

Co-producing materials to support people with severe mental illness to attend health checks

2025



This report was produced by Involve North East on behalf of Health Innovation North East and North Cumbria.

Involve North East is a trusted, independent charity with over 20 years of experience in community engagement and research. We support organisations to understand what's really going on in people's lives – the stories behind the statistics. By listening to those often overlooked we turn lived experience into insights that drive meaningful change.

We specialise in gathering honest, in-depth feedback from individuals and communities to support the design and improvement of public services. Our work spans health, housing, poverty, and wellbeing – wherever people's voices need to be amplified.

Our methods are flexible and rooted in inclusion. Whether it's evaluating a service, exploring barriers to access, or shaping future provision, we create space for people to speak and make sure what they say gets listened to.

To find out more, contact Chief Executive AJ White aj@involve.org.uk or visit us at www.involve.org.uk

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Contents

Introduction 1

Workshops overview..... 2

Detailed findings 3

Final designs 23

Introduction

It is well known that people living with SMI are at higher risk of physical health problems, moreover, the life expectancy of people with SMI is 15-20 years lower than the general population (DE Hert M and others. 'Physical illness in patients with severe mental disorders' World Psychiatry 2011: volume 10, issue 1, pages 52-77). However, historically, across the North East and North Cumbria, there has been a relatively low uptake of annual physical health checks (APHCs) for people with severe mental illness (SMI) such as schizophrenia, bipolar affective disorder, other psychoses, and patients on lithium therapy.

Health Innovation North East and North Cumbria (HI NENC) is committed to addressing healthcare inequalities, particularly among underserved populations. HI NENC is advancing its efforts through the Healthy Hearts Programme which focuses on cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention and aims to improve health outcomes across the region for CORE20PLUS5 population groups. As part of this Programme, it provided portable kits that enabled APHCs to be carried out with individuals, with a SMI diagnosis, in a community setting, including at home. The programme, ended in March 2024 with the evaluation highlighting the importance of coproduction and involving a wide range of system partners - "with us, and not to us" to ensure appropriate and widespread adoption.

As part of the Healthy Hearts Programme HI NENC are currently engaging with a wide range of system partners to understand what services are available to SMI patients across the NENC footprint with the aim of:

1. Co-producing with SMI patients, families, and carers to develop interventions that increase the uptake of APHCs.
2. Collaborating with Community-Based Mental Health Transformation Teams to integrate tools like PocDoc, to facilitate the administration of APHCs in community settings.
3. Understanding signposting and social prescribing services offered to patients post-APHC to identify best practices and reduce variability across the NENC region.

HI NENC recognised that in order to achieve these objectives, active participation from SMI patients, families, and carers was essential as their lived experiences are invaluable for co-producing effective interventions.

Involve North East was approached to work with patients to co-produce a new letter and leaflet to support the uptake of APHCs. This report details the co-production workshops that took place and the draft materials developed. It also highlights the barriers to attendance at APHCs that were identified during the workshop activities.

This project could not have been possible without the support of [Chilli Studios](#) who helped recruit participants and provided a safe and familiar place for the workshops to take place. Credit is also given to [Barking Dog](#) who provided creative design support.

Workshops overview

In October 2025 three 1.5-hour interactive workshops, informed by a creative health approach, were held to explore the most appropriate and effective text and visual content for a leaflet and letter encouraging people with SMI to attend APHCs.

These workshops were held at Chilli Studios, a Newcastle charity that delivers creative services for people experiencing mental health problems. Involve North East staff facilitated the workshops and people with SMI who attended Chilli Studios took part. The workshops took place on consecutive Wednesdays to create momentum with each session having a specific focus.

Workshop One: Reviewing existing SMI health check leaflets and invitation letters to determine preferred headlines, content, and tone.

Workshop Two: Creating individual mood boards to further inform the design of the SMI health check leaflet and letter.

Workshop Three: Reviewing two prototype SMI health check leaflet designs to provide feedback on what works, and what needs changing.

Participants had differing views on the preferred language and design for the SMI health checks leaflet and letter, although some common priorities were identified:

Relevance: including sufficient information, but not too much.

Reassurance: reducing anxiety around having a health check.

Respect: avoiding stigmatising language, threats, or authoritarian approaches.

Rights: promoting the right to have a physical health check to stay well.

Accessibility: using clear, easy to understand text and visual images.

Diversity: accommodating non-English speakers and cultural differences.

Detailed findings

This section summarises the workshop activities and findings from these activities and interactions.

Workshop One

Seven participants attended the first workshop, one of whom was accompanied by their support worker. A staff member from Chilli Studios was also present. This session was facilitated by two members of Involve North East staff, with a third colleague observing and taking notes.

Reactions to existing leaflets

Copies of an existing Newcastle Gateshead SMI health check leaflet were shared with participants. They were then shown three similar leaflets from other areas of England.

We asked participants to mark up the leaflets using green and red pens to highlight anything about them that they particularly liked or disliked. They could also add written comments.

This activity prompted a lively group discussion about SMI health checks in general, and how leaflet content and design could increase awareness and uptake.

Key points from the group discussion

- The term 'SMI' was problematic due to stigma, confusion about who falls within this definition, and the refusal of some people to identify with this label.
- Previous negative experiences with mental health services and healthcare more generally affect attitudes towards having health checks.
- Invitations to health checks are sometimes made in phone calls or text messages, rather than by letter.
- "Scare tactics" emphasising the risk of early death associated with SMI were seen as unhelpful.
- A rights-based approach was preferred, emphasising entitlement to a health check and encouragement not to miss this opportunity.
- Emphasis on early identification of health issues preventing problems was seen as helpful.
- A sensitive, friendly, and caring tone was welcomed.
- Visual images could make a leaflet more engaging and accessible.
- A leaflet should provide sufficient information without being overwhelming (additional detail can be provided via QR codes).
- Additional steps might be needed to get some people to engage – e.g. translated versions of the leaflet for non-English speakers, drop-in sessions for people who prefer to get information via face-to-face communication.

