



## **Beat's Advocacy Service– helping you navigate decisions experienced by your constituents affected by eating disorders**

### **Summary**

If you have been contacted by a constituent who has experienced a decision in relation to their eating disorder treatment or someone they are caring for, Beat can advise you on the steps you could take to challenge and overturn the decision. This document outlines how we define a bad decision, the support we can provide, and how you can contact us.

***Please note that this is a free service.***

### **About Beat**

Beat is a leading eating disorder charity, with a vision of an end to the pain and suffering caused by eating disorders. We provide free information and support through our national helpline which anyone affected by an eating disorder can call, text (via webchat) or email, and through online support including information, peer support groups and e-learning resources. We partner with the NHS to provide services for those with an eating disorder, their carers - such as family and friends - and training for healthcare professionals.

We provide expert training for healthcare professionals and staff in social care, schools and further/higher education. We also work to raise public and professional awareness of eating disorders, and campaign for change in policy and practice, so that when people are brave enough to take vital steps towards recovery, the right help is available to them. We are inspired by the people we serve, by the difference we can make, and by our commitment to each other.

### **What is a bad decision?**

Beat regularly hears from people with eating disorders and their carers who have been denied a referral, assessment, information or treatment for their eating disorder that treatment guidelines<sup>1</sup> say they have a reasonable entitlement to.

These bad decisions may be a result of the decisionmaker not having full information or training on eating disorders, or because of a commissioning decision, which in either case is contradictory to guidelines. Eating disorders have devastating consequences and increase the strain on families and carers. Such decisions can result in the eating disorder getting worse and have long term impacts on the health service.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes guidance published by NICE, SIGN, as well as guidance published by NHS bodies across the UK that services are expected to follow.

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### **What support do we offer to people experiencing bad decisions?**

We currently support people to self-advocate when they contact us through our helpline, have resources on our website and have also recently completed piloting a casework service to overturn bad decisions. During the pilot, every bad decision we challenged was overturned, indicative of its need and effectiveness. We are also exploring the use of an artificial intelligence tool with the necessary safeguards in place that will help people challenge bad decisions more efficiently by providing them with letters to services highlighting the relevant guidance.

Our aim is that anyone unreasonably denied a referral, assessment or evidence-based treatment or information can overturn the decision and receive appropriate treatment quickly.

We often advise those experiencing bad decisions to contact their elected representatives when other avenues to challenge a bad decision have failed. We can guide and support you/your staff through this process if one of your constituents is experiencing a bad decision.

### **How can we help you support your constituents experiencing a bad decision?**

*"I can say with certainty that without your initial case management direction, I would not have been able to act with the necessary speed to support my constituent in this vital and complex case. Your guidance on tone was essential in establishing a constructive, albeit critical, relationship with her primary care clinicians. Additionally, your willingness to review correspondence in advance gave me the confidence to send what would have otherwise been a quite risky letter for an MP with only two weeks' tenure"*

*Steff Aquarone, MP for North Norfolk*

Beat has an in-depth understanding of eating disorder services, treatment pathways and ways to overturn bad decisions, all developed from supporting thousands of people affected by eating disorders. MLAs and their teams have a better understanding of their constituencies, more authority within them, and access to different local networks. In working together we can ensure that bad decisions can be overturned, enabling people with eating disorders to get the treatment they are entitled to sooner.

What we can advise you (and your staff) on:

- Providing direction on how to challenge a bad decision, including the necessary services or decisionmakers to contact
- What the treatment guidelines say about what should happen
- The content of any communication to decision makers or services such as letters or emails

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We can continue to guide you and your staff through this process until the decision is overturned.

In turn, we would value being updated on the outcome of each case to enable us to measure the effectiveness of the service.

We work according to the available treatment guidelines, and are therefore unable to challenge clinically appropriate decisions that a constituent may disagree with. If this is the case, or if your constituent is seeking to make a complaint, we will direct you to alternative avenues<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, while we campaign for waiting times to be shorter for all patients we cannot seek to advance the position of an individual on a waiting list.

### **Confidentiality and safeguarding**

Confidentiality and safeguarding are fundamental to Beat's services. Whilst we would not be in direct contact with your constituents at any time through this service (excluding their potential initial contact to us via our helpline), we would expect that they are signposted to the relevant support as needed. If you are unsure of where to signpost your constituent, we can offer some suggestions to you. This may include crisis or emergency services. Beat's [helpline](#), whilst not a crisis service, is also available for people experiencing eating disorders, their carers, and professionals.

### **Contact details**

For more information on the work Beat does across Northern Ireland please email: Nicola Armstrong, National Lead in Northern Ireland, at [n.armstrong@beateatingdisorders.org.uk](mailto:n.armstrong@beateatingdisorders.org.uk)

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<sup>2</sup> This includes the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) in England and Wales, the Patient Advice and Support Service (PASS) in Scotland, and the Patient and Client Council (PCC) in Northern Ireland.