

Streamlined referrals for earlier intervention and reduced costs



Accepting referrals from charity partners will save NHS time and money – and help people into recovery faster

On average, people wait for 3½ years between falling ill with an eating disorder and starting treatment, with adults waiting longer (1). Beat’s helpline is ideally placed to make referrals for specialist assessment by community eating disorder services – and could reduce that average wait by at least 15 weeks.

Who is it for?

This service is available free-of-charge to any eating disorder service which makes the internal decision to accept referrals from voluntary sector partners.

Intended outcome

Service users are assessed sooner, with reduced distress and better outcomes; GP workload reduces; faster and more sustainable recovery delivers NHS budget savings.

Details

GPs remain the first point of contact for most people seeking treatment, despite many not being trained to spot the signs of an eating disorder. Only 14% of people with likely eating disorders are referred within 4 weeks of their first GP visit (1).

NHS England commissioning guidance (2) states that adult community eating disorder services should accept referrals from voluntary sector partners, as does the Welsh Government’s 2019 Eating Disorder Service Review (3). This does not currently happen in the majority of services, with the picture only slightly better for children’s services (4).

Considerable savings are therefore available in the form of GP time savings and faster, more effective treatment if the recommendation on voluntary sector referrals is implemented.

Beat’s helpline is open from 9am to 8pm on weekdays and 4pm to 8pm on weekends and all bank holidays. Staff are trained to support people to understand their eating disorder and to guide them to seek treatment. It is currently contacted by almost 6000 people per month.

We will agree a referral protocol with partner services, provide a dedicated phone number for local promotion, and sift helpline contacts received through other channels (webchat, email, regular phone line, etc) for service users covered by partnership agreements.

Thanks to government and lottery funding, Beat will provide this service free-of-charge.

More information

For more information about this service or a partnership with Beat, please contact the team via PublicSectorCommissioning@beateatingdisorders.org.uk.

This is one of a series of services which Beat provides in support of NHS eating disorder services. A full list is available at www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/commission-us.

Other services for people with eating disorders:

- 1-1 and group-based support for people waiting for or unable to access treatment
- 1-1 / group-based support and training for family members and others caring for a loved one with an eating disorder
- Binge Eating Disorder guided self-help: NICE-recommended treatment for BED
- CPD to enable clinicians and professionals working in education to spot and act upon the early signs of an eating disorder

Beat and NHS working in partnership

Beat works with NHS partners to help people get into treatment faster and to achieve a quick and sustainable recovery. Our belief is that we can provide non-clinical support quickly, effectively and cheaply, leaving NHS clinicians more time to do the clinical work that they have been trained for.

We can provide some of our services to NHS partners free of charge. For other services we have to pass on our costs to you, but we never take a profit from our work with NHS partners.

We provide services in the following areas:

- Direct support to people with an eating disorder
- Training and support for family members and others caring for a loved one with an eating disorder
- Support and training for clinicians
- Strategic support to health care providers

All our services are developed in consultation with NHS and academic partners, and co-produced with our beneficiaries with guidance from our multidisciplinary Clinical Advisory Group of senior clinicians:

Abigail Cardwell (Lead Occupational Therapist, South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust)

Dr Erica Cini (Consultant Psychiatrist, East London Foundation Trust)

Sam Clark-Stone (Lead Clinician and Registered Mental Health Nurse, 2gether Trust)

Dr Fiona Duffy (Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Lead, NHS Lothian)

Sarah Fuller (Specialist Eating Disorder Dietitian, East London NHS Foundation Trust)

Jess Griffiths (Eating Disorders Practitioner and Clinical Lead, Beat)

Dr Menna Jones (Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Lead, Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust)

Dr Rhys Jones (Consultant Psychiatrist, Leeds and York Partnership)

Dr Dasha Nicholls (Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist and Clinical Lead, Central and North West London NHS Trust and East London NHS Trust)

Becca Randell (Kent, Surrey and Sussex Implementation Lead, Children's Mental Health - KSS Academic Health Science Network)

Dr Paul Robinson (Consultant Psychiatrist; Principal Teaching Fellow, University College London)

Professor Janet Treasure (Consultant Psychiatrist, South London and Maudsley Trust)

All services are delivered either by experienced eating disorder clinicians or by specially trained helpline advisors under the supervision of a clinician. Where suitable, they are co-delivered by Beat lived experience trainers and volunteers.

1. Beat. Delaying for years, denied for months: The health, emotional and financial impact on sufferers, families and the NHS of delaying treatment for eating disorders in England. 2017. Available from: <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/uploads/documents/2017/11/delaying-for-years-denied-for-months.pdf>

2. NHS England. Adult eating disorders: Community, inpatient and intensive day patient care. Guidance for commissioners and providers. 2019. Available from: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/aed-guidance.pdf>

3. Tan J., Pollard J, Maddaford J, Gray A. Welsh Government Eating Disorder Service Review. 2019.

4. Beat. Best practice recommendations for eating disorder services accepting self-referral. 2020. Available via: <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/policy-and-reports/statements>

February 2022