



ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCILS
FOR ENGLAND & WALES

Ms Rosie Winterton
Minister of State for Health
Richmond House
London SW1

4/9/03

Dear Ms Winterton,

I am writing in connection with the development of the new ICASs, which began work on September 1st 2003.

ACHCEW of course welcomes the Government's commitment to establish the ICAS service at this stage, as it will clearly be some time before the new Patients' Forums are functioning to the level required to enable them to take on this important new role. There are however a number of key issues we need to raise with you about the ICAS.

- 1) There are concerns about the new ICAS in some areas, because they have made very little contact with pilot ICAS services (which are now closed) and CHCs (which of course are now running down their capacity). Advocates, complaints workers and service users in many parts of the country have expressed great concern that there has been no hand over from pilot ICAS and CHC to the new services.
- 2) Some of the new services do not appear to have got their organisations ready for their new role and we were receiving reports that as late as last Friday 29th August, CAB offices were referring people with complaints to CHCs.
- 3) Patients with complaints and PALS have been contacting ACHCEW over the past few weeks because they have been unable to find a service to handle complaints. CHCs have stopped complaints work, pilot ICAS services have closed down and in some cases no information has been available about the new service. This has caused considerable distress to people with new complaints and those who had complaints in progress. Some of these complaints concerned the deaths of relatives and the sense of disempowerment caused by the poor handover has been agonising for those concerned.
- 4) Services provided by pilot ICAS and CHCs to complainants have been very highly regarded and have provided many thousands of people with highly expert, professional and effective support. The staff have been very committed to those for whom they have advocated. Many complainants who have used these services feel very angry that the services have been run down and closed and need an absolute assurance that the new services will be able to meet their needs in the long term, with the same high professional standards of CHCs and pilot ICAS.

- 5) The way in which the new service will be monitored is not clear. It is essential for us to be able to keep CHCs and the public informed about the governance arrangements and monitoring of the new system. Clearly it is essential that the new services across the country are of the same high standard as CHCs and that clients know how the service is monitored.
- 6) The new system will need to be well advertised and we hope you have plans for this to happen.

I would be very grateful if you could let me have your response to each other these issues, so that we can reassure CHCs and the public about the future of their services.

I look forward to seeing you on September 10th when apart from Alan Hartley and myself our Vice Chairs Sally Brearley and Donald Roy will join the meeting.

With very best wishes,

Malcolm Alexander
Director