

Signposting services for people with health and care needs: a rapid realist review

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

Signposting points people to information, help or advice that they should find useful. Signposting can be delivered face to face, by phone, or virtually, by technology. This review of research brings together what is already known. We have not collected any data ourselves. The review uses realist synthesis. This method tries to understand the whys and ways (the mechanisms and theories) of how things work (or do not work!). It goes beyond whether something works (is effective). It tries to explain why something might work for some people but not others. For example, why an approach may not be helpful for people with disabilities, why it might work in some places but not others and exactly what leads to what effects (what are the 'key ingredients').

The report answers the following three questions:

1. What do people with health and social care needs require from a signposting service to enable them to believe it is a valuable and useful service?
2. What resources do people providing signposting services require to ensure that they can confidently provide effective signposting services?
3. How can commissioners/funders specify, monitor and evaluate signposting services (generic or specific) to optimise value for money and outcomes for service users? Specifically, do any factors favour funding general over specialist services and vice versa?

The diversity of signposting services within health or across social and community services, including voluntary services, makes them difficult to evaluate and compare. Within each service, different people undertake signposting roles: from general practitioners, practice nurses or receptionist to a standalone signposting role, each for a different purpose and intensity. Only a small number of service users potentially benefit from signposting-only services. Many service users have complex health and social care needs and, therefore, need different support extended over a longer time.

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