

## Covid-19

## ----- Guidance for practices



**Date: 23.4.2020**

**Please be aware that this is a rapidly evolving situation.**

### **Primary Care Network Directed Enhanced Service (PCN DES) FAQs**

**Q1. I had understood that all DESs and LCSs had been suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Is this not the case?**

The PCN DES generated significant controversy but was agreed by the BMA's General Practitioners Committee (GPC) as part of the 2020/21 GP Contract Agreement. The Special LMC Conference on 11 March 2020 did not support the PCN DES, but the ramifications of that have subsequently been subsumed by the Covid-19 emergency. There have also been adjustments made to the PCN DES specifications in the light of Covid-19 (as below).

The PCN DES continues to be offered to practices. It commenced on 1 April 2020 and GPC encourages practices to remain signed up to it for 2020/21. The rationale for this is that it represents a vehicle for channel funding into general practice in the national effort to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, while it continues to enable a structure for much needed collaboration between practices to enhance support and resilience for practices at local level.

**Q2. Must I confirm my sign-up/participation in the 2020/21 PCN DES by 31 May 2020, as I have been told by my CCG?**

For 2020/21 it is assumed that practices already participating in the DES as part of an approved PCN will continue to do so. It is an automatic opt-in process, which means that if a practice participated in the Network Contract DES in 2019/20, it acknowledges that it will automatically participate in subsequent years' Network Contract DES unless it follows the opt-out process.

For previously approved PCNs with no change, practices should notify the commissioner of no change **on or before 31 May 2020**. This can be provided by one practice on behalf of PCN members if all practices agree.

For previously approved PCNs with a change, the practice must notify the commissioner of the relevant change on or before 31 May 2020. Where the PCN wants to ensure there is no interruption to payments made to the PCN as the PCN transitions to this new Network Contract DES Specification, the Core Network Practices of that PCN must have completed the process for participating in the Network Contract DES prior to the next local payment deadline. Core Network Practices should liaise with the commissioner to confirm timescales. The practice must include in the notification: the change that has occurred, and; the reasons for the change.

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Separate arrangements are in place for newly formed PCNs and practices not previously in a PCN who wish to join a PCN. The [Network DES Participation Form](#) contains information includes full details of the information required.

By 1 April 2020 the commissioner must indicate to each practice the method the practice must use to provide the information necessary for that practice to participate in the Network Contract DES. The information must be provided by using the form set out at Annex A of the Network Contract DES Specification.

It is expected there will be auto-enrolment from 2021 onwards, but the LMC can confirm that practices will remain able to opt out on an annual basis.

### **Q3. If I remain signed up to the PCN DES for 20/21, what does that mean for my practice? Are there any service specifications I need to deliver in order to secure PCN DES funding?**

NHS England & NHS Improvement (NHSE/I) have made it very clear that it is their priority to free up practice capacity so that practices can prepare for and manage Covid-19.

To that effect, GP practices in 2020/21 will continue to be paid at rates that assume they would have continued to perform at the same levels from the beginning of the outbreak as they had done previously, including for the purposes of QOF, DES and LES payments.

In terms of the PCN DES Service Specifications:

- The commencement of the **Medicine Optimisation** specification has been deferred until October 2020 in the first instance.
- PCNs should begin work on the **Early Cancer Diagnosis** service specification “unless work to support the Covid-19 response intervenes”. The LMC anticipates that responding to the Covid-19 emergency will be the priority for practices locally.
- The **Enhanced Health in Care Homes** service specification is still in place according to NHS England’s letter of 19 March; this is because it was felt that this helped to align practice/PCN response to care homes during the Covid-19 pandemic. This programme seems to have faltered and the LMC suggests no action is taken under this service specification except if this is part of the practices’ response to the Covid-19 emergency, which clearly will require practice support to care homes in any event.

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### Q4. Do I still need to provide Extended Hours access?

Capacity to provide extended hours access is going to fluctuate and potentially be severely impacted by the pandemic over coming months. Focus needs to remain on staff and patient welfare and must not be compromised by efforts to deliver the specified hours in the DES.

Please note that:

- It is not realistic or appropriate to work long days.
- Appointments can be delivered remotely and by other healthcare professionals.
- The payment of £1.45 per patient will be made to the PCN to be passed on to practices, and potentially used for funding of community assessment centres (hubs).

As the primary focus for all GP practices during the current pandemic is to provide a practice Covid-19 response and prioritise the delivery of essential services to patients, PCNs and GP practices are only expected to continue to offer Extended Hours appointments **if they are able to do so**, whilst still prioritising patient care.

### Q5. What about all the PCN DES related income streams?

The following income streams either remain or have been adjusted:

- **Additional Roles Re-imbursment Scheme (ARRS):** funding remains in place and can be accessed by PCNs to support practices in responding to Covid-19. The preparation by PCNs of workforce plans has been postponed to 31 August in the first instance.
- **Investment and Impact Fund (IIF):** the IIF incentive scheme (also referred to as 'PCN QOF') had been suspended for six months and the equivalent funding of 27p per patient is being paid directly to CCGs. This is now known as the PCN Support Payment. The LMC is identifying this funding with CCGs for potential support to practices and PCNs through the Covid-19 outbreak period.
- **PCN Clinical Director Payments:** remain unchanged.
- **The Network Participation Payment:** £1.76 per weighted patient will continue to be paid to practices who remain signed up to the PCN DES.
- **CCG £1.50 funding:** will be paid to PCNs.

### Sources

- [Cover note for GPs and Commissioners: Revised Network Contract DES 2020/21](#)
- [Network Contract Directed Enhanced Service \(DES\) Contract Specification 2020/21 – PCN Entitlements and Requirements](#)
- [Network Contract Directed Enhanced Service \(DES\) Guidance 2020/21](#)
- [Network Contract Directed Enhanced Service \(DES\) Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme Claim Form 2020/21](#)