END OF LIFE

Palliative care at home: who does what, and who to call

How GPs, district nurses, hospices and fast-track NHS funding fit together in London, with south-east London contacts and what a care agency adds.

By the JNP Sidona team · How we write our guides · 24 November 2026 · 11 min read

Palliative care at home in London is a team effort, and the NHS and hospice parts are free: the GP has overall responsibility, district nurses visit, and a hospice or specialist palliative care team advises on pain and symptoms. If the NHS fast-tracks your relative for continuing healthcare, it pays for the day-to-day care too. Otherwise the council or the family arranges that care, often through a home care agency that helps with washing, dressing, meals and company, visiting or living in.

KEY POINTS

- Start with the GP. Ask them to refer your relative to the district nurses and the local specialist palliative care team, and to put them on the practice's palliative care register.
- Get every out-of-hours number written down this week: the district nursing service, NHS 111 and, once your relative is under a hospice, its 24-hour line. Use 999 in an emergency.
- If your relative is deteriorating quickly, ask the GP, district nurse or hospice nurse about the Fast Track Pathway Tool for NHS continuing healthcare. It is free care, and the NHS says it is usually in place within 48 hours.
- Ask a doctor or nurse for form SR1. It lets your relative claim quickly under the special rules: Attendance Allowance at the higher rate, or, if under State Pension age, the higher daily living part of PIP, plus Universal Credit or Employment and

Support Allowance if eligible. The main carer may be able to claim Carer's Allowance.

- Ask for "just in case" medicines to be prescribed early, so symptoms can be treated at home at night or at the weekend.
- Ask about a Universal Care Plan, London's shared record of your relative's wishes. The NHS says (https://www.nwlondonicb.nhs.uk/professionals/universal-care-plan) the London Ambulance Service, NHS 111 and out-of-hours GPs can see it.

What is palliative care at home?

Palliative care aims to make someone with an incurable illness as comfortable as possible. The NHS describes it (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/end-of-life-care/what-it-involves-and-when-it-starts/) as managing pain and distressing symptoms, along with emotional, social and spiritual support for the person and their family.

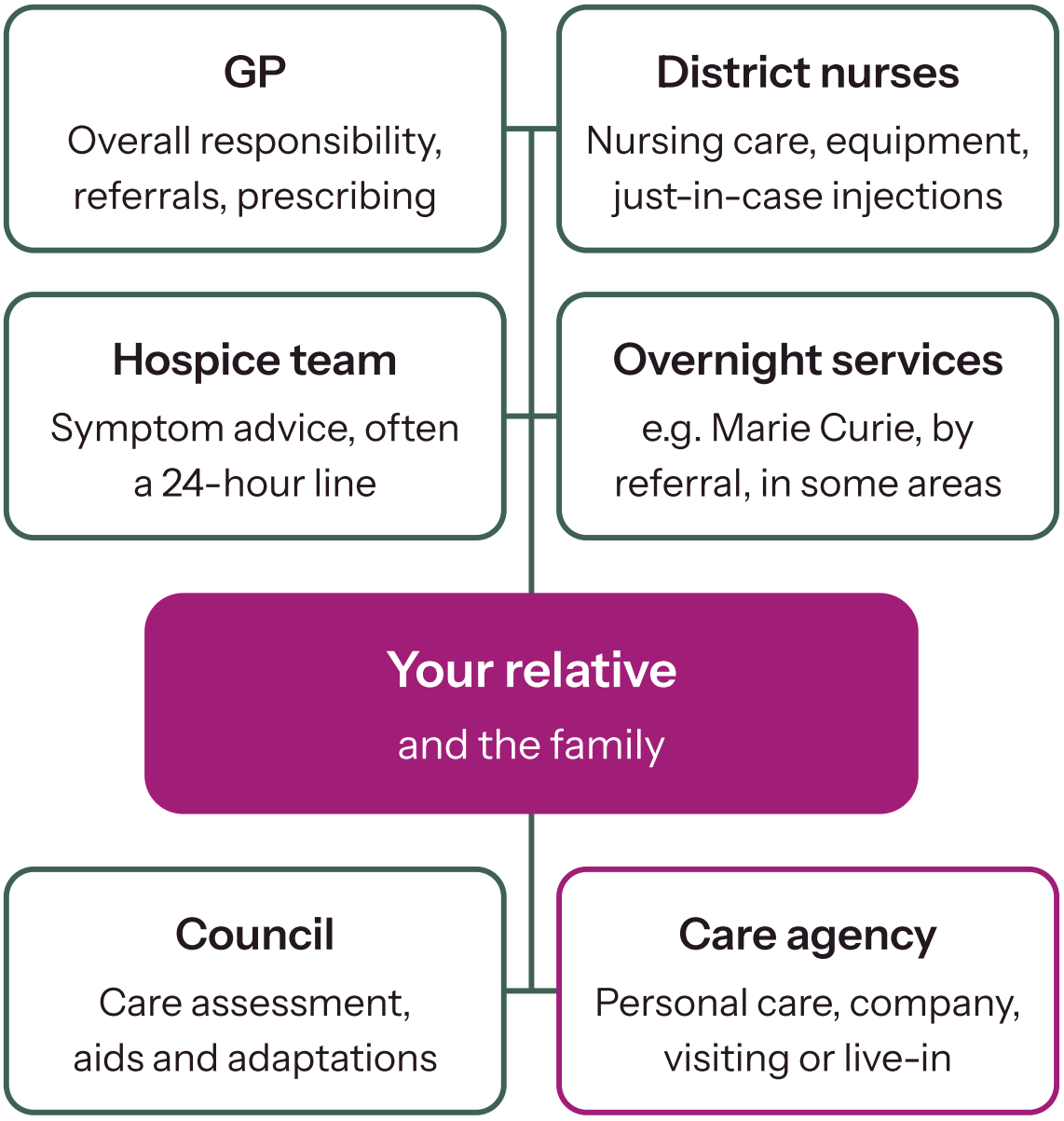
It is not only for the last days. The NHS says palliative care "is available when you first learn you have a life-limiting (terminal) illness", and it can run alongside other treatment. End of life care is the part of palliative care for people who are likely to die within the next 12 months, though the NHS is clear that this timing is not always predictable.

