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Dear Practice Colleagues

Text Messaging in General Practice

I am writing to you to explain the position in relation to pressures on the general practice text messaging budget and actions that need to be put in place to manage this.

Despite initial proposals to reduce this year's text messaging budget, we were successful in making a case to maintain this budget in line with expenditure last year. However, we find ourselves in a position at early September, where over 50% of the 2024/2025 text messaging budget has already been utilised. If practices continue to use credits at the current rate, the budget will be exceeded before the end of the financial year. The ICB is experiencing significant financial pressures this year and unfortunately, is not able to accommodate any overspend against this budget. Therefore, to mitigate this, the ICB will be applying a cap to practice messaging of approximately seven fragments per patient for the remainder of the financial year as of the date of this letter.

If practices do overspend based on their fragment allocation, it would then fall to the practices to pay for additional text message fragments. AccuRx will invoice practices directly based on their usage and it will be a practice responsibility to directly manage these payments. A reduced cost is offered if practices pay via Direct Debit. Details are available [here](#). Information regarding usage is available at a practice level on the AccuRx portal.

The practice allocations should be used for messaging needed to deliver local enhanced services, core services, and other targeted schemes. We will advise partners who wish practices to use messaging for other purposes that they may fund these on behalf of practices. For example, additional text credits can be added should local authorities want to fund specific schemes.

We recognise the benefits to patients and practices from using text messaging including being able to reduce DNAs by sending reminders, reduction of the administrative burden of call and recall and a reduction of postage. However, this needs to be balanced with

the requirement to reduce the number of text message fragments to keep within the allocated budget.

Some of the practice benefits realised from sending messages to patients have been:

- Sending leaflets to patients e.g. exercise leaflets to patients (saving printing costs (toner, paper +/- admin))
- Informing of test results / invite for test (saves admin, printing, and postage)
- Reminders for screening (saves admin)
- Automating reminders (saves admin, search generation)

Practices will continue to be offered support via the GP IT Facilitation Team and AccuRx to help minimise the number of text fragments being used, and webinars have already taken place to support the reduction of message lengths. The ICB will write to those practices who have utilised text messaging most frequently to date, to see what immediate support will be of most benefit to them.

Further information on support available is outlined below:

The ICB will also continue to fund the full cost of licences for Accubook and other clinical digital tools.

Support to reduce the number of fragments

We have provided a link to a recorded webinar summarising how to streamline fragment and SMS usage.

[Streamline your Accurx SMS Messages Guidance to SMS Fragment Reduction and Best Practice-20240723 123321-Meeting Recording.mp4](#)

Rather than opting to send messages via SMS, practices also have the ability to switch the message to be sent via an email or by the NHS App, noting this still needs to be recorded in the clinical record

AccuRx attempts to send batch messages to patients via the NHS App, which is free for practices. After 24 hours, this converts to SMS if the patient has not opened the message via the App. We will be holding further training sessions on the NHS App and how to encourage patients to use this, as switching on notifications will reduce the number of text fragments needing to be sent out.

A central resource of template SMS messages, to help reduce fragment costs, will be shared on the primary care portal here:

[SMS Fragment Usage – North East London \(icb.nhs.uk\)](https://www.icb.nhs.uk)

Future position April 2025/2026

We are currently reviewing funding arrangements for future years, and plan to support practices and patients to maximise the full potential of the NHS App as the primary method for communication. The ICB will continue to engage with NHS England and AccuRx to increase the number of messages that can be sent via the NHS App to reduce costs.

However, given current SMS costs are rising exponentially, and to manage this, the ICB will be moving to a co-funding model in future. With the deployment of the NHS App, the limit for 2025/2026 is expected to be around 10 funded fragments per patient and we will be in touch with you about this in due course.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sarah See". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue highlight effect.

Sarah See

Managing Director of Primary care

NHS North East London

Frequently asked questions

Q Will SMS functionality automatically turn off once the practice allocation is reached?

A No, the functionality will continue and practices will be charged directly by AccuRx. If practices no longer wish to send text messages, they should inform AccuRx and the ICB

Q How much do additional SMS fragments cost to purchase?

A SMS costs are currently (May 2024) calculated at 2.25p (£0.0225) per fragment if paid via direct debit or 2.35p (£0.0235) per fragment without direct debit (ex-VAT).

Q How do I pay for and track additional SMS spending

A AccuRx will invoice the practice. Usage can be seen via the AccuRx portal. Please contact AccuRx if you cannot access this.

Q Do Florey's and other structured messages count toward the limit?

A Yes

Q How do I ensure messages are routed via the NHS App first?

A Currently only batch messages go via the app, but this happens automatically, except for urgent messages.

Q Is there any guidance on how to support patients to receive messages via the NHS App?

A They need to install the NHS App and enable notifications as per the NHS England guidance.

Q I use MJOG for batch messaging, how will this be affected?

A The ICB does not fund text messaging via MJOG.

Please also review the helpful fact sheet for further information.

