



NHS Volunteer Responders and adult social care

CPA Briefing for care providers

Published 14 July 2020

Introduction

NHS Volunteer Responders offer help to people in need of support or who are avoiding public places during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is run by the NHS in England, supported by Royal Voluntary Service and operates across England. Its aims are to supplement existing voluntary support within communities, help people to stay well, and reduce avoidable demand on NHS services.

This Care Provider Alliance briefing summarises the programme and how staff, care provider organisations and people who use care services can access NHS Volunteer Responders.

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NHS Volunteer Responders programme

The [NHS Volunteer Responders programme](#) has been developed by NHS England in partnership with the Royal Voluntary Service and facilitated by the GoodSAM app. It went fully live to match volunteers to tasks on 7 April 2020.

The programme has been developed to complement local level volunteering activity during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Over 750,000 people signed up to the NHS Volunteers Responders programme in England. Of those, almost 600,000 passed the identity verification requirements and can receive tasks. Of these, approximately 360,000 have since put themselves 'on duty'.

Volunteers carry out simple, one-off non-medical tasks to support people in England who need help with accessing essentials or who would benefit from a friendly chat to help prevent loneliness.

The programme is also providing support to NHS and local authorities with transport tasks such as delivering blood pressure monitors to patients, transporting small quantities of PPE to care homes etc.

There are six roles that NHS Volunteer Responders (NHSVR) can currently undertake:

- **Community Response** – collecting shopping, including food medication or other essential supplies for someone close to their home.
 - *Community Responder Plus* - providing this support to individuals with cognitive impairment, such as dementia or a learning disability.
- **Check-in and Chat** – telephone support to individuals during self-isolation because talking to someone has been shown to help people stay healthy.
 - *Check-in and Chat Plus* – regular telephone support over several weeks providing peer support and companionship to people who are shielding or have been shielding.
- **Patient Transport Support** – providing transport to take patients home from hospital who are medically fit for discharge;
- **NHS and social care Transport Support** - providing transport for equipment, supplies and medication between NHS/ social care services and sites; assisting pharmacies with medication delivery.

Volunteers turn their app to 'on duty' when they are available and will then receive notifications of tasks that require volunteer support in the areas required. The volunteer is able to then choose whether they accept or reject this task, giving volunteers flexibility. If a task is rejected, the task is then offered to another volunteer.

All NHS Volunteer Responders have had their identification verified. For the community responder plus role, check-in and chat plus, and the patient transport support role, volunteers have had a recent DBS certificate verified.

Who is eligible?

The programme is open to anyone who needs to self-isolate for any reason. This includes anyone who:

- has ever been advised to shield by a health professional
- is vulnerable for another reason, (for instance, due to disability, pregnancy, aged over 70, has a long-term condition such as Parkinson's or epilepsy, or are vulnerable due to a mental health condition)
- is someone with caring responsibilities
- is self-isolating because they've been diagnosed with COVID-19 or have symptoms, or they've been in contact with someone who has
- has been instructed to self-isolate by the 'Test and Trace' service, because they've been near someone infected
- is self-isolating ahead of planned hospital care
- has been instructed to self-isolate following entry into the country.

The programme is also open to frontline health and care staff.

Q&A

Will NHS Volunteer Responders still be in place to support people after the shielding guidance is paused from the 1 August 2020?

NHS Volunteer Responders will continue to help anyone who needs support, as detailed above.

The NHS Volunteer Responder scheme will remain in place until at least December 2020 and will continue to support everyone who needs help during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the event of a local lockdown will there be sufficient local capacity for NHS Volunteer Responders to continue to help anyone who needs support?

The NHS Volunteer Responders programme is designed to complement any local offers already in place and local authorities can refer people into the programme if in need. Local authorities may also have their own volunteering programme to support people during the pandemic.

NHS Volunteer Responders can also be accessed via self-referral, thereby enabling people the choice on how to access support in their local area, if they need it.

The NHS Volunteer Responders programme monitors supply and utilisation at local level and can trigger interventions as and when necessary, such as targeting recruitment of volunteers in local areas.

In the event of a localised lockdown, the team will work with the local area to support the response. Local areas at risk of going into localised lockdown can contact england.covid-communities@nhs.net to discuss how the programme could provide support if needed.

What support can frontline health and social care staff receive?

From 8 June 2020, the scheme expanded to offer frontline health and social care staff support with essential tasks such as shopping and collecting prescriptions.

This includes anyone with direct, physical access to patients/residents in hospital or community settings, including residential settings and domiciliary care.

This will help staff to protect those they care for by making fewer journeys and coming into contact with fewer people so they can focus on and continue their vital work.

Further information is available on the [NHS Volunteer Responders website](#).

Who can make a referral?

Referrals can be made into the NHS Volunteer Responders programme on behalf of vulnerable individuals through a number of including.

- Approved charity partners
- Community pharmacy
- General Practice (GP)

- Healthwatch
- Hospital
- Local authority
- Member of Parliament (MP)
- NHS111/Ambulance trust
- Police or Fire Service
- Resilience Forum Member
- Social care provider
- Social housing provider
- Social prescribing/link worker scheme

Charities and other Voluntary and Community Sector (VCSE) organisations can also become approved referrers so that they can make referrals on behalf of their clients/members. If a VCSE organisation wishes to become an approved referrer, they need to contact england.covid-communities@nhs.net.

Referrals can be made through the Good Sam [online portal](#) at or by calling 0808 196 3382. The exception to this is **self-referral which must be done by phone**.

Individuals can self-refer themselves directly for support through the programme by calling 0808 196 3646, (8am-8pm).

Where can I find more information?

Further information on referrals can be found on [the Royal Volunteering Service website](#). Information on how to self-refer is available on the [Royal Volunteering Service website](#).

Should volunteers pay for food shopping?

No, volunteers should not pay for food shopping on behalf of a service user. There are a range of payments options that could be used. [See the Royal Volunteering Service guidance](#).

How do you ensure that vulnerable people and volunteers are kept safe?

The programme follows Home Office guidance in checking the identity of all NHS Volunteer Responders. Volunteers and all service users are given safety information

and guidance about reporting safeguarding concerns and ensuring appropriate steps are taken to ensure no risks are taken.

A safeguarding team is in place at Royal Voluntary Service to pick up any concerns regarding patients or volunteers and will deal with any concerns appropriately. This includes referring a patient back to the referrer if needed. The NSPCC are also contacted for any safeguarding concerns about children. The police and National Crime Agency would be contacted to address any criminal concerns about volunteers.

The [RVS website has a statement on the safeguards](#) in place for the scheme.

Further information

Further information is available at the following links:

[NHS Volunteer Responders portal](#)

[Good Sam App referral portal](#)

[CPA's information on coronavirus](#)