

*NHS Volunteer Responders:*  
**Practical guide and tips for  
primary care and community  
health professionals**

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NHS England and NHS Improvement



# Drawing upon volunteer support to get patients the help they need

- This practical guide is intended to help you understand the opportunities that the NHS Volunteer Responders scheme presents, and is aimed at anyone working in primary care and community health, including in general practice, community pharmacies and community health services.
- There are over 550,000 NHS Volunteer Responders ready to help those who need that bit of extra support. The scheme has only been running for a short time but it is growing in popularity amongst primary and community health professionals.
- Volunteers who are part of the scheme have undergone appropriate ID checks, with DBS checks for patient transport roles and those supporting people with significant vulnerabilities or cognitive impairment. NHS Volunteer Responders are linked to dedicated roles and can do discrete and one-off tasks:
  - Community Response: collecting and delivering shopping, medication or other essential supplies especially to those who are shielding
  - Community Response Plus: a Community Response volunteer supporting people with cognitive impairments and or significant vulnerabilities, who are shielding
  - Patient Transport: providing transport to people who are ready for discharge and ensuring they are settled safely back into their home
  - NHS Transport: providing transport to move supplies between NHS services
  - Check in and Chat: providing telephone support to individuals who are at risk of loneliness
- You or your teams can refer any person you think would benefit from the support of a volunteer based on your professional judgement. You can refer through the [referral portal](#) or by calling 0808 196 3382. Your patients can also self-refer – with the exception of requests for patient transport services – by calling 0808 196 3646.

## What health and care professionals are saying

*“I’ve found the referral system extremely easy to use and think it is a wonderful scheme. All of my patients who have received volunteer support have given positive feedback and been happy with the support provided. I’ve been utterly charmed by both the speed and sensitivity of the volunteers and think it’s a real force for good. I hope it continues post covid-19.”*

**GP, North London**

*“I have to say I’ve been beyond impressed so far with the NHS Volunteer Responders. When it was first announced I snorted, gutted, rolled my eyes back and raised my left eye brow all simultaneously.*

*I have to say I’ve eaten the biggest slice of humble pie. My first referral was on Good Friday for a prescription and I’d inadvertently forgotten to send the electronic prescription. 1 hour and 56 minutes after I submitted the referral the volunteer rang the surgery to ask where the prescription was. So I knew it worked.*

*I only hope that the network continues beyond the end of the pandemic!”*

**Locum ANP, East Kent**

# Example tasks for NHS Volunteer Responders

Below are illustrative examples of specific tasks that NHS Volunteer Responders could carry out within general practice , community pharmacy  and community health services . This is an evolving programme - please send your examples, ideas and suggestions to: [england.covid-communities@nhs.net](mailto:england.covid-communities@nhs.net)

Role	Description of tasks	Referrer
Community Response Volunteer	<p><b>1. Collecting and delivering self care and health monitoring equipment to individuals including but not limited to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ medical supplies and products e.g. oxygen cannisters , oximeters, basic nursing and physio tools and materials, blood pressure monitors, blood sugar monitors to pregnant women</li> <li>➤ health materials and advice to hard to reach groups and/or those with accessibility issues – e.g. providing materials in alternative formats</li> </ul>	  
	<p><b>2. Collection and delivery of medications to individuals – including:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ medicines from pharmacies to people who do not have other arrangements in place</li> <li>➤ paper prescriptions from GP practices when electronic prescriptions cannot be used</li> </ul>	 
	<p><b>3. Coordination and delivery of necessities – including:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ coordinating the repair and maintenance of essential aids: hearing aids, spectacles, walking frames/sticks, etc.</li> <li>➤ food deliveries and other necessities</li> <li>➤ Picking up books from libraries or other essential items that shielded people may need to help them maintain wellbeing during their shielding</li> </ul>	 
	<p><b>4. Help to improve patient experience*, for example:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improving on site public information e.g. putting up posters, help with reorganising layout to assist with people flow management</li> <li>➤ Improving waiting areas e.g. help to change layout, update reading materials and magazines</li> </ul>	  
Community Response Plus Volunteer	<p><b>1. Collection of medication, food and other necessities for individuals with cognitive impairments and/or significant vulnerabilities who are shielding</b></p> <p><b>2. Connecting individuals*</b> (virtually) to local existing community services and (virtual) community groups and activities, alongside and in coordination with the local Social Prescribing Link Workers. This activity could also be performed by Community Response volunteers</p>	  
Check in and Chat Volunteer	<p><b>1. Speaking via telephone to individuals who may be lonely or at risk of loneliness as a consequence of self-isolation</b></p>	  
NHS Transport Volunteer	<p><b>1. Help to move medical supplies and equipment between sites</b>, for example, to help respond to changes in demand. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Oximeters or other equipment/supplies</li> <li>➤ Pharmacy deliveries</li> <li>➤ Medical specimens e.g. urine samples, sputum pots</li> </ul>	  