Leaflet ranking activity

Each of the participants was asked to rank the four SMI health check leaflets from best (1) to worst (4). Preferences varied, but aggregating the rankings produced this overall order:

1. Portsmouth



You should have a free health check every year to get advice and support to keep you living well and feeling as healthy as possible.

If you have a mental illness, taking certain medications can put you at an increased risk of developing health problems.

It is important to have these checks to make sure that you are healthy on the medication prescribed; and to keep you living well and feeling as healthy as possible.

For information about physical health checks for people with severe mental illness, visit www.healthandcareportsmouth.gov.uk/smihealthcheck

Physical health checks

for anyone aged 18+ with severe mental illness



A partnership between

Designed by: design@portsmouthcc.gov.uk
Published: Oct 2023 • Ref: 42.311

HIVE

What happens at your health check?

You will:

- **Have your blood pressure checked**
Raised blood pressure can contribute to heart problems or increase the risk of having a stroke.
- **Have a blood test to check your cholesterol and blood sugar levels**
Raised cholesterol can increase the risk of a heart attack or stroke and high blood sugar can mean you have diabetes.
- **Get weighed**
Being overweight can increase your chance of developing diabetes, having a heart attack or stroke, and getting other physical problems.
- **Talk about smoking, alcohol, non-prescription drugs, diet and exercise.**

You might also be offered a flu vaccination if your health check is during the winter months.



Attending your health check is important

Your health check will help to identify any early signs of:

- Diabetes
- Stroke
- Heart problems

If any issues arise from your health check, your GP practice will help you with any next steps.

This might include offering support for any suggested lifestyle changes and linking in with adult mental health services to review medication where required.

Some medications can sometimes cause side effects. If you are having any issues with your medication, you might be advised to book another appointment after your health check.



What next?

You will receive an invitation to book an appointment for your free health check. This might be a text, letter, phone call or email from your GP practice. Please make every effort to attend your appointment.

For more information about health checks, visit www.healthandcareportsmouth.gov.uk/smihealthcheck

Support for your appointment

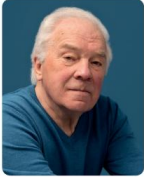
If you'd like any telephone support for your appointment, our friendly team at the Portsmouth Mental Health Hub can help. They can talk to you about what might be worrying you and explain exactly what will happen during your health check, to make you feel more comfortable.

Contact the team on 0300 123 6621, email portsmouthmentalhealthhub@solent.nhs.uk or visit www.mentalhealthinportsmouth.co.uk to find out more about the Hub.

2. Greater Manchester

How to get an appointment

If you're eligible, you should get a letter from your GP surgery inviting you for an annual health check.



You can contact your GP surgery to ask for an appointment if you've not received a letter. A family member or friend can contact the surgery for you if you prefer.

If you're in regular contact with your mental health team, they can do the health check for you.

If you have not had your annual health check yet, contact the care co-ordinator in your mental health team and they can help.

Then book your **FREE** yearly physical health check now!

Are you living with...

Schizophrenia
Bi-Polar
Psychosis?

Affective Disorder



Scan for more information



NHS Greater Manchester

NHS Greater Manchester

We all have to look after our health, but people with severe mental illness need to be a little extra careful. Your medication and lifestyle could put you at risk of certain health problems, and the earlier any issues are identified, the easier they are to fix. The good news is, you're entitled to an annual health check to get advice and support.

Who are physical health checks for?

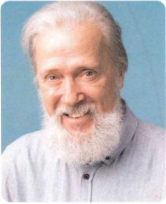
The annual physical health check is for people with severe mental illness. If you have a diagnosis of Schizophrenia, Bi-Polar, Affective Disorder or Psychosis you're eligible for a free health check.



If your GP is aware that you have severe mental illness this is recorded on a register at your GP surgery.

Why should you get a physical health check?

Annual physical health checks for people with severe mental illness are designed to pick up on signs that someone may be at risk of diabetes, stroke or heart problems. This means action can be taken before these issues become more serious.



What does the health check include?

- A blood pressure check
- A blood test for cholesterol
- A blood test for glucose (sugar)
- A check of your weight
- A discussion around your smoking and alcohol habits

You may also be asked about things like any medication that you are taking, your diet, exercise and physical activity, and if you have taken up any offers for national screening programmes (such as cervical screening).

3. Bradford



Physical health checks for people with a severe mental illness (SMI)

For people aged 14 and over in Bradford District and Craven who are diagnosed with bipolar, schizophrenia or psychosis.



Physical health checks for people with a severe mental illness (SMI)



We all have to look after our health but if you have certain mental health conditions you are more likely to have a physical health condition too. This could be due to your medication or lifestyle.

This is why people diagnosed with a severe mental illness (SMI) are invited to a free health check at their GP practice or with the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT). SMI refers to people who have a diagnosis of bipolar, schizophrenia or who experience psychosis.

These checks are free and help provide you with as much support as possible. Afterwards, professionals will work with you to help you lead a healthier and longer life.

What happens at the health check?



The physical health check lasts no longer than 45 minutes. It may include:

- 1 Blood pressure check
- 2 Blood test for cholesterol
- 3 Blood test for glucose (sugar)
- 4 Check of your weight
- 5 Some questions around smoking
- 6 Some questions around drinking of alcohol

You may be offered more checks such as an electrocardiogram (ECG).

