

PHBChoices: The innovative online care marketplace

A simple, cost-effective and patient-focused way to manage the expansion of Personal Health Budgets



“The whole reason for providing PHBs is to give people greater freedom and the ability to make decisions about their own care. So it’s really pleasing to hear PHB holders now saying that PHBChoices is giving them that greater control.”

With the drive for more personalised healthcare a key national priority, three Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) in North West London have been at the forefront of developing bespoke technology, which gives those with long term conditions greater choice and control over how their health and wellbeing needs are met.

Since implementing the custom-built digital platform, PHBChoices, to manage the delivery of around 100 personal health budgets (PHBs) to older people and adults with physical disabilities, the easy-to-use technology has simultaneously improved governance, reduced costs and benefitted patients, according to the Continuing Healthcare team for Hammersmith and Fulham, West London and Central London CCGs.

Designed as an innovative online care marketplace, where PHB holders can purchase products and services in line with their agreed care package using a virtual budget, PHBChoices also delivers savings and greater financial oversight for CCGs, whilst removing much of the administrative burden on patients.

Working together, the three CCGs in North West London were early adopters of PHBChoices. A six month pilot was agreed in early 2017 to ensure the platform was developed in a way that would meet the needs of CCGs, suppliers and – most importantly – PHB holders themselves.

The first step was to transition existing PHB holders to the platform. Having been used to receiving direct payments into their bank account from the local authority, introducing a brand new system – and an entirely different way of receiving and managing their PHB – was not without its challenges.

Key benefits for PHB holder

- User-friendly with familiar look and feel of online retail platforms
- Simplifies the process of managing a PHB by having all information in one place and easy to hand
- Easy to be an employer – takes stress out of providing contracts; paying tax, national insurance and pensions; managing holidays and arranging training
- Ability to view, book and manage all care services in one place
- Peace of mind for PHB holders and their families

The commissioner explained: *“We did have a number of people who at the beginning were either not keen to use PHBChoices at all, or were finding it difficult to use. Some of this was around it being a new system and a different way of working, but some people were struggling with the terminology or confused by some of the notifications they received on the system.”*

By working closely with patients and the CCGs, NHS Shared Business Services (NHS SBS) and CloudBuy used the pilot to refine and enhance the platform, making it more user-friendly and introducing greater functionality over time.

The commissioner said: *“The system has developed with the individual PHB holder in mind but has also helped ensure we as*

Key benefits for CCG

- Enhanced financial controls and simplified audit processes
- Improved governance and compliance, with enhanced management information 'dashboard' and reporting
- Delivers cash releasing savings
- Simple and easy to use, reducing administration
- Enables early identification of risk through real time view of care provided

a CCG work in a way that makes it easier for them. We've met with people who were involved in the transition process and they have told us that the platform today is far easier to use.

"The whole reason for providing PHBs is to give people greater freedom and the ability to make decisions about their own care. So it's really pleasing to hear many of those same PHB holders now saying that PHBChoices is giving them that greater control."

With the overall aim of PHBChoices being to shift the focus away from administration and back on to the care and health outcomes for patients, the platform has been used to great effect in North West London to ensure a closer link with PHB holders.

The commissioner explained: *"The platform enables two-way dialogue with the PHB holder. It means we can really work closely with an individual budget holder, rather than it being quite disconnected, which it was before.*

"PHBChoices has given us complete visibility of what is actually being provided to all of our PHB holders. It means we have central oversight of the care hours being used, against the care hours provided for a person's assessed needs. So if a budget is not being used, we can now identify this very easily and manage any underlying issues."

Indeed, by implementing PHBChoices for existing PHB holders as part of the pilot, the CCGs identified the need to increase some budgets and decrease others – where care needs were sufficiently met for less money than was being provided as a direct payment.

This alone has resulted in significant savings. And with work underway to double the number of PHB holders within this patient group, PHBChoices will be important to ensure the successful implementation, management and direction of PHBs across the CCGs.

The commissioner explained: *"One of the biggest benefits of PHBChoices is that it's an easy system to setup and very simple to use – so not onerous at all from our point of view. From our side, the system can be accessed by clinicians, finance professionals and managers – bringing everyone together to a central point.*

"We find it's very easy to access the information we need and we're able to set people up quickly to give them access to a PHB.

"I like the fact that the system has developed with us and is responsive to both our needs as a commissioner and also the feedback from PHB holders themselves. It very much feels like CCGs, patients and family members are working together.

"People with a PHB have a lot going on and often many complex needs. Put simply, PHBChoices helps them easily access what they need without making it too complicated, whilst at the same time helping us to make sure we're providing exactly what we should be."

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