To note: Any tasks, including the examples above, that volunteers are asked to perform need to be in line with the [guidelines](#) provided by the RVS

\* Volunteer guidance currently being updated to include this option

# You should have confidence in using the NHS Volunteers Responders scheme: truths and myths

<p><b>You have discretion over who you can refer</b></p>		<p>You can refer anyone who may be vulnerable as the result of the impact of COVID-19 and may benefit from this support in your professional judgement. This is not limited to clinical vulnerability. You can also advise people to self-refer</p>
<p><b>Referring takes only a few minutes and can be tracked</b></p>		<p>Referring is simple and only takes a few minutes. The system will then match the patient with a volunteer and you will be able to track your referral to check if it has been matched</p>
<p><b>Volunteers are covered by insurance</b></p>		<p>The activities of NHS Volunteer Responders are covered by the Royal Voluntary Service Public Liability insurance procured in connection with the Business. Cover under the policy is contingent on volunteers following set guidelines and boundaries</p>
<p><b>Safeguarding issues are properly reported</b></p>		<p>NHS Volunteer Responders and people receiving support are informed about how to report a safeguarding concern, including via NHS leaflets. The Safeguarding Team is on hand by email at <a href="mailto:safeguarding@royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk">safeguarding@royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk</a> or phone on 0808 196 3382. Referrers will be informed of raised safeguarding concerns</p>
<p><b>Volunteers are not sufficiently prepared</b></p>		<p>NHS Volunteer Responders receive specific guidance on the role they are performing and appropriate behaviours around issues such as data protection, confidentiality, equality, safety around COVID-19 and suitable times to do their tasks</p>
<p><b>Volunteers can support personal care needs</b></p>		<p>NHS Volunteer Responders should not be used to provide personal care or mental health care and are unable to support these regulated care activities. This is the role of trained professionals</p>
<p><b>Volunteers can't prove their identity</b></p>		<p>NHS Volunteer Responders have to be able to show their registered profile on the app to the people they are supporting to prove their identity. Volunteers doing prescription drop-off have to show a second photo ID to the pharmacy</p>
<p><b>Volunteers are not vetted</b></p>		<p>All NHS Volunteer Responders have to undertake ID checks DBS checks are required for Volunteer Responders who have direct patient contact Enhanced DBS checks are required for those who support people with significant vulnerability or cognitive impairments</p>

# Top tips: proactively referring patients

Below are 9 tips for you and your staff to be as proactive as possible to refer people who may benefit from the help of a volunteer