After the checks, you may be:



- Given advice regarding your physical health
- Offered information about people and organisations who can help you make lifestyle changes
- Be referred on to another organisation to help you with your physical health goals
- Be invited for a further discussion regarding your physical health
- Information about your physical health may be shared with organisations in the form of a referral. Your information would only be shared to support you with your physical health goals and with your consent.

How to book a physical health check



Your GP practice or CMHT will contact you about your annual physical health check. If you think you have missed your appointment, please call your GP practice to arrange another one.

For further information, visit the Healthy Minds website at www.healthyminds.services/smi or for emotional support, call Guide-Line on **08001 884 884**.

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)



Can I bring someone with me?

Yes. You can bring a family member, friend, interpreter or advocate. Please request this when making your appointment.

Can I have a choice of gender of practitioner?

Please request this whilst making your appointment and your health care worker will make every effort to accommodate you.

What should I wear to my appointment?

You can wear whatever you feel comfortable in. However, as your health care worker will need to access your upper arms for the blood tests, we recommend loose-fitting clothing.

Do I need to bring anything before my appointment?

No. You do not need to bring anything with you to your appointment.

Can I have a copy of my results?

Yes. You can request a copy of your results.

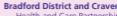
Further information



For tips on a healthy lifestyle, including diet, exercise and stopping smoking, visit www.mylivingwell.co.uk or www.northyorks.gov.uk/healthy-living.

If you are a carer, you can find support through Carers' Resource at www.carersresource.org.

www.healthyminds.services/smi



4. Newcastle Gateshead



If you are living with a severe mental illness you are entitled to a free physical health check.



For more information and support:
www.physicalhealthchecks.co.uk

The Process.

Appointment.

If you have a diagnosis of schizophrenia, bipolar affective disorder, other psychoses or if you're on lithium therapy, you will receive a letter from your doctor to arrange an appointment. You may be asked to fill out a questionnaire before your visit. If you don't receive a letter please contact your GP.

The Physical Health Check.

The Physical Health Check will be conducted by a health care professional. Some of your Physical Health Check might be over the phone or on the computer. You can bring a friend, advocate or peer support worker with you to your appointment. The health check itself will cover many different aspects of your health.

Aftercare.

During your health check, you will create a care plan. This care plan could include contacting other health professionals, accessing other services, or signposting to activities in the community so the relevant healthcare will be in touch after your health check to ensure these things happen. Physical Health Checks are annual, so your doctor will arrange your next Physical Health Check in due course.




The Health Check.

"They make you feel alright, they talk to you, explain things."

If you are living with a severe mental illness you are entitled to a free physical health check.

Severe Mental Illness (SMI) is a term used to describe all patients with a diagnosis of schizophrenia, bipolar affective disorder, other psychoses and patients on lithium therapy.

People with a severe mental illness are much more likely to have physical health problems. Life-expectancy is reduced by an average of 15–20 years. This is due to a number of factors that will be discussed with you at your check.

To support you in managing your health we'd like to invite you to a comprehensive review to support you to help manage existing conditions and reduce the risk of preventable health conditions. These reviews will increase the chances of having a longer, healthier life.

There are different elements of the health check:



Weight Management. General Health Check.

Blood pressure. Smoking status. Alcohol consumption. Signposting.

Access to scanning. Medicine review. Blood Test. Create a Care Plan.

Pulse rate. Diet and Exercise. Reviewing Support. Illicit drug review.

Headline activity

Before the meeting we had compiled a list of 'headlines' based on content in existing SMI health check leaflets. Each participant was given a copy of this list and asked to tick the headlines they considered important.

Aggregated results are shown in the table below:

Headline	How many people thought it was important*
Why is attending your health check important?	8
Can I have a copy of my results?	7
Support for your appointment/Can I bring someone with me?	7
What happens at your health check?	7
Contact information	6
I feel healthy, do I still need to attend?	6
Who are physical health checks for?	6
Who will do my health check?	6
Do I need to bring anything?	5
More information about health checks (link to QR code)	5
Can I have my health check at home?	4
What happens after my physical health check?	4

*8 people completed this activity

Participants had said they did not want to be overwhelmed by information, so the headlines activity gave us helpful insights about content that they saw as more/less important.

Critique of SMI health check invitation letters

Examples of SMI health check invitation letters were shown to participants as the basis for a final group discussion.

Participants felt that an SMI health check invitation letter should be brief, especially if it was designed to be sent with a leaflet. They reiterated that health checks are sometimes arranged via phone call or text message rather than by post.

The language used in the letter was said to be important with a general dislike of the term 'Severe Mental Illness': "Sometimes a label is useful for some things [GP treatment, entitlement to benefits etc.] but you don't need to put it in the letter."

Accessibility was seen as important: "I'm not familiar with terminology [in medical letters]. I have to bring them to other people." It was suggested that an easy read version of the letter should be produced, together with translated versions for people who speak/read languages other than English.

Several participants expressed negative views about receiving letters: "I can't be bothered to read it! I'd put it in the bin." Another participant disliked brown envelopes. Sending letters by post was seen as non-eco-friendly: "Aren't they meant to be saving paper?" "What about climate change?"

Participants said that health check invitations should be offered in a range of ways: face to face, online invite, phone call, but there was no consensus. Individual participants in the group were for and against each of these approaches.

As with the leaflet, participants wanted the letter to emphasise rights and entitlement to a health check. They didn't want the tone to be threatening or authoritarian. An important message they wanted it to communicate was a health check can help you to look after yourself.

The group were divided on whether the letter should list what will happen during the health check. Some people felt they needed this detail to prepare (for example wearing a loose top to have a blood pressure check). Others in the group said that knowing what would happen in advance would trigger anxiety.