It is not only for cancer either. South East London's NHS integrated care board (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-and-support/peolc/) lists chronic lung disease, heart failure, dementia and chronic kidney disease as examples of illnesses where palliative care can help.

At home, it means the same specialist knowledge comes to your relative, so they can stay in their own bed, with their own things around them, for as long as that is safe and what they want.

Who does what in London?

Several services are involved, and families are often unsure who to ring for what. This is how the pieces fit together.



The team around your relative. The GP coordinates the NHS side; a care agency adds hands-on daily care, paid for by the NHS fast track, the council or the family.

The GP

If your relative is cared for at home, the NHS says (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/end-of-life-care/what-it-involves-and-when-it-starts/) "your GP has overall responsibility for your care". The GP makes the referrals, prescribes, and is usually the person who starts the conversation about where your relative wants to be cared for. Ask whether your relative is on the practice's palliative care register, so the whole practice knows.

District nurses

District nurses (also called community nurses) visit at home. The NHS says (https://www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/end-of-life-care/where-you-can-have-care/care-at-home/) "your GP can arrange for community nurses to come to your home and provide nursing care for you there". Marie Curie says (https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/information/symptoms/just-in-case-medication) the district nurse usually gives "just in case" injections, and that the district nurse (https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/information/planning-ahead/getting-disability-equipment), community palliative care team or GP may be able to refer your relative for a hospital bed.

Hours differ by borough. In Greenwich and Bexley, for example, Oxleas runs a district nursing day service from 8am to 11pm, and Bexley also has a night service. In Bromley, the community nursing service runs 24 hours a day. Ask your relative's team what happens after their last visit of the day.

The hospice or specialist palliative care team

Specialist palliative care nurses and doctors often work from a local hospice or an NHS community team. They advise on pain, breathlessness, sickness and agitation, visit or see people in clinic, and support the family. South East London's NHS pages (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-and-support/peolc/) state plainly that "hospice care is free". Being "under the hospice" does not mean moving into it. The NHS borough pages (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-and-support/peolc/boroughs/lewisham/) say the specialist team can see your relative at home or at clinic appointments, and that a stay in the hospice is mainly for symptoms or end of life care that cannot be managed at home. A health professional has to refer for a hospice stay.

Ask the GP, district nurse or hospital team to refer your relative. Once your relative is under the hospice, you can ring its