1. **Make sure your team is aware and feel empowered to offer to refer people they think could benefit**
2. **Make sure people have given consent to be referred to the scheme**
3. **Make contact with all known or suspected unpaid carers including young carers to offer volunteer support services. Unpaid carers are providing more care because local services have closed or reduced hours during the coronavirus outbreak**
4. **Make contact with all people who normally receive home visits to see what volunteer support they might need**
5. **Offer volunteer support to people who are calling regularly who do not have a medical concern**
6. **Inform people who are calling for other reasons, such as prescriptions, of the self-referral option**
7. **Proactively contact shielded people to check if they require support and signpost to self-referral or refer them yourself in coordination with local Social Prescribing Link Workers**
8. **Speak to people who are and/or have self-identified as vulnerable, for example, when issuing prescriptions or medications**
9. **Put up self-referral poster on your premises**

## PATIENT REFERRAL FORM

This is a live request for a volunteer - when submitting your first request you will receive a verification link to your email, once you have clicked this link you will automatically be registered and your referral will be live. All referrals after this will be live immediately.

If you are a Healthcare professional and would like to make a referral over the telephone, please call our Support Team on 0800 196 3382.

If you would like the individual to self-refer, please advise them to call a separate number - 0800 196 3646. Please note, this is only for individuals identified as high risk who have received a letter asking them to self-isolate.

Please note a patient (hereafter referred to as client) could be an individual that needs support or a NHS service that requires volunteers providing they meet the referring criteria and would benefit from one of the 4 volunteer roles as determined by a health care professional or a local authority referrer.

A referral form will need to be completed for each individual request eg if more than 1 volunteer is required or various types of support required.

Please ensure the client details reflect the name and location of where the support is required as this information will be sent to a volunteer.

- Please ensure you have read the **instruction** document.
- We cannot accept requests for patient transport that involve wheelchair users.
- You will receive a notification if we are unable to match a volunteer to support the client.
- Please note that we will process your personal data in accordance with our Privacy Notice - Referral Parties, which you can find [here](#).

# Other useful resources

Below are links to other useful resources and further information

- **The referral portal:**  
<https://www.goodsamapp.org/NHSreferral>
- **Information for referrers:**  
<https://volunteering.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/nhs-volunteer-responders-portal/referral-healthcare-referrers>
- **Further information on safeguarding:**  
<https://volunteering.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/nhs-volunteer-responders-portal/safeguarding>
- **Self-referral poster:**  
<https://volunteering.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/documents/final-rvs-nhsvolres-postertemplate-v2-1008.pdf>
- **Delivering biological specimens kits and samples:**  
<https://volunteering.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/documents/vr-portal/delivering-biological-specimen-kits-and-picking-up-biological-samples-factsheet-v1-060520-1018.pdf>

I am a referrer that represents \*

Client (Patient) or Organisation Name \*

Client (Patient) or Organisation Email Address

Client (Patient) or Organisation Contact Number \*

Please enter the Client (Patient) or Organisation postcode and address \*

Postcode...

Address...

Support Required \* You must select the correct support as this is matched to a volunteer with specific training for that role. An individual requiring shopping or prescription pick-up is a Community Support. A pharmacy/OP surgery/ED site requiring the collection and delivery of many prescriptions/supplies is NHS Transport Support. IF YOU ARE UNSURE PLEASE CALL 0800 196 3382.

- ☐ - Check in and Chat Support: Provides short-term telephone support to individuals who are at risk of loneliness as a consequence of self-isolation.
- ☐ - Community Support: Provides collection of shopping, medication or other essential supplies for someone who is self-isolating, and delivering these supplies to their home.
- ☐ - Patient Transport Support: Provides transport for patients who are medically fit for discharge or to support patients going to NHS appointments.
- ☐ - NHS Transport Support: Provides transport for equipment, supplies and/or medication between NHS services and sites. Also involves assisting pharmacies with medication delivery.

Priority \* This will automatically alert a volunteer for the frequency requested. This is LIVE - it is not a registration form.

Referrer First Name \*

Referrer Last Name \*

Referrer Email \*

Referrer Contact Number \*

I confirm that the patient is aware of this referral and that I have permission from the patient to refer them for support.

YOU ARE ABOUT TO REQUEST A VOLUNTEER - THIS IS NOT A REGISTRATION FORM.

Register Referral