It was clear that some people wanted more information than others. One participant suggested including a QR code to access more detail, but the group felt there would need to be an alternative option for less "tech savvy" people.

Next steps

Data from this session were used to prepare a style guide for the leaflet designer and to update a draft version of an SMI health check invitation letter.

Workshop Two

Five participants took part in this workshop, one of whom was accompanied by a support worker who also took part in the activities. A staff member from Chilli Studios was also present. This workshop was facilitated by two members of INE staff and the graphic designer was in attendance to observe.

In this session each participant was invited to create a mood board capturing the look and content of the SMI health checks leaflet design they thought would work best. Drawing and collage materials were provided, and writing was encouraged.

A few general guidelines from the graphic designer were shared with the group before they started work on their individual mood boards:

- Colour contrast is important, particularly when it comes to text.
- Clean fonts make text more accessible.
- Simple graphics work best (for example, we could use a local landmark like the Tyne Bridge but in a simplified, undetailed form).

The six mood boards created by participants contained rich insights and ideas:

Your Choice.
 We can all need to ~~make~~ ^{make} decisions or choices around our health and healing.
 You should never be forced to take any medications - you should have to choose the preventative ways of dealing with health issues so you feel your way.

If you have fear around ~~to~~ ^{of} this and the medical model, know that a health coach should be for your benefit to check + inform. Not to force any further treatment.

~~you have an inner compass~~
~~and your healing path~~
~~and you can trust on that path~~

FINDING A WAY.
 Health coaches could be holistic + human centered. offering all the things that are proved to improve mental and physical health.

e.g. community (like choir studios) social help
 good diet (eg keto). Peer support
 people to talk to about trauma. or breathing
 and whatever works for you - like creativity + exercise.

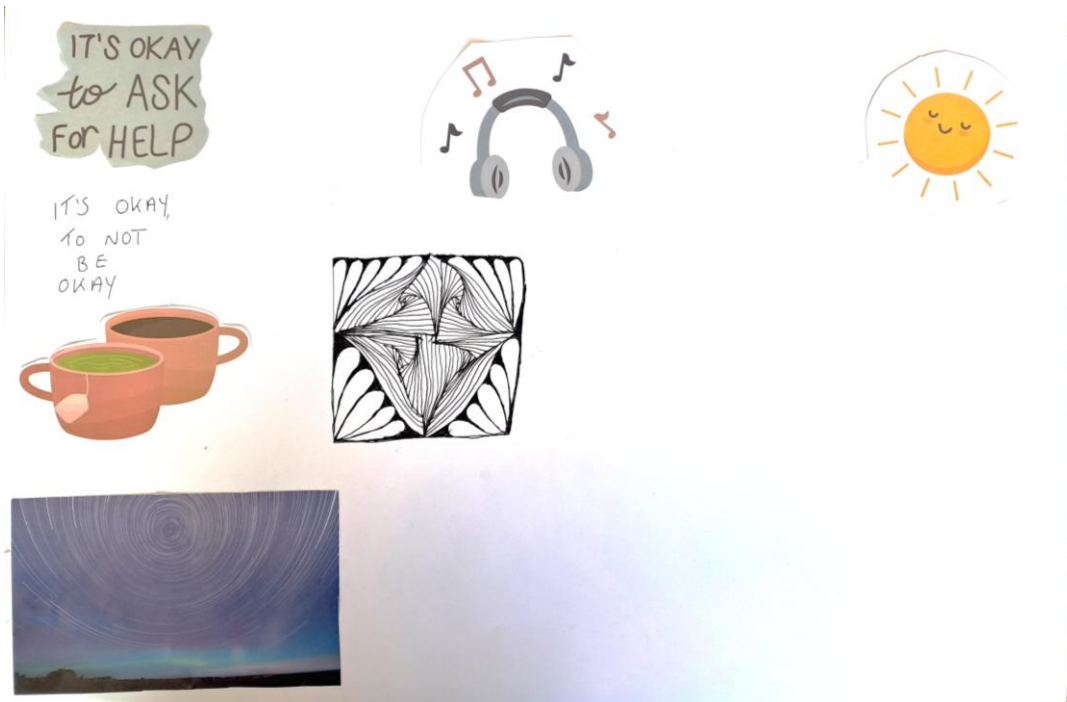
CPN therapist

[illegible]

Mood board 3



Mood board 4



Mood board 5

Wm (Images/colours should be included to illustrate these points)

- ④ Have you had a hard time with mental Health? mental health symptoms can be horrible mental health treatment can be ~~most~~ nasty experience, mental hospitals can be rushed, dehumanising, badly funded, unprofessional and even abusive!!!
- ② with a serious mental illness it can be difficult to trust Doctors and the mental health system... ~~the~~ psychiatric hospital/care can be unpleasant....
- ③ But Perhaps we can be here to help!!!
- ④ Don't let mental health issues get in the way of ~~a~~ looking after your physical health,
- ⑤ People with serious mental health issues often have ~~physical~~ health issues that go untreated... leading to pain suffering and even earlier death!!!
- ⑥ we believe people with serious mental health diagnoses should have the treatment they need.
- ⑦ we are here to offer the help you may need for ~~the~~ your physical health,
- ⑧ we are not the mental health service we are friendly - we can give you physical health checks including... blood tests for - diabetes - heart problems - etc-etc in a ~~calm~~ calm environment... (- description what to expect-)
- ⑩ See point -
- ⑨ maybe you have had bad experience with mental health care or: maybe you have ~~been~~ to the doctor about physical health and your problem ~~has~~ been dismissed as "mental illness" "Your ~~mental~~ health should be taken seriously!"

Mood board 6

The doctors as well. The government are not seeing mental health and depression as a serious issue.

I have a learning disability.

I act silly to try & cheer people up.

