

**ACOD response to Ofcom's consultation on:
A Three-digit Number for Non-Emergency Healthcare Services**

1. ACOD, Ofcom's Advisory Committee for Older and Disabled People, welcome the opportunity to respond to the proposal to create a new 111 non-emergency healthcare phone number.
2. We believe that such a proposal, if enacted, would provide all citizens and consumers - and not just older and disabled people - with a new single memorable phone number, which in turn will help both Ofcom and the Department of Health to make it easier for patients to access non-emergency healthcare in their local area.
3. Its introduction will require considerable publicity so that citizens understand when they should use this number and not others such as 999; many of which have been in the public domain for a long time.
4. ACOD feels that a service such as NHS Direct would benefit from being available via 111, and that this memorable shortcut would be of benefit to older and disabled people, groups who arguably use - or can benefit from - such services more often than most demographics.
5. We do not believe that such a service should be run at a profit and we would therefore encourage the Department of Health to charge calls at cost.
6. In addition, we would also encourage mobile telecoms providers to consider consumers to be able to access this service as part of their free call allowances. At present, when using 0845 numbers, this typically does not happen and we believe that this penalises all groups, in particular older and disabled people, many of whom are on lower incomes and thus unable to afford additional premium or normal call charges. If this is not the case, then they certainly think twice before using a service which will cost them money. We believe that this should not need to be a consideration.
7. Finally, we would also encourage the Department of Health to consider how the service can support the needs of Older and Disabled people, so that services are available for consumers using both existing technologies such as TypeTalk, as well as emerging technologies like VoIP or video relay. As these new technologies come on stream it is important to ensure that any new non-emergency healthcare phone number is compatible with these services so that their users can also benefit from this service.
8. This new number provides the opportunity to ensure equality of access, and experience, for all consumers and we hope that this opportunity will be realised.

Mike Whitlam CBE
Chair, ACOD
September 2009