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**Sexual assault referral centres (SARCs)**

Campaign toolkit

In support of activity for 2025

**This communications toolkit contains information to help you promote the campaign in your area. It includes key messages and suggested copy in support of campaign activity.**

The [Campaign resource centre](https://campaignresources.dhsc.gov.uk/campaigns/turn-to-us-we-are-here-sexual-assault-referral-centres/#:~:text=This%20NHS%20campaign%20aims%20to,experiencing%20sexual%20assault%20or%20abuse.) also hosts the campaign materials.

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## Campaign overview

On 3 February 2025, the NHS in England will launch a national campaign to raise awareness of sexual assault referral centres (SARCs), which marks the beginning of [Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence Awareness Week 2025](https://sexualabuseandsexualviolenceawarenessweek.org/) (3-9 February 2025). The campaign will reuse some previous assets, as well as introducing new material for colleagues to use.

SARCs provide free, specialist care and support to anyone who has been raped, sexually assaulted or abused, at any time in their life. This includes crisis care, medical and forensic examinations, emergency contraception and testing for sexually transmitted infections. They can also arrange access to an independent sexual violence advisor, as well as referrals to mental health services and emotional and psychological support, such as counselling.

SARCs are available 24/7 across England for people of all ages, whatever their sex, sexual orientation or gender identity. Many sexual assault and abuse survivors, however, do not know where to go or who to turn to for help and support. This campaign is here to help promote the important work they do.

Whilst these services are co-commissioned by NHS England and police and crime commissioners, individuals can get help from a SARC without having to talk to the police or report what happened to them.

The campaign will run in England for two weeks supported by social / media activity and stakeholder engagement.

A range of digital resources are available on the [campaign resource centre](https://campaignresources.dhsc.gov.uk/campaigns/turn-to-us-we-are-here-sexual-assault-referral-centres/#:~:text=This%20NHS%20campaign%20aims%20to,experiencing%20sexual%20assault%20or%20abuse.), including video content, posters, and social media assets. New assets for the 2025 campaign include SARC staff posters and supporting social media creative, as well as a new SARC animation aimed at young people and those supporting them.

### Campaign objectives

The strategic aim of the campaign is to increase use of SARCs by people who need them and general awareness among the wider public.

The communications objectives of the campaign are:

1. **Awareness:** Increase awareness of SARCs amongst the target audience
2. **Knowledge:** Increase the target audience’s knowledge of the range and services of SARCs and how to access them
3. **Behavioural intent:** Increase the percentage of the target audience who claim they would access a SARC if they had a need to
4. **Outcome:** Increase the number of individuals supported through a SARC

### Target audience

The campaign will target the following groups, who are at greater risk of sexual assault and abuse:

* Women from ethnically diverse backgrounds aged 18-33
* Men aged 18-25
* LGBT+ people aged 18-33
* University students

## Key messages

**Primary messages**

* Sexual assault and abuse can happen to anyone. It may be a single event or happen repeatedly.
* Sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) provide free, specialist care and support to anyone who has been raped, sexually assaulted or abused, at any time in their life.
* Available 24/7 across England, SARCs support people of all ages, whatever your sex, sexual orientation or gender identity.
* To get help from a SARC, you can call your nearest centre.
* If you do not want to involve the police or report what happened, you can still get help from a SARC.
* The SARC team will make sure that you understand what is happening and help you get the support you choose. They will help you think about your options and never tell you what to do.
* They will listen to you and believe you and you will be cared for in a place where you are safe.
* If you have been raped, sexually assaulted or abused and don't know where to turn, turn to us. We are here.

**Secondary messages**

* SARCs offer a range of services, including crisis care, medical and forensic medical examinations, emergency contraception and testing for sexually transmitted infections. They can also arrange access to an independent sexual violence advisor, as well as referrals to mental health services and emotional and psychological support, such as counselling.
* If you have been recently raped, sexually assaulted or abused, you will be offered a forensic medical examination to collect evidence. This is where a doctor or nurse collects evidence, including swabs, from your body and clothes.
* It is your choice whether you have a forensic medical examination and if you are unsure, the evidence can be taken and then safely stored at the SARC, giving you time to decide what to do.
* You may feel confused about what has happened, as well as overwhelmed, emotional or numb. You may also feel alone, angry, ashamed or frightened – these thoughts and feelings are common, and SARCs can help you get support to manage them.

### Call to action

* Visit [nhs.uk/SARCs](http://www.nhs.uk/sarcs) to find your nearest sexual assault referral centre.

## Long and short copy

Below are examples of long and short copy that can be used in communication about the SARCs campaign. Please use the copy for any newsletters, emails or other materials, including websites and e-bulletins.

### Long copy – 207 words

**NHS launches campaign to support survivors of sexual assault and abuse**

The NHS has launched a campaign to raise awareness of sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) - specialist services that offer free care and support to anyone who has been raped, sexually assaulted or abused at any time in their life.

SARCs are available 24/7 across England, however, many sexual assault and abuse survivors do not know where to go or who to turn to for help. We also know that some people are put off seeking help due to thinking they need to speak to the police. Help is available from a SARC without having to talk to the police or report what happened.

The SARC team will make sure that anyone visiting their service understands their options and gets the support they choose in a place where they are safe. This could include crisis care, medical and forensic medical examinations, emergency contraception and testing for sexually transmitted infections. They can also arrange access to an independent sexual violence advisor, as well as referrals to mental health services and emotional and psychological support, such as counselling.