Everyone's opinion matters Not just yours.

There are misconceptions always with people as they think I am trying to whine the m up.

I've got mental health issues so does this make me not normal

What is Normal?

I do not like the word "not Normal"

Dark and gloom.

When I am very stressed I like to cool down with my cup of tea.

IT'S OKAY to ASK for HELP

Please allow me the accurate time for my appointment.

People look at me as being funny, stupid and not worth to have an adult conversation.

People tend to talk to me as if I am a child.

Do not label me, I am a person.

While participants were working on their mood boards, conversations and discussion took place. The main themes and suggestions generated are summarised below:

Person-centred and empathetic

- Holistic and human centred: “it has to be about the human.” Instead of defaulting to diagnosis and medication, reframing the health check as an opportunity for people to have some autonomy within their care: “No one knows you as well as you know yourself.”
- Use of an empathetic tone and acknowledgment that the hardest part is often asking for help: “You’ve had a hard time – let us see if we can do something to help you.”
- Don’t be patronising or make assumptions.
- Acknowledgement that this is a very emotive subject and should be treated as such.
- Ensuring people receive the check they are anticipating: “I felt rushed in my appointment. It was meant to be 1 hour, and it ended up being 15 minutes. It felt like they were saying, ‘You’re not important enough.’ They need to make sure you get the time that you are meant to get.”

Fear of attending health checks

- People might have fears about attending the check, especially if they’ve been through the psychiatric system. Emphasise the check is not a psychiatric service, it is about physical health and physical issues that may present as mental health (such as hormonal imbalances, thyroid issues, other underlying issues) but not defaulting to attributing them to mental health.
- Recognising people may have a suspicion and fear of doctors: “I’ve had some really horrible experiences, and I don’t trust them”, and validating their experience: “You have a good reason to be scared of doctors, but maybe you could see a friendly nurse, and they will help you.”
- Some people may feel unable to stand up for themselves and find speaking to doctors “intimidating”, particularly regarding medications.
- Acknowledgement that physical health problems could also be caused by medication: “I am now way healthier without medication.”
- The value of a leaflet was queried: “Will a chirpy leaflet address their fears? If I go in, will they section me? Will I be safe? Not to mention paranoia and anxiety. Will they be testing me? It needs to be more sophisticated than a colourful leaflet.”
- Use of peer support could be valuable to address fears.

Need to be fully informed

- Need to be specific of the purpose of the check as “‘health check’ could be anything”.
- Description of what to expect: “if you want people to come in for a regular health check you need to explain step by step what it’s going to be. Some description so they can say, ‘Yeah I can do that’.”
- To help people “make better decisions around [their] health” they should be fully informed.
- When people are fully informed it is “better for the GP too as we won’t be butting heads”.
- Full explanation of the reason when people are prescribed medications: “I was told it was the lesser of two evils, why can’t they explain this at the health check.”
- Where possible, could invite people in to see where the health check would take place.
- Provide options for how people receive their test results and care plan (online, paper etc).

Desire for change

- “I want things to change for future generations through our voices. [To] help some young people with voices of people from the past who haven’t been helped.”
- “It’s our health system. It’s our voice and we want our voice to be heard. We are coming together to shape what it should be.”
- People valued that this project was taking place: “things are improving now that people are wanting to get our opinions – this would never have happened [in the past]. Things are changing, it’s taking time but we’re slowly getting there.”
- On a practical level, improving the environment the checks take place in to be less clinical (example of one community venue which is getting art from Chilli Studios, plants and more light): “The environment impacts everyone and the impact on staff then impacts on the patient.”

At the end of the session participants shared their mood boards with each other and discussed visual elements and emotions doing this activity brought up. The main points are summarised below:

- One person included a picture of a bee to symbolise “be[e] yourself”.
- Images selected had a theme of relaxation and self-care, such as headphones, scented candles and warm drinks. There were also calming or peaceful images of trees, nature, and a person doing yoga or meditating.
- These linked to people emphasising the importance of looking after yourself: “Don’t let mental health issues get in the way of looking after yourself”; “If you don’t look after yourself, you’re going to go downhill and won’t be there for other people.”
- “Sun makes you feel happy.”
- People preferred light colours.
- Preference for clip art over photos as it is “more visual to me as a person” and “draws you in”.
- Words written on the mood boards reflected a need for person-centred and individual care:
 - “People talk to me as if I was a child, or I get told off for my opinion.”
 - “Don’t label me, I am a person.”
- The leaflet should be something fresh instead of standard leaflets or websites to symbolise “the new NHS”. It should also be representative of a calming and friendly environment and nurses.

Next steps

We sent deidentified data from workshop two to the graphic designer so they could create two prototype versions of an SMI health check leaflet for discussion and feedback at workshop three, scheduled for the following week.

Workshop Three

Six participants took part in workshop three, one of whom was accompanied by a support worker. A member of Chilli Studios staff also attended this session. This workshop was facilitated by two members of Involve North East staff with assistance from the graphic designer.

The two prototype SMI health check leaflets below were shared with participants, and they were invited to give feedback on them.

Leaflet A



More information

Information on SMI health checks:

Annual health check for people with severe mental health conditions - NHS



Information on healthy lifestyles: Live Well - NHS



Scanning a QR code

You can scan a QR code with your smart phone or tablet, in most cases open the camera app, and hover over the QR code and you will be prompted to access a website link. If your device doesn't have this function you can download free apps to allow you to scan the codes via your preferred app store.



It's important to 'bee' yourself



How to get help in an emergency

In a medical emergency, please contact NHS 111 or 999

NHS 111 is also online <https://111.nhs.uk> and in the NHS App.

In a mental health emergency, contact 111 and press option 2.

