

# THE HELPLINES STANDARD



INFORMATION  
FOR FUNDERS



## What is the Helplines Standard?

The Helplines Standard is the nationally recognised quality framework which defines and accredits best practice in the delivery of non face-to-face information, support and advice. It applies to multiple channels such as phone, SMS, email, instant messaging and social media.

## Who administers the Helplines Standard?

Helplines Partnership (HLP) is the membership body for organisations that provide helpline services in the UK and internationally. HLP is committed to raising standards across the sector. Helplines are strongly encouraged to adopt a quality standard framework and demonstrate their commitment to quality and best practice for the benefit of their callers, funders, staff and everyone impacted by their service.

HLP facilitates high quality service delivery for callers by providing a range of services, including training, information, individually tailored support and events. HLP raises the profile of the sector through representation of member 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 specifically developed to accredit helplines, recognising and accommodating their diversity in terms of operation, scope, subject, sector, remit and channel choice.

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

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 regularly updated and refined since then, taking into account developments in technology, regulatory changes and research in the helplines sector.

The scope of the Helplines Standard is wide ranging. It helps to ensure effective processes and systems are in place to support delivery of a high quality service. An accredited helpline will have clearly demonstrated its commitment to maintaining and providing responsive, professional and high quality support via non face-to-face channels.

The Helplines Standard is structured in three sections:

### PLANNING & RUNNING YOUR HELPLINE

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

### THE SERVICE YOU PROVIDE

- ⇒ Service user experience
- ⇒ Interactions with service users
- ⇒ Social media & online services
- ⇒ Performance, monitoring & development
- ⇒ Developing your service

### RECRUITMENT, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- ⇒ Human Resources
- ⇒ Recruitment & selection
- ⇒ Training
- ⇒ Supervision, support & continuing development

### How does a funder know if a helpline is Helplines Standard accredited?

A helpline that has been satisfactorily assessed will be awarded an accreditation certificate and logo to display on its website and publicity materials. Accredited services are also listed in the 'Find a Helpline' directory on [www.helplines.org](http://www.helplines.org) and show the Helplines Standard logo.



### What is the duration of the accreditation?

The Helplines Standard is awarded for a three year period. To support continuous improvement HLP provides recommendations within the accreditation report. The helpline produces an interim report after 18 months covering action taken as a result of findings or other changes. A senior representative of the helplines such as the Chief Executive or Chair of Trustees also certifies that the observed standards are being maintained. After three years a further assessment is required to maintain accredited status.

### How is the assessment carried out?

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