

Co-creation of Resources to improve experiences of Nearest Relatives under the Mental Health Act

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About the research

If someone is compulsorily admitted to hospital under the Mental Health Act 1983 for psychiatric care and treatment, [their Nearest Relative becomes a crucial part of what happens next](#).

Nearest Relatives have important legal rights and responsibilities. They need and deserve information, guidance and help about their role. However, often they struggle to make sense of how things work.

This project drew on research about Nearest Relatives' experiences and worked with experts to co-create a [website as a trusted, go-to place for Nearest Relatives to find information and practical advice to help them in their role](#).

The Nearest Relative role is being revised in late 2026/early 2027 as part of the [planned reforms to the Mental Health Act](#). In the future, anyone could become a Nominated Person for someone who is treated under the Mental Health Act. The website has been created to enable easy updates for the new role. Information and guidance for Nominated Persons will be essential to successful implementation of the new Mental Health Act.



Policy Implications

- Include the website in all communication with Nearest Relatives.
- Review information that Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHPs) give when Nearest Relatives are identified and include the [Nearest-Relative-rights-and-duties-Factsheet.pdf](#) in the revised Mental Health Act Codes of Practice in England and Wales.
- Include the website and the [Leaflet for Staff](#) in education and professional development for AMHPs and as part of induction materials for all staff working in mental health services in England and Wales.
- Work with mental health providers to include the website in information for carers/family members when a person is admitted for treatment under the Mental Health Act.
- Work with the third sector to include the website in information provided by carers support services and patient advocacy services.
- Include the section: [If things go wrong](#), and the [Complaints tool](#) in statutory information about complaints.
- Commission courses for Nearest Relatives/Nominated Persons to help them understand their role and provide information on local support centres.
- For Mental Health Act reform, build the website into practice guidance and make it the 'go-to' place for Nominated Persons to access up to date and trusted information about their role.

Key Findings

[Recent research](#) explored Nearest Relatives' views on their experiences and knowledge of mental health law. The research involved surveys, focus groups and interviews and found that generally, Nearest Relatives had negative experiences of the role and were not given enough information. They were uncertain about the scope of their legal rights and powers, and felt the role lacked status. They wanted more recognition, better information and more support.

This project brought together a group of Nearest Relatives, mental health professionals, advisors and researchers to create resources that *"tell you, practically, how to do the role"*. We explored the need for a range of materials in different formats and the importance of sharing advice and experience from Nearest Relatives themselves.

Once we had identified the messages, information and tools that would help, we worked to co-create the content for the website based on what the law says, what we know from research, and people's experiences of being or working with Nearest Relatives.

The website was launched at a Carers Trust webinar in November 2025. We will be developing accessible versions, Welsh language resources and additional trauma-informed and culturally-informed resources. As the new Mental Health Act is implemented, we will update the website to reflect and support the Nominated Person role.



Impact so far

"How have we gone so long without a resource like this?" (Carer)

"An excellent and much needed resource, thoroughly and thoughtfully produced". (Nearest Relative)

"It's good to see content from people who have been Nearest Relatives which feels really important." (Andy Bell, Chief Executive, Centre for Mental Health)

The website has been shared widely and had nearly 2000 views by over 600 visitors in the first month. Practitioners and services are using the information and tools, and including the site address and leaflets in their communication with relatives and carers.

Further information

This project is led by Judy Laing, University of Bristol Law School, in collaboration with researchers at the Universities of Cardiff (Jeremy Dixon) and South Wales (Kevin Stone), Mind and Gerry Nosowska at Effective Practice. We are grateful to all our project collaborators for their input and support, and for UKRI ESRC & AHRC IAA funding to enable us to carry out this work.

Visit the website [here](#).

Contact the researcher

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