



Department  
of Health

From the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP  
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To: Chairs of Health and Wellbeing Boards

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Cc: Chief Executives of NHS Trusts and NHS Foundation Trusts

- 7 OCT 2014

Dear colleagues,

### **Effective Engagement between health and Wellbeing Boards and Major Providers**

As we move towards a modern, effective health and care system the importance of working together across local health and care economies only grows. Effective engagement between Health and Wellbeing Boards and the major providers who serve their communities is critical to our shared success.

The Better Care Fund (BCF) plans were submitted on 19 September following a great deal of hard work in local areas. These plans are built on the foundation of conversations taking place that have never happened before, and I do want to commend local areas for all their efforts to bring this about. However, it has become clear through this process that there are differences in the level of engagement between Boards and providers. The results of the National Consistent Assurance Review (NCAR) process for the BCF will be made available shortly, and we want to take steps now to ensure that all local areas will be working effectively together to lay strong foundations for the implementation of the BCF plans from April 2015.

The BCF, among other changes, will lead to a reduction in emergency admissions across England and a changing pattern of care with more being done in the community. This will have a significant impact on major NHS providers and so the BCF planning necessitates strong relationships, open conversations and new ways of working. Strong, constructive dialogue from all local partners involved in developing and delivering BCF plans will be crucial to success.

How this engagement works in practice will be different in each area. Where providers have been included as full members on boards, there have been clear advantages – for example full involvement and challenge throughout the process of developing and signing off BCF plans. Around two thirds of boards do not include local NHS providers, and I know that in many areas, this has been a considered

decision. In such cases there are some examples of engagement working well through secondary mechanisms such as partnership groups, provider forums and workshops convened to explore specific local issues.

However, there are cases where this engagement does not seem to have worked effectively and this is unacceptable. Boards and providers must be positively engaging in the local decision making process, and it is the responsibility of all parties to ensure that engagement is effective, timely and meaningful. I would therefore urge Boards that do not include providers to reconsider this position, or at the least to consider their current arrangements, and assure themselves that the right structures and relationships are in place.

Support is available to Boards and providers to support effective engagement, through the Health and Wellbeing System Improvement Programme (delivered by the Local Government Association with DH funding)  
<http://www.local.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing-boards>

I would welcome your feedback on the issues raised in this letter. In particular, further examples of where you believe engagement is working well and how this has been achieved; and suggestions for further support from system leaders that you think would be helpful.

*Yours sincerely*  
*Jeremy Hunt*

**JEREMY HUNT**