



25 May 2011

## **GOVERNMENT LISTENS TO THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR IN THE REGIONS**

Increasing competition in healthcare will promote fragmentation and widen inequalities. That is the message from the voluntary sector following a series of 'listening' events on the Government's proposed Health and Social Care Bill.

According to representatives from voluntary sector organisations across England, good health outcomes are best served by collaboration and increasing competition won't improve outcomes in deprived communities. The voluntary sector plays a significant role in improving the health of communities, with a particular bias towards those most in need of support.

Voluntary sector representatives also called for the GP Commissioning Consortia to be accountable to the communities they serve urging them to not to be insular about decision making, allowing public access to commissioning decisions. They also called for an integration in the system between health spending, ill health prevention spending and social care. A confidence boost in the Commissioning Consortia is needed so that people are reassured that GPs are commissioning the correct services.

The events also found that the new Health and Wellbeing Boards in local authorities will be a useful place to integrate health and social care planning and commissioning. The voluntary sector should be represented on the Health and Wellbeing Boards to help local voices be heard in an organised way, ensuring that equality and reducing health inequalities are at the forefront of decision making. This will help the Boards understand community need, shape the commissioning strategies and use innovative and flexible providers.

The listening events for the voluntary sector, held throughout May and led by Regional Voices, have focused on the implications and impact of the changes proposed in the Health and Social Care Bill and have fed in directly to the NHS Future Forum. The Government is taking advantage of a break in the passage of the Health and Social Care Bill to pause, listen to patients, clinicians and the public and reflect and improve its plans for modernisation of the National Health Service.

Voluntary sector organisations, large and small, have been engaged through the listening events, including patient, service user and carers' groups and the Local Involvement Networks (the LINKs). NHS Future Forum members attended the meetings to listen to what the delegates had to say and feed those messages into the review of the Health and Social Care Bill. Delegates used the event to discuss the impact of the Bill on the communities they work with, what changes they broadly supported and any amendments to the Bill they would like to see with a focus on the role of choice and competition for improving quality, and how to ensure public accountability and patient involvement in the new system.

Regional Voices champions the engagement of the third sector within the English regions. On a national level, it connects each of the regional networks, enabling the critical connection between national, regional and local infrastructure.

Judy Robinson, Chair of Regional Voices and chief executive of Involve Yorkshire & Humber, said:

“In a time of so much change in health and social care, this has been a useful opportunity for the voluntary sector to review the proposed changes and to shape it for the better for the people we are here to support.

“Voluntary sector services, based locally, reduce pressures on the health service. The sector can provide high quality, responsive holistic services that complement statutory services, therefore we are keen to have our voices heard in respect of the Health and Social Care Bill.

“There needs to be stronger guidance to local authorities about the importance of working collaboratively with the voluntary sector, through the whole commissioning cycle.”

Ends

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For further information on the outcome of the listening events, please contact Jo Whaley, Health and Social Care Manager, Regional Voices on 07769 168388 / [jo.whaley@regionalvoices.org](mailto:jo.whaley@regionalvoices.org)

**Notes to editors:**

**Regional Voices**

In each of the nine English regions there is a network which champions the engagement of the third sector within the region. They provide the bridge between local and national policy and share good practice across the region.

Regional Voices is funded through the Department of Health Third Sector Strategic Partners Programme to ensure input from the sector in developing health and social care policy and to support organisations to improve health and social care services- Stronger Connections for Better Health. As one of the Strategic Partners, Regional Voices is strengthening links between the Department of Health and the third sector. For further information visit [www.regionalvoices.net](http://www.regionalvoices.net).

**NHS Future Forum**

The NHS Future Forum is a group of clinicians, patient representatives voluntary sector representatives and others from the health field, including frontline staff, that will oversee the NHS listening exercise. It will drive the process of engagement with staff, patients and communities over the coming weeks. The group is being chaired by Professor Steve Field, immediate past Chairman at the Royal College of GPs.