



NHS England to move against use of expensive telephone numbers by NHS GPs in England

This briefing provides background for a formal NHS England news release that will be issued when a letter is published and distributed on Monday 4 November.

The **fair telecoms campaign** has been working with **NHS England** on the action necessary to ensure the removal of use of 084 numbers by GPs. This should have been achieved within 12 months of the introduction of revised contractual conditions on 1 April 2010. An audit has shown that around **700 practices in England (8% of the total) continue to use 084 numbers**.

The clear position of **NHS England** will be confirmed in a letter from its **Medical Director** and **Head of Primary Care** to its 27 **Area Teams**, who manage the relationship with local contracted practices in their area. Appropriate action will be taken by those **Area Teams** to ensure compliance.

- **All 084 numbers are considered "expensive"**. Their adoption or continuing use should henceforward be treated as a breach of the terms of the GP contract.
- Providers of systems used by GPs under long term arrangements permit their customers to **switch from 084 to geographic rate numbers without financial penalty**. This option enables reasonable steps to be taken to cease the use of 084 numbers in all cases.
- This is considered to be an **"equalities issue"**. Erecting a cost barrier to accessing NHS services particularly affects poorer patients, potentially denying them necessary treatment.
- Practices will not be permitted to retain a 084 number as a "premium option" alongside a geographic rate number. **The NHS does not offer a "two tier service"**.
- This move has been made possible by the creation of **NHS England** as a single national body, and by working with the **fair telecoms campaign** to get to grips with the detailed underlying issues. The previous network of autonomous local Primary Care Trusts denied the possibility of such co-ordinated and well informed action.

Empowering patients

When the letter is issued and published, the **fair telecoms campaign** will provide a link on its website (fairtelecoms.org.uk). This will assist patients of the practices in question to know the position and potentially print out **a copy to present to the practice** in support of a complaint.

Further detail and the broader campaign

In June 2013, we published summary totals of how many surgeries and practices were listed then as using 084 numbers. These lists may not be treated as being complete or accurate, however they provide a fair indication of the scale and distribution of the problem. These include **GPs in the rest of the UK**, outside England. (See [Lists of UK GPs using 084 telephone numbers](#).)

We have published a list of **Hospitals which still use 084 numbers, in breach of Directions issued by the Department of Health** in 2009. (See [NHS Hospitals continuing to use 084 phone numbers](#).)

The same issue is also being addressed for other public services by the **Cabinet Office**, following a NAO report. (See [Cabinet Office commits to end the Telephone Tax](#).)

The **Department for Business** will shortly be announcing regulations to apply the same conditions to businesses offering customer enquiry and complaint telephone lines. (See [End All Costly Calls](#).)

