



# Safe Surgeries

## A guide for PCN Health Inequalities Leads

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## About this guide

This guide has been developed by Doctors of the World to support Primary Care Network (PCN) Health Inequalities Leads in their efforts to improve access to equitable and quality care for inclusion health populations. It provides an overview of the [Safe Surgeries](#) programme, highlights how PCNs can enable local GP practices to build Safe Surgeries, and provides a set of practical tools and recommendations to help address barriers to GP registration and ongoing access to primary care.

## About Doctors of the World

Doctors of the World UK ([DoTW](#)) is a charitable organisation working to reduce health inequalities by improving access to healthcare through our volunteer-led clinic and advocacy programme. As well as providing direct medical support through our London clinic and advice line, we also work with GP practices across the country to address barriers to registration and ensure everyone is able to access high quality primary care.

## Understanding Inclusion Health

Inclusion health populations usually include Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, people experiencing homelessness, vulnerable migrants, people who use drugs, and sex workers. However, the term is widely used to refer to populations facing severe health inequalities as a consequence of stigma, exclusion and multiple forms of disadvantage. This includes people in contact with the justice system, victims of modern slavery, people with learning disabilities and more.

People from inclusion health groups tend to have much poorer health outcomes than that of the general population and face complex barriers to care. While everyone in the UK is entitled to free primary care, research shows that individuals from inclusion health populations struggle to access these services. This can be for a number of reasons including lack of knowledge on entitlements, language or cultural barriers, discriminatory practices or difficulty navigating health service bureaucracy. Despite NHS England guidelines, some GP practices still refuse to register people because they don't have proof of address, ID or because of their immigration status. Beyond registration, these patients may require additional support to sustain their engagement with primary care services.

Understanding who and where your local inclusion health groups are, their distinct health needs and potential barriers to care is critical in order to meaningfully address inequalities and build healthier communities.

## Role of Primary Care Networks in addressing health inequalities

*'While we cannot treat our way out of inequalities, the NHS can ensure that action to drive down health inequalities is central to everything we do' – NHS England Long Term Plan*

PCNs have a critical role in addressing local health inequalities and improving access to care. The new PCN Directed Enhanced Service (DES) Contract outlines the duty of every PCN to assess local population risk of inequalities and develop strategies in response to this. The population in your area will include people from inclusion health groups, even if these are not immediately obvious, and it is likely that they will face additional barriers to primary care. PCNs should understand who their local inclusion groups are, the barriers that these groups face, as well as the intersectional barriers for people that belong to more than one group.

The PCN Health Inequalities Lead serves as a champion for this work and plays an important role in identifying local inclusion health populations and supporting GP practices in their catchment area to better understand and meet the needs of these groups.

## About Safe Surgeries

[Everyone](#) living in the UK is entitled to register and consult with a GP, free of charge. It means we can prevent and treat illness early and create a healthier society for everyone.

At our London clinics, Doctors of the World ([DoTW](#)) UK helps almost 2,000 people every year access NHS services. Most of these are people in vulnerable circumstances, who are often prevented from registering with a GP by administrative, language or other barriers. They include people experiencing homelessness, vulnerable migrants, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, sex workers and other socially excluded groups.

[Safe Surgeries](#) is a network of GP practices committed to tackling barriers preventing access to primary care and to promoting the health of everyone in their community – regardless of immigration status or identity. There are currently over 1,500 practices signed up as Safe Surgeries across England.

The Safe Surgeries network, facilitated by DoTW UK, provides resources, training, policy updates and connects participating practices together to enable peer-to-peer support. The Safe Surgeries [toolkit](#) outlines 7 key steps that practices can take to make their services more accessible and is available free alongside other resources on the DoTW UK website.

## What can Safe Surgeries do for your area?

1. Advance local PCN priorities including implementation of the Health Inequalities DES
2. Promote healthy communities and improve access to equitable and quality primary health care
3. Respond to the needs of diverse local communities and promote non-discriminatory practice
4. Support GP practices to implement national NHS England guidelines on patient registration
5. Support GP practices to score highly in CQC inspections as Effective, Caring and Responsive surgeries

## What support is available for GP practices?

- User-friendly resources to support practice staff, like our Toolkit, translated patient-facing posters and registration FAQs for receptionists
- Ongoing support and Safe Surgeries Network events to facilitate learning and collaboration between members
- Training for both clinical and non-clinical staff on the needs of inclusion health groups, common barriers to accessing care and good practice
- DOTW monthly newsletter, providing news and case studies from members, analysis of relevant policy changes, new research, events and other resources

## How can GP practices become a Safe Surgery?

Becoming a Safe Surgery means you commit to taking steps to tackle the barriers faced by people facing exclusion from healthcare. At a minimum, this means declaring your practice a 'Safe Surgery' for everyone and ensuring that lack of ID or proof of address, immigration status or language are not barriers to patient registration.