If you have been raped, sexually assaulted or abused and don't know where to turn, search ‘sexual assault referral centres’ for more information or visit [www.nhs.uk/SARCs](https://www.nhs.uk/SARCs) to find your nearest centre.

### Short copy – 162 words

**NHS launches campaign to support survivors of sexual assault and abuse**

The NHS has launched a campaign to raise awareness of sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) - specialist services that offer free care and support to anyone who has been raped, sexually assaulted or abused at any time in their life.

SARCs are available 24/7 across England, however, many sexual assault and abuse survivors do not know where to go or who to turn to for help. We also know that some people are put off seeking help due to thinking they need to speak to the police.

Help is available from a SARC without having to talk to the police or report what happened. The SARC team will make sure that anyone visiting their service understands their options and gets the support they choose in a place where they are safe.

If you have been raped, sexually assaulted or abused and don't know where to turn, search ‘sexual assault referral centres’ for more information or visit [www.nhs.uk/SARCs](https://www.nhs.uk/SARCs) to find your nearest centre.

## Social media support

Please use the suggested posts below on your social media channels in support of the campaign. Where possible, please use the campaign hashtag **#SARCs** and call to action.

NHS/SARCs channels:

**X**

You can turn to us 24/7 for medical, emotional or practical support at your nearest sexual assault referral centre. Search SARC or visit [NHS.uk/SARCs](http://www.nhs.uk/sarcs) for more information and to find your nearest centre. We are here. #SARCs

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Sexual assault referral centres provide 24/7 specialist care and support to anyone who has been raped, sexually assaulted or abused at any time in their life. You can turn to us for help – we are here for you. Visit [NHS.uk/SARCs](http://www.nhs.uk/sarcs) to find your nearest centre. #SARCs

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More than half of people do not seek help after being raped or sexually assaulted. The NHS want to make it clear: we are here, turn to us. SARCs provide a safe space and dedicated care for anyone who has been raped, sexually assaulted or abused [NHS.uk/SARCs](http://www.nhs.uk/sarcs) #SARCs

**Facebook**

Sexual assault or abuse can happen to anyone at any time - it may be a single event or happen repeatedly. But we are here, and you can turn to us 24/7 for medical, emotional or practical support at your nearest sexual assault referral centre. Search SARC or visit [NHS.uk/SARCs](http://www.nhs.uk/sarcs) for more information and to find your nearest centre. #SARCs

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**Instagram**

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Stakeholder channels

**X**

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**Facebook**

Sexual assault or abuse can happen to anyone at any time. It may be a one-off event or happen repeatedly. Today, the NHS are making it clear that they are here, and you can turn to them 24/7 for specialist care and support at your nearest sexual assault referral centre. Search SARC or visit [NHS.uk/SARCs](http://www.nhs.uk/sarcs) for more information and to find your nearest centre. #SARCs

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More than half of people do not come forward for help after sexual assault or abuse. The NHS want to make it clear: they are here for you and you can turn to them for specialist help. SARCs provide a safe space and dedicated care for anyone who has been raped, sexually assaulted or abused. [NHS.uk/SARCs](http://www.nhs.uk/sarcs) #SARCs

**Instagram**

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## Appendix 1 – Facts and stats

* Around one in ten SARC service users are male and 90% are female.
* In the year ending 2023, over 225, 000 people suffered serious sexual assault, such as rape or assault by penetration. ([Sexual offences in England and Wales overview - Office for National Statistics](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/sexualoffencesinenglandandwalesoverview/march2022))
* Younger people and students (because of their age) are the demographics most likely to experience rape or sexual assault.

### Attitudinal data from January 2022

* NHS England commissioned independent survey provider Censuswide to carry out a survey with over 4,000 people in England between 4 January and 18 January 2022. Data was weighted to be nationally representative of people in England using ONS figures, for age, sex and region.
* Respondents’ self-identified as being victims of sexual assault or abuse, by answering the question ‘Have you ever been sexually assaulted or abused?’. A description of sexual assault and abuse was given to help inform people’s answer.

Headline stats

* 56% of people who’ve been sexually assaulted or abused have not sought help.
* 44% of people don’t know where to get help after being sexually assaulted.
* 72% of people are unaware of NHS specialist sexual assault services.
* 46% of people don’t seek help for sexual assault due to fear of not being believed.

**What is rape and sexual assault?**

* The legal definition of rape is when a person intentionally penetrates another's vagina, anus or mouth with a penis, without the other person's consent.
* Assault by penetration is when a person penetrates another person's vagina or anus with any part of the body other than a penis, or by using an object, without the person's consent.
* The overall definition of sexual or indecent assault is an act of physical, psychological and emotional violation in the form of a sexual act, inflicted on someone without their consent. It can involve forcing or manipulating someone to witness or participate in any sexual acts.
* Not all cases of sexual assault involve violence, cause physical injury or leave visible marks.
* Further information is available [here.](https://www.met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/rsa/rape-and-sexual-assault/what-is-rape-and-sexual-assault/)

### Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence Awareness Week

* [Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence Awareness Week](http://www.sexualabuseandsexualviolenceawarenessweek.org) is the UK’s national week to raise awareness of sexual abuse and violence and provide an opportunity for organisations and individuals to engage in dialogue on this subject. It takes place in the first full week of February, which for 2025 is 3-9 of February.
* This week is an opportunity for anyone that wants to use their voice to join a conversation with thousands of others. Together we can amplify the voices that should be heard and spotlight support services and engage beyond our sector in the discussion.