More information on urgent help scan the QR code or visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/where-to-get-urgent-help-for-mental-health/>



www.nhs.uk

involve.org.uk



Inside flap

Back page

Cover

Who can have an annual physical health check?

Some people do not like medical labels, but we want to be clear who can have an annual NHS physical health check. Anyone aged 18+ with an SMI (Severe Mental Illness) can have a free health check once a year.

SMI includes schizophrenia, psychosis, and bipolar. If you are not sure if these apply to you, ask your GP, or check at your next medication or healthcare review.

Why should I choose to have a physical health check?

The health check is here to help you. We all need to look after our health, but people with SMIs need to be extra careful. Medication and lifestyle can increase the risk of health problems. Spotting these early makes them easier to fix.

Do I need a health check if I feel well?

Health problems may not cause symptoms at the beginning. A health check can find problems before you start to feel unwell.



What happens at a physical health check?

The health check usually takes about 45 minutes.



The doctor or nurse will:

- Check your weight, blood pressure, heart rate, and offer you a blood test
- Discuss medication you are taking, how this makes you feel, and any changes to it you want to discuss
- Have a conversation about your lifestyle. If you want, they can give you advice on healthy eating, exercise, alcohol and smoking so you can make better decisions around your health
- Work with you to develop an individualised care plan so you can look after yourself better based on your own needs



They may also offer you an echocardiogram of your heart (ECG), or a urine (pee) test.

The health check is an opportunity for you to ask questions about your health and the healthcare support you receive.

At the end of the appointment, they will ask you if you want a copy of your care plan and health check results, either digitally or by letter.



How do I get my annual health check?

You can book this with your GP practice or ask someone else to book it for you. Please tell your GP practice if you need extra help, such as a longer appointment or a person to come into the appointment with you.

Don't let mental health issues get in the way of looking after yourself.



Inside 3 pages

Leaflet B



More information

Information on SMI health checks:

Annual health check for people with severe mental health conditions - NHS



Information on healthy lifestyles: Live Well - NHS



Scanning a QR code

You can scan a QR code with your smart phone or tablet, in most cases open the camera app, and hover over the QR code and you will be prompted to access a website link. If your device doesn't have this function you can download free apps to allow you to scan the codes via your preferred app store.



Inside flap

How to get help in an emergency

In a medical emergency, please contact NHS 111 or 999

NHS 111 is also online <https://111.nhs.uk> and in the NHS App.

In a mental health emergency, contact 111 and press option 2.

More information on urgent help scan the QR code or visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/where-to-get-urgent-help-for-mental-health/>



It's important to 'bee' yourself

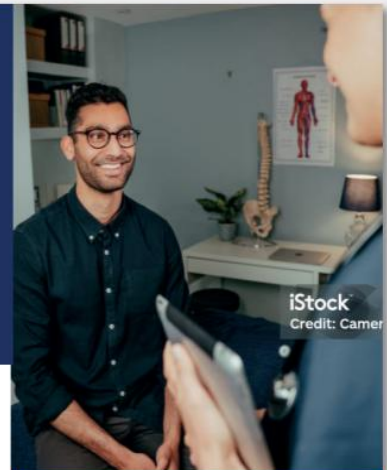


NHS

www.nhs.uk

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involve-ne.org.uk



iStock
Credit: Cameron

Having a health check means you can look after yourself better.

NHS

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northeast
Amplifying Community Voices

Cover

Who can have an annual physical health check?

Some people do not like medical labels, but we want to be clear who can have an annual NHS physical health check. Anyone aged 18+ with an SMI (Severe Mental Illness) can have a free health check once a year.

SMI includes schizophrenia, psychosis, and bipolar. If you are not sure if these apply to you, ask your GP, or check at your next medication or healthcare review.

Why should I choose to have a physical health check?

The health check is here to help you. We all need to look after our health, but people with SMIs need to be extra careful. Medication and lifestyle can increase the risk of health problems. Spotting these early makes them easier to fix.

Do I need a health check if I feel well?

Health problems may not cause symptoms at the beginning. A health check can find problems before you start to feel unwell.



What happens at a physical health check?

The health check usually takes about 45 minutes.



The doctor or nurse will:

- Check your weight, blood pressure, heart rate, and offer you a blood test 
- Discuss medication you are taking, how this makes you feel, and any changes to it you want to discuss
- Have a conversation about your lifestyle. If you want, they can give you advice on healthy eating, exercise, alcohol and smoking so you can make better decisions around your health 
- Work with you to develop an individualised care plan so you can look after yourself better based on your own needs 

They may also offer you an echocardiogram of your heart (ECG), or a urine (pee) test.

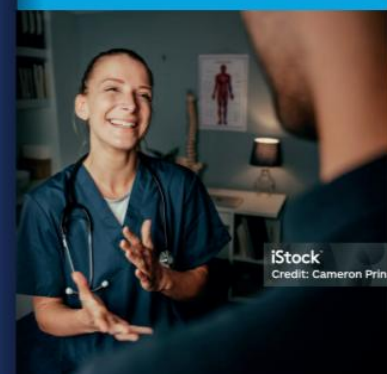
The health check is an opportunity for you to ask questions about your health and the healthcare support you receive.

At the end of the appointment, they will ask you if you want a copy of your care plan and health check results, either digitally or by letter.

How do I get my annual health check?

You can book this with your GP practice or ask someone else to book it for you. Please tell your GP practice if you need extra help, such as a longer appointment or a person to come into the appointment with you.

Don't let mental health issues get in the way of looking after yourself.



iStock
Credit: Cameron

Inside 3 pages

When asked for a preference, five preferred leaflet A, and three said there were elements of both leaflets they liked so could not pick a favourite. Feedback on the leaflets is summarised below.

