

**Initial Health Assessment Outreach Service for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in NEL 'contingency hotels'****Introduction**

There is a significant increase in people seeking sanctuary due to world events such as the war in Ukraine and instability in various parts of the world. As a result, the number of refugees and asylum seekers is increasing, with 5,644 asylum seekers in north east London as of March 2023. From this number, almost half live in 'contingency hotels', commissioned by the Home Office.

The considerable backlog in processing people's asylum claims, along with the context of wider public, voluntary and community sector constraints, means the ability to support people in an appropriate and coordinated way presents significant challenges.

People seeking asylum experience hardships such as war, conflict and a range of wider experience that negatively impact health and wellbeing. This population faces many of the same health problems as the UK population, but often experience barriers in accessing health care and support due to not understanding the workings of the NHS and other public services, and incorrectly believing that they are not entitled to free treatment at the point of use. Language barriers, stigma and discrimination further impact the likelihood of accessing services.

A new **Initial Health Assessment Outreach Service for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in NEL 'contingency hotels,'** has been commissioned by NHS North East London Integrated Care Board and will be delivered by Doctors of the World. It aims to address the barriers to accessing health care and support the holistic health and wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees homed in contingency hotels by supporting people to register with a GP and undertaking a full initial health assessment (IHA).

The service aims to prevent ill health, reduce health inequalities, enable equitable access to health and care services, all while working collaboratively with local partners.

Summary of the service

This newly commissioned service will provide asylum seekers, no matter their country of origin, with fair and equal access to primary medical services. The outreach service will provide the individual with an initial health assessment to support management of urgent health and care needs. This will identify need for onward referral and investigation. The service will also facilitate GP registration for those who are not registered.

A key goal of the service is to support embedding people within primary care and the health system so that their immediate health and care needs are identified and managed. The service will signpost people to other relevant and available services locally and beyond, for example borough-based support services and Citizen's Advice.

The service has been commissioned for 12 months support people in contingency hotels across NEL, and will commence in June 2024, starting in Newham.

What happens in an initial health assessment (IHA)?

An initial health assessment (IHA) will involve a holistic health and wellbeing assessment of each individual – both adults and children – and addressing any immediate health concerns. A full initial health assessment will include (but not limited to):

- recording of relevant medical history, including vaccinations
- recording of a woman's pregnancy and maternity history
- identifying any active health problems and mental health needs
- identifying need for health screening

What happens with the health needs captured in the IHA?

Immediate and urgent needs, including safeguarding concerns, urgent care needs and communicable disease, will be referred and/or reported rapidly via the relevant routes and services.

The health needs captured through the IHA will be shared with relevant GP practices, and people will be supported to access their GP to continue the process of supporting and addressing their needs. Through this access to primary care, people will be referred to wider services as needed.

People will also be supported and signposted on to relevant local, community and outreach services which could include the NEL Community Pharmacy Selfcare Advice Service and the pan-London Find and Treat service.

How will the service interface with General Practice?

Once registered with a GP practice, individuals should have their health needs considered. The patient's data will be provided to the GP practice via PDF document to allow the practice to read code and update the patient record. This will enable the continued support of their health needs, including:

- investigation, treatment and/or referral for any active health problems
- referral when appropriate to specialist mental health services
- ongoing monitoring and management of chronic conditions

Doctors of the World working in partnership

[Doctors of the World](#) (DOTW) is an international humanitarian organisation that fights to reduce health inequalities by improving long-term access to healthcare in the UK and internationally. With 17 chapters around they serve more than 7.25 million people in over 70 countries thanks to 4,600 staff and 6,300 volunteers. DOTW have a track record of delivering outreach clinic services to those most in need, including those experiencing homelessness, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants and those from the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and Boater community.

DOTW will develop and maintain relationships with a range of system partners (for example, Local Authority safeguarding teams, hotel accommodation providers and colleagues in primary care) to support continuity of care, information sharing, and to ensure that the service is linked with local services, well known and understood, and engaged with the wider system.

Outcomes and impact of the service

The service aims not only to support better health outcomes for this population, but also improve integration with the health and care system and support refugees and asylum seekers to integrate into UK society. Through the service, we will gain a better understanding of the health needs of this often vulnerable group, supporting the planning and delivery of future support and provision across NEL.

Getting in touch

If you would like to contact DOTW, please contact Durga Sivasathiaseelan, Outreach Lead, on dsiva@doctorsoftheworld.org.uk

If you have any general queries about the service, please contact Nicola Weaver (n.weaver@nhs.net) and Melody Dhinda-Rees (melody.dhinda-rees@nhs.net), Health Inclusion Team, NHS North East London.