

# THE HELPLINES STANDARD



## INFORMATION FOR FUNDERS



### What is the Helplines Standard?

The Helplines Standard is the nationally recognised quality standard defining and accrediting best practice in delivery of non face-to-face information, support and advice across multiple channels such as phone, SMS, email, instant messaging and web forums.

### Who administers the Helplines Standard?

Helplines Partnership is the membership body for organisations providing helpline services in the UK and internationally. Helplines Partnership is committed to raising standards across the sector and we strongly encourage helplines to demonstrate their commitment to quality and best practice for the benefit of their callers, funders, staff and everyone impacted by their service.

We facilitate high quality service delivery for callers by providing a range of services, including training, innovative contact solutions, individually tailored support and information resources through web portals. We raise the profile of the sector through representation of our members' interests and influencing the social policy agenda, giving providers of helpline services a voice to build sustainability and promote excellence, choice and accessibility for everyone.

### What is unique about the Helplines Standard?

The Helplines Standard was developed to specifically accredit helplines, recognising and accommodating the incredible diversity in terms of operation, scope, subject, sector, remit and channels.

The standard assesses the infrastructure of the service as well as the outcomes, to ensure the needs of the service users are being met. It also emphasises the importance of strategic planning and partnerships which are essential for the sustainability of helplines.

### What does the Helplines Standard show funders?

The Helplines Standard was launched in 2000 by the Telephone Helplines Association (THA), one of the organisations which subsequently merged to form Helplines Partnership. The Standard has been continuously developed and refined since, taking into account the latest technology development, regulations and research in the helplines sector.

The Standard is a holistic assessment of the service from processes to outcomes. It helps to ensure effective processes and systems are in place to support delivery of a high quality service. An accredited helpline has clearly demonstrated their commitment to maintaining and providing responsive, professional and high quality support via non face-to-face channels.

The helpline has undergone a thorough assessment and provided robust evidence against criteria which cover 4 discreet areas:

## 1 PLANNING AND RUNNING YOUR HELPLINE

- Mission, aims and strategic planning
- Confidentiality, data protection and risk
- Operations
- Technology and resources

## 2 THE SERVICE YOU PROVIDE

- Service user experience
- Interactions with service users
- Service user experience when they can communicate with each other
- Performance, monitoring and evaluation
- Developing your service

## 3 RECRUITMENT, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- Human Resources
- Recruitment and selection
- Training
- Supervision, support and continuing development

## 4 WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

- Internal (within your organisation)
- External (funders, partners and your sectors)

### How can a funder tell if a helpline currently holds the Helplines Standard?

An organisation that has been accredited will be awarded an accreditation certificate and logo to display on their website and publicity materials. Accredited services are also listed in the 'Find a Helpline' directory with the Helplines Standard logo alongside their listing.



### How long does accreditation last?

The Helplines Standard is awarded for a three year period. In order to guide helplines to maintain and develop throughout this period we give recommendations for improvements in the report when the accreditation is awarded. We contact the helpline 18 months following the award to request an update on the progress of recommendations to review the subsequent actions taken. Renewal after three years is not automatic and requires another full assessment to be undertaken.

### How is the assessment carried out?

The assessment process consists of 9 stages:

1 Workshop	An assessor provides an overview of the criteria and process.
2 Self-Assessment	Detailed self-assessment tool to identify work to be undertaken.
3 Application & Agreement	Provision of evidence template and submission instructions.
4 Evidence Submission	Evidence submitted and thoroughly read and checked by an assessor.
5 Assessment Visit	Observation of helpline workers and time with manager on site.
6 Partnership Contacts	Verification of evidence process with stakeholders, commissioners etc.
7 Sample Contacts	Assessor makes contact via all channels to verify evidence.
8 Assessors Report	Based on evidence submitted and observations against criteria (moderated by another assessor).
9 Final Report	Detailed report with recommendations and commendations.