Any GP practice can sign up to become a Safe Surgery by filling out this [online form](#). Once you sign up, DOTW will follow up with a welcome email outlining some next practical next steps. These include:

### 1. Signing the Safe Surgeries declaration

*Announce your commitment to ensuring that everyone in your community can access the healthcare they're entitled to.*

### 2. Disseminate Safe Surgeries training across the practice

*[Safe Surgeries training](#) can help clinical and non-clinical staff understand healthcare entitlement and how they can support patients in vulnerable circumstances to access primary care. Ensure all staff have received Safe Surgeries training, and include our e-Learning module in the induction for new staff. Contact us at [safesurgeries@doctorsoftheworld.org.uk](mailto:safesurgeries@doctorsoftheworld.org.uk) for support and further information on training.*

### 3. Reviewing your registration policy

*Ensure that your registration policy complies with NHS England [guidance](#) and [Safe Surgeries principles](#) by including a pathway for those who do not have documents or a fixed address to ensure consistency across your practice*

### 4. Display Safe Surgeries materials in your practice and on your website

*Put up our Safe Surgeries [posters](#) on display in your waiting area to let patients know that your practice is a safe space and everyone is entitled to register with a GP. Ensure your website reflects inclusive principles (for example, not insisting on ID or proof of address) and advertise to patients that you are a Safe Surgery for everyone in your practice area.*

### 5. Engaging with the network

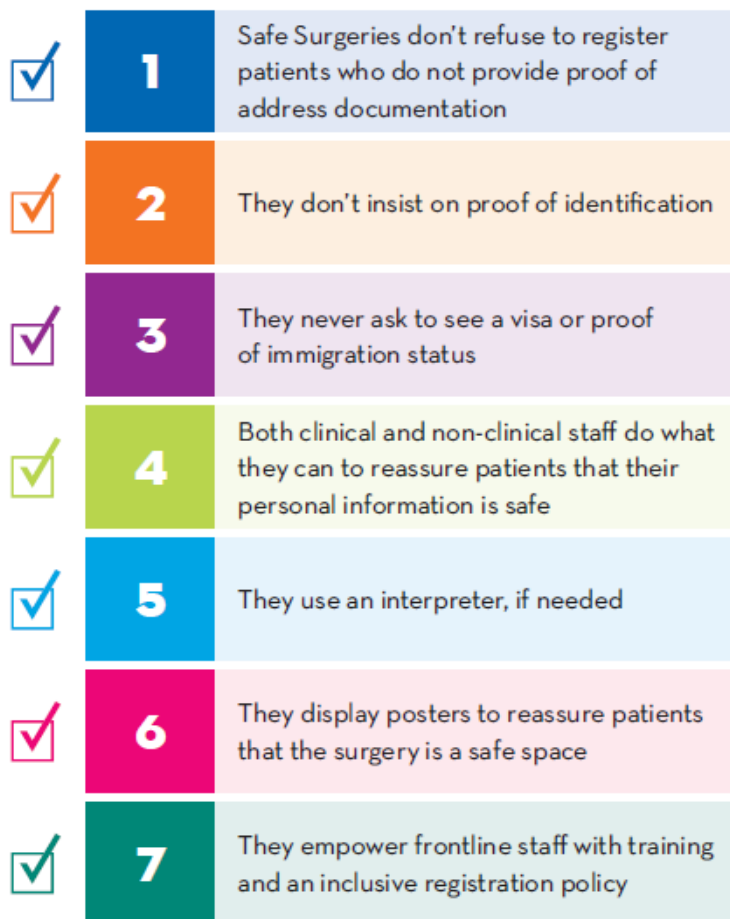
*Sharing examples of good practice with DOTW, inviting practices in your local area to join the network and promoting to your Integrated Care Board (ICB)*

If you would like to discuss how your PCN can help roll out the Safe Surgeries programme to local GP practices, please contact [safesurgeries@doctorsoftheworld.org.uk](mailto:safesurgeries@doctorsoftheworld.org.uk).