Leaflet A feedback

- Positive feedback on the illustrations: “I prefer this to photos.”
- Liked the use of local landmarks.
- A feeling that this one had a “softer” and more positive approach to attending the check: “The cover makes you feel happy and shows that you can have really good health”; “hopeful and inspirational.”
- One person felt this “softer” information would be helpful when received alongside some “hard text” such as a letter or more formal information.
- There was discussion about the cover image, and whether this could be mistaken for a yoga leaflet, or people may be put off by the image of the person meditating – “is that relevant to everybody? Some people might think it’s airy fairy...blokes thinking it’s nothing to do with me.” However, most people felt this was not an issue.

Leaflet B feedback

- Felt that the middle panel of the inside had a better layout with the colour blocking and use of speech bubbles.
- Dark font on white was “easier to read and understand.”
- “Don’t let mental health issues get in the way of looking after yourself” was in bold and draws attention to this message.
- Liked that “why should I choose to have a physical health check” was highlighted from the rest of text in a blue box.
- Liked the use of lotus flower.
- Felt that this looked a bit more generic and could blend into the background, especially if it is amongst other leaflets.

Feedback on both leaflets

- Positive feedback on the bee symbol and the message connected to it: “I think it is better than writing the word be”; “[it is] fun, cute, quirky, more personality and uplifting.”
- Liked the use of clock, heart, apple and clipboard symbols.
- Discussion on whether the perceived gender of the person on the front cover would matter in terms of appealing to people. Most of the group felt this wouldn’t affect their interest.
- One person “liked the front cover of A but the font of B.”
- Comments on font size being small as “it’s a lot of text”, but the group agreed that all the information was useful and relevant.

Feedback on the leaflet text

- Easy to understand language: “use of ‘Urine (pee)’ in text is very human and easy to explain.”
- Positive feedback on “some people don’t like medical labels.”

- Importance of the check being described as a discussion and an opportunity to develop a plan that suits the individual: “if you’ve had a say in it, you would rather stick to the [care] plan.”
- Reflect the reciprocal nature of the check; instead of “ask questions” emphasise that “it’s a conversation, I need to know you’re talking to me.”

In addition to discussing the prototype leaflets, the group discussed other topics around the health checks, such as how to promote them, and ensure they offer person-centred care.

Feedback on use of a leaflet to promote SMI health checks

- Discussions around where the leaflet would be and how it would be used, “would they be left at hospitals? I still need clarification on who it is for, and how does it reach them.”
- Validity of a leaflet as promotion was discussed: “could the leaflet put you off?”; “is a leaflet useful at all?”; “it’s a difficult thing for a leaflet to do, encourage people to attend a health check.”
- We asked the group if it would be helpful getting this leaflet in advance of receiving an invitation letter, which the majority agreed with.
 - o “You can look at the leaflet, and then put it down, and then can check or reread it if you want.”
 - o “It gives you time to think about it.”
 - o “Giving you time to process the leaflet and you can write a list of what you want to say or find out.”
 - o “You could take this leaflet in with you.”

Alternate ways to promote the health checks

- Phone calls as promotion were discussed, with conflicting views on their value:
 - o Positive:
 - “A phone call from a kind person who understands mental health – a personal touch.”
 - “A mental health nurse that rings me.”
 - “More easily accessible if I don’t want to speak to that person today [I don’t have to].”
 - o Negative:
 - Potential scariness of a phone call or knock on the door, particularly when considering psychosis and potential barriers connected to the conditions that the SMI register covers.
 - Discussed whether people would answer a phone call. One person said they would only answer “because I know the CPN and have a good relationship” but otherwise would ignore the call.
- When contacting people, persistence is important: “it shouldn’t be [that] you try once and then move on.” It is important to understand “real issues and barriers” to answering phone calls and the impact of fluctuating mood: “I might want to speak in the morning but not in the evening.”

- Make the way in which people are invited personalised. However, it was queried whether this would be “a change to the mental health service and asking too much?”.
- One practical change was around the timing of the check, which would allow people to be fully prepared: “it would be easier if you had [the check] the same time every year, if they could give you a month when you will be invited.”

Peer support

- The group discussed the importance of places like Chilli Studios for peer support around mental health.
 - o “Knowing you have friends to give you a hug and say that everything could look better tomorrow, it can change your day. Having support from others... I know I could come in and bend [Chilli Studios staff member]’s ear. There’s always somebody around you can go and talk to. I just like helping people, it makes me feel a little bit better. Not people saying, ‘I don’t want to know’ or ‘not now’.”
 - o “I have a list of people in my phone, friends and family, but I can’t speak to them about my mental health like I can here.”
 - o “It’s nice to talk to people who have similar things to me, [peer support] makes me feel better.”

‘SMI’

- Discussions around the SMI register and who is/isn’t offered a health check and how “you can’t choose to join.” People queried how it was decided who should go on this register and be entitled to a health check, commenting on how conditions such as complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD) weren’t included.
- One person queried whether someone who gets an annual physical health check due to either another condition, age, or GP practice policies would get a separate check for SMI, and if so whether that would render one of the checks pointless.
- Discussion of the word “severe” and its specificity.
- Confusion around acronyms when receiving treatment and applying for benefits as the council use SMI which means “Severe Mental Impairment” rather than “Severe Mental Illness”.
- Language used is important: “Don’t want to be ‘mental patients’ or ‘patients’.”

Fears around health and appointments

- Several people discussed avoidance when it comes to their health: “I very much like to avoid doctor’s appointments, I stick my head in the sand, so it is about trying to get this message to people [who also do that]”; “I like to think mental health and meds aren’t real, the reality is too frightening.”
- For people who are scared of appointments, [it would be helpful to] stress that they won’t be forced to do anything they don’t want to in the check.

