

Brief Guide: Assessing how well mental health services support carers¹

Context

Carers face significant challenges when the person they support requires care from mental health services. They may find it difficult to get the information and support they need to continue in their caring role.

The [Care Act 2014](#) introduced a single, national threshold for accessing care and support in England and consolidated legislation relating to carers aged 18 or over². Local authorities³ have a responsibility to assess a carer's needs for support, where the carer appears to have such needs, and to agree a support plan if eligibility criteria are met.

Evidence required

At provider level:

- How does the provider make sure the needs of carers are considered? Is there a board or operational lead for carers?
- Check whether key policies refer to carers' rights (especially those with welfare power of attorney), for example, confidentiality and information sharing, Mental Capacity Act 2005 and Mental Health Act 1983.
- How does the provider find out the views and assess the experience of carers?
- Does the provider know how many young carers it is supporting? How does the provider work with young carers?
- Does the provider have a Triangle of Care strategy or similar?
- Does the provider train its staff in how to support carers?
- Does the provider have dedicated support staff working with carers?
- Does the provider comply with the duty of candour with respect to carers?

At core service level:

Speak to as many carers as possible (essential for core services that work with patients who might experience difficulty in communicating).

Ask carers whether staff have:

- told them they have the right to an assessment by a local authority
- referred them to the correct local authority if they wanted an assessment
- provided them with support to meet their assessed needs (if this was part of the support plan)
- provided them with information and support even if they were not eligible for a support plan or did not want a needs assessment

¹ This includes providers of NHS and independent inpatient and community mental health services for people who have needs related to their mental health, learning disability, autism or dementia.

² The Children and Families Act 2014 gives young carers (and parents of children with mental health or disability needs) similar rights to those other carers have under the Care Act.

³ The patient's local authority is responsible for the carer's assessment, regardless of where the carer lives.

- shared appropriate information about the care and treatment of the person they care for, with the person's consent
- offered them any support or information when the person has not consented to information-sharing, particularly about discharge planning and risks to family and friends (if any)?

Ask staff and check care records to see if carers' assessments have been offered or completed.

Is information about support for carers (for example, [Carers UK helpline](#)) displayed in appropriate areas?

Policy

- Department of Health [Care Act 2014 factsheets](#) – factsheet 8 covers the law for carers.
- New Government carer's action plan.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/carers-action-plan-2018-to-2020>

Intelligence

The routine provider information request asks providers to give the following information about people who use services and their carers:

- Feedback methods used to find out people's experiences of care and how these have led to improvements in the last 12 months.
- How the provider promotes privacy and dignity for service users and carers, meets their spiritual and religious needs and meets their information and communication needs where these relate to a disability, impairment or sensory loss.

Reporting

Report findings under:

- **Involvement of families and carers** in the **Caring** section of the core service evidence appendix.
- **Engagement** in the **Well-led** section of the core service evidence appendix and at provider level.

Link to regulations

Section 4(1) (b) of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 requires CQC to 'have regard to' the experiences of people who use health and social care services and their families and friends. This places a strong legal requirement on CQC to actively consider carer experiences. However, the regulations do not require this when a service user has capacity.

If inspectors have concerns about a provider's actions (or non-action) in relation to carers they should seek legal advice.

Brief guides are a learning resource for CQC inspectors. They provide information, references, links to professional guidance, legal requirements or recognised best practice guidance about particular topics in order to assist inspection teams. They do not provide guidance to registered persons about complying with any of the regulations made pursuant to s 20 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 nor are they further indicators of assessment pursuant to s 46 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008.