## Seven steps for Safe Surgeries

GP practices can make practical changes, both at reception and in consultations, to improve equity of access to their services. Safe Surgeries commit to following seven steps to support safe and accessible patient registration, which are outlined below.

### KNOW THE 7 STEPS FOR SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE PATIENT REGISTRATION

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- 1** Safe Surgeries don't refuse to register patients who do not provide proof of address documentation
  - 2** They don't insist on proof of identification
  - 3** They never ask to see a visa or proof of immigration status
  - 4** Both clinical and non-clinical staff do what they can to reassure patients that their personal information is safe
  - 5** They use an interpreter, if needed
  - 6** They display posters to reassure patients that the surgery is a safe space
  - 7** They empower frontline staff with training and an inclusive registration policy

## How can PCN Health Inequalities Leads help to build Safe Surgeries?

### IDENTIFY

- Work with GP practices as well as your local public health team, Healthwatch, third sector organisations and community representatives to identify local inclusion health populations and any current barriers to accessing primary care which need to be addressed.
- Ensure that local needs assessments and health inequalities strategies are informed by the needs of health inclusion groups and draw on data and intelligence from primary care.

### SPREAD THE WORD

- Encourage all GP practices in your area to become Safe Surgeries and make a commitment to providing more accessible services.
- Share regular reminders on NHS England's patient registration policy and signpost to useful resources such as the DOTW Receptionist FAQs and our Safe Surgeries Template Registration Policy for GP practices.

### INFORM

- Organise a free DOTW UK Safe Surgeries training for GP practices in your area, either by using peer-to-peer resources or inviting DOTW to deliver a session. Contact us at [safesurgeries@doctorsoftheworld.org.uk](mailto:safesurgeries@doctorsoftheworld.org.uk) for support and further information on training
- Ensure that both clinical and non-clinical practice staff are supported to attend and explore other avenues for learning and development
- Share inclusive primary care strategies such as communication adjustments and extended consultation times to improve access for inclusion health groups.

### CONNECT AND COLLABORATE

- Disseminate the Safe Surgeries toolkit and resources to stakeholders in your area – to individual practices, health and wellbeing boards, public health teams and other colleagues.
- Connect with other PCN Health Inequalities Leads to share learning and good practices and highlight inclusion health priorities through the local Integrated Care System.
- Work with both clinical and non-clinical GP practice staff to ensure their registration policies are in line with NHS England guidance.

### EVALUATE, LEARN AND IMPROVE

- Seek out regular feedback on the accessibility of GP practices across your PCN and explore workable solutions – you may even wish to consider a mystery shopping exercise!
- Highlight good practices to and across GP practices and explore how population health management tools such as data-linkage and patient coding may help direct efforts and resources towards those facing the greatest exclusion from primary care.

## Doctors of the World Resources

[Safe Surgeries Toolkit](#) - this toolkit is the key guidance document for Safe Surgeries. It lays out seven steps for practices to help ensure that everyone in their community can access the healthcare they're entitled to.

[PCN Health Inclusion Self-Assessment Tool](#) - this online tool will help your Primary Care Network to assess its engagement with Inclusion Health groups and identify areas for further action.

[Social Prescribing Toolkit](#) - this toolkit is intended to support Social Prescribing Link Workers operating within primary care and VCSE organisations. These materials, put together with input from social prescribing link workers and migrants, provide practical steps and information to recognise and address healthcare barriers.

[Translated Resources Hub](#) - this is a repository of translated health information resources in over 60 languages, developed by DOTW. These cover coronavirus and other health topics, and are available to download for free in a variety of formats, including video.

[Patient health questionnaires](#) - these questionnaires have been developed by DOTW and NHS England. They are designed to be completed by refugees and migrants to help to prioritise health needs in initial consultations and are translated into 12 languages

## Other Useful Resources

[NHS England Primary Medical Care Policy and Guidance Manual \(PGM\)](#)

[BMA: Patient registration guidance](#)

[BMA: Refugee and asylum seeker patient health toolkit](#)

[CQC: registration and treatment of asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants](#)

[Migrant Health guide](#)

[NHS England Guidance for Commissioners: Interpreting and Translation Services in Primary Care](#)



**DOTW UK is here to provide support to PCNs working towards healthy communities in a way that is inclusive of everybody.**

**Sign up for updates, events and resources. More information on the Safe Surgeries programme can be found at <https://www.doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/safesurgeries/>**

**Contact us at  
[safesurgeries@doctorsoftheworld.org.uk](mailto:safesurgeries@doctorsoftheworld.org.uk)**