Need for personalised care

- There were negative views around the checks and medical treatment being too generalised in nature: “The doctor sees that many people that they read a script and not see the real person”; “The check is a sticking plaster and a small gesture... a perfunctory test and not very personal.”
- Offering personalised care, acknowledging that “people have their own wisdom about what works” to keep them well and that should be considered in conversations around their health and how they can make healthier choices.
- Building trust is essential for attendance: “I go to checks now cos I’m getting what I need, I’ve built a relationship with the nurse.”
- Importance of the staff member you see: “Different people and they have different approaches to make you feel welcome.”
- Location is important: “Human centred spaces,” example of community venues, “could be a good place for them to do [checks].”

Personalised follow-up care

- There was discussion about whether people would engage with follow-up care, and how this could be personalised.
 - o “Even if this [updating of leaflet and letter] is successful in doubling attendance at these checks, what is the next step – are the people pursuing the treatment?”
 - o “If there is a physical problem developed by a person with mental health issues [that is picked up in the health check], what happens next, is it a referral? Need to consider if they will engage with the journey itself” e.g. if they are referred to a liver specialist, will they wait and engage with the referral?
 - o “They should be curating the journey at each stage; they might need some more support.”
 - o “Can a mental health nurse follow up on this with you? Help you to go to the next bits of treatment by saying ‘this person needs this support’?”

We thanked participants for their helpful insights and suggestions and reminded them that final decisions about the design and content of the SMI physical health checks leaflet will be made by HI NENC.

Next steps

Feedback from participants was shared with the graphic designer who produced a final draft version of the SMI health check leaflet.

Final designs

Letter template

Dear [Name]

Are you getting the annual physical health check you are entitled to? A health check can help find any problems before you start to feel unwell.

What the check will include:

- Blood pressure
- Weight, height
- Discussing medication you are taking, how this makes you feel, and any changes to it you want to discuss
- A conversation about your lifestyle and how you can look after yourself better based on your own needs

[Information on how to book the appointment/this is your appointment date depending on whether the practice pre-books the appointment]

If you want to know more about this health check, and why you have been invited, scan the QR code* below [and type out website] or contact your GP practice's Mental Health Team.

If you are having a medical emergency; please contact 111 or 999. If you are having a mental health emergency, please contact 111 and press option 2. For details of more mental health support services scan the QR code** below [and type out website].

*QR code should link to webpage providing detailed, patient friendly information about the APHC including this patient leaflet.

**QR code should link to webpage detailing other mental health support services.

More information

Making Every Contact Count (MECC) gateway
www.meccgateway.co.uk/nenc



NHS app
www.nhs.uk/nhs-app/



Cancer screening
www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/nhs-screening/

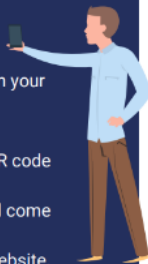


How do I scan the QR code?



You can scan a QR code with your smart phone or tablet,

1. Open the camera app.
2. Point the camera at the QR code and hold it still.
3. A message or website will come on screen.
4. Tap the link to open the website.
5. If this doesn't work, you can download a free app from your app store, this can help you scan a QR code.



It's important to 'bee' yourself



How to get help in an emergency



In a medical emergency, please call **NHS 111 or 999**



You can use NHS 111 online at:
<https://111.nhs.uk>
 or in the NHS App.



In a mental health emergency, call 111 and press option 2.

You can find more information on how to get urgent help here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/where-to-get-urgent-help-for-mental-health/>



www.nhs.uk

healthinnovationnenc.org.uk



Who can have an annual physical health check?

We know some people do not like medical labels. But in this leaflet, we use the term Severe Mental Illness (SMI). This is to make it clear who can have an NHS health check.

You can have a free health check once a year if you are 18 or older and have an SMI.

SMI includes schizophrenia, psychosis, and bipolar. If you are not sure if these apply to you, ask your GP, or check at your next medication or healthcare review.



Why should I choose to have a physical health check?

The health check is here to help you. We all need to look after our health, but people with SMIs need to be extra careful.

Medication and lifestyle can increase your risk of health problems.

A health check can find health problems early. Spotting these early means we can help and treat you sooner.

Do I need a health check if I feel well?

Health problems may not cause symptoms at the start. A health check can find problems before you start to feel unwell.



What happens at a physical health check?

The health check usually takes about 30 minutes.



The doctor or nurse will:

- Check your weight, blood pressure, heart rate, and offer you a blood test



- Talk about any medication you are taking, how this makes you feel, and any changes to it you want to make

- Talk to you about your lifestyle. If you want, they can give you advice on healthy eating, exercise, alcohol and smoking. This can help you make better decisions about your health



- Work with you to create an individualised care plan. This is a plan to help you look after your health. It is based on your own wants and needs.



They may also offer you:

- An electrocardiograph of your heart (ECG) (a test that checks how your heart is working)
- or a urine (pee) test



The health check is a chance to talk about your health and healthcare support you get. It might help to bring along a list of anything you might want to discuss with the doctor and nurse.

At the end of the appointment, they will ask you if you want a copy of your care plan and health check results. This can be by letter or digitally.

How do I get my annual health check?

You can book this with your GP practice or ask someone else to book it for you. The NHS must make health services easy for everyone to use. They can do this by making changes to your appointment called reasonable adjustments.

These are small changes, like a longer appointment, simple explanations, or a person to come into the appointment with you. Tell your GP practice what works best for you if you need extra help.

Don't let mental health issues get in the way of looking after yourself.



Next steps

HI NENC will consider the letter template and leaflet and once approved, will share them with GP practices for distribution.

HI NENC are also looking into the development of an easy read version of the letter and leaflet.