



The Health Service Safety Investigations Body

“There is a need for a new, permanent, simplified, functioning, trusted system for swift and effective local clinical incident investigation conducted by trained staff, so that facts and evidence are established early, without the need to find blame, and regardless of whether a complaint has been raised.”

*Investigating Clinical Incidents in the NHS, Public Administration Select Committee,
24 March 2015*

This fact sheet explains more about how the new independent Health Service Safety Investigations Body (HSSIB) will function.

Background

1. Under proposals set out in the Draft Health Service Safety Investigations Bill, a new independent body will conduct major safety investigations into the most serious risks to NHS patients in England.
2. Investigations undertaken by the Health Service Safety Investigations Body (HSSIB) will use ‘safe space’, to encourage patients, families, NHS staff and other participants to contribute to safety investigations fully and candidly, for the purposes of learning when things go wrong.
3. The HSSIB will not seek to apportion blame or hold individuals to account and investigators will not disclose information, except in certain circumstances, unless the High Court orders them to do so.

How big will the HSSIB be?

4. It is expected that the HSSIB will have a dedicated team of around 30 people with expertise in the NHS, safety-critical systems investigations, human factors disciplines and other professional investigative areas.
5. However, other subject matter experts may be called upon to join the team, as required.
6. The HSSIB team will investigate up to 30 serious safety incidents a year in the NHS in England.

What will the HSSIB’s budget be?

7. The HSSIB will have an annual budget of £3.8 million. This contrasts with the cost of large scale national investigations and inquiries into patient safety incidents, which has amounted to £37 million in recent years.

Will the HSSIB be truly independent?

8. The HSSIB will be established as a new independent arm's-length body (ALB) similar to investigation bodies in the aviation and rail sectors. The HSSIB will determine its own investigation criteria, processes and recommendations.
9. The HSSIB will operate independently but will be accountable to the Secretary of State for Health, similar to other independent ALBs in the health sector.
10. The aim is to ensure that the NHS can learn from patient safety incidents and for this learning to be shared across the NHS in order to provide safer services. HSSIB investigations will not seek to apportion blame or liability.
11. The HSSIB will be an exemplar providing guidance on best practice and will work with NHS trusts and foundation trusts to develop standards which will improve patient safety across the NHS.

How will the HSSIB impact upon the independent sector?

12. The HSSIB will have powers to investigate any provider of NHS-commissioned services in England; and to request anyone to participate in its investigations.

What will happen to the current Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch?

13. The Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch (the Investigation Branch) started operations in April 2017 as a new investigative body under the umbrella body, NHS Improvement, following recommendations from the Public Administration Select Committee in

March 2015, and wider stakeholder engagement.

14. The Investigation Branch became operational in April 2017. Its aim is to exemplify and deliver independent, expert-led and high-quality investigations which focus on lessons which NHS trusts can learn from, in order to reduce harm to patients.
15. It will also assist local investigations by setting standards and offering guidance to NHS organisations in respect of their own investigations.
16. The new body, the HSSIB, will be completely independent; have statutory powers of investigation; powers of entry and inspection; and wider powers to recommend and effect change. Once fully operational, the HSSIB will take forward the work of the Investigation Branch.
17. Subject to the will of Parliament, the HSSIB could be operational by 2019.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- *Investigating Clinical Incidents in the NHS*, Public Administration Select Committee, 24 March 2015
<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmpublicadm/886/886.pdf>
- *Complaints and Raising Concerns*, Health Committee, 13 January 2015
<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmhealth/350/350.pdf>