How to deliver a great Annual Health Check

An Annual Health Check is a reasonable adjustment made to help make sure people with learning disabilities are accessing primary healthcare and receiving fair and equal treatment.

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- How to deliver a great Annual Health Check
- Your 10-step guide for providing a great Annual Health Check
- Further best practice to consider

How to deliver a great Annual Health Check

Annual Health Checks should always be carried out in person, with the patient as priority but involving support providers, carers or chaperones as needed.

They are essential to carrying out physical tests and checks, as well as listening to and identifying any concerns and risks.

The health check is ideally split into two appointments at least half an hour each. These are usually arranged with the practice nurse and then the patient's usual GP immediately after to ensure continuity.

Nurses and doctors have different skills in assessing patients with a learning disability and whilst either profession can complete the full examination, the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) recommend the nurse carries out the checks of weight, height, urine analysis and completes the checklist up to the physical examination.

The person should then be guided to the GP. The GP then reviews the symptoms, performs the physical examination, reviews the medication and completes a written health action plan.

Some patients with learning disabilities may find dealing with two different professionals creates more anxiety, so a flexible approach is recommended depending on the needs of the patient.

After the health check the doctor should write a brief Health Action Plan with a clear follow up plan and provide the patient with a copy.

The Annual Health Check should result in a good quality Health Action Plan, agreed with the patient and, where relevant, the people supporting them. This should be used throughout the year and kept up to date so it can effectively support the person's health and wellbeing. This can also highlight reasonable adjustments that should be added to their digital flag for future appointments.

10 steps for providing a great Annual Health Check

The changes you make to provide a more accessible and inclusive Annual Health Check can be easy and relatively cheap, or free, to make, but they can vastly improve the lives and wellbeing of your patients.

Steps 1-5; Prepare for their Appointment

1.

Make sure they have at least an hour booked in. If you can provide extra time it can help them relax, transition into the appointment and allow them space to explain things throughout the appointment. Appointments at the start or end of the day can help with time flexibility and provide a quieter environment when they arrive.

2.

Check if they have requested any reasonable adjustments and try to implement as many as possible before they arrive. They may not have requested any, but this doesn't mean they won't benefit. Check with them and provide some as standard.

3.

Provide accessible information throughout the process and let them know what you will require. Knowing what to expect means people can prepare in their own time and collate records and logs needed to answer your questions. This will help make the appointment smoother and more beneficial for everybody.

4.

Look at their records for:

- Summary of past medical history.
- The issues covered on the last health action plan.
- Current medication.
- Last few consultations.
- Any recent investigations.

5.

Make changes to the practice environment and décor, clearing obstacles, making sure signage to facilities is clear, providing a quiet waiting room or area and making sure the appointment room is accessible.

“Frankie is afraid of needles and refused blood tests for many years, but at the end of last year Frankie successfully had their blood taken after being part of a 6-month desensitisation programme with Dimensions and the community nursing. Since then, on approach to every blood test, Dimensions staff work hard to complete daily desensitisation with Frankie by massaging their hands and arms, getting used to touch and applying a tourniquet around their arm so, when the blood test happens, Frankie feels comfortable. So far- so good and Frankie has had several now with each one being successful. This was huge for Frankie and we are so proud of them and the work both the community nursing team and the support team have done.”

Steps 6 -10; at the appointment

6.

Collect them from the waiting room. This is not only more accessible and welcoming, but you can greet them and observe their mobility.

7.

Start by getting to know them. They may have chaperones with them, but you must talk to the patient and give them time and opportunity to respond. Start by talking about them more generally, reassuring them, explaining what will happen and discussing how you can make them more comfortable. This will help build much needed trust.

8.

Let them know what tests and checks are coming and explain what will happen before, during and afterwards. Explain why this is important and how it can help their health and wellbeing in the short and long term.

9.

Take your time. Your patient is the priority and they need to feel like they are. They may need more time to process information, prepare and take part in tests and checks and communicate answers to your questions.

10.

Prepare their Healthcare Action Plan and make sure everybody understands what it’s for and what to do. If they attend with carers or support workers they may have their own documentation too. What happens after the Annual Health Check is just as important. Remember Annual Health Checks aim to prevent future and serious health problems. Joined up working is essential for this to be successful.

Further best practice to consider

Good services will always listen to the people and the populations using them. All services should recognise the expertise of people with a learning disability, value their contribution and make sure they are considered and represented in all matters relating to them.

Practitioners should consider:

- Networking with the professional learning disability community, including local learning disability nurses;
- Using asset and values-based approaches which focus on utilising existing strengths to build therapeutic relationships (see 'Evidence for strengths and asset-based outcomes from NICE');
- Promoting acceptance of recognised tools to support physical health such as hospital passports and health action plans;
- Where appropriate, working in a multidisciplinary way with other professionals to plan, develop and deliver effective services;
- Promoting the use of various flagging systems, including the NHS reasonable adjustment flag to identify people with a learning disability across primary and secondary service systems;
- Developing accessible clinical pathways to support access to mainstream screening services;
- Collecting information about the experiences of people who use your service and using this information to make service improvements.

The above has been taken from NHS England's guidance from the All Our Health. They include a range of resources to help health and care, emergency services and the wider public health workforce prevent ill health and promote wellbeing as part of their everyday work: Learning disability - Applying All Our Health

The Royal College of General Practitioners Step by Step Guide for GP Practices: Annual Health Checks for People with a Learning Disability

Easy Read guide from Ace Anglia and NHS Suffolk and North East Essex. We recommend you share this with your patients and use it to steer how you deliver the check: Gold Standard Health Check, What the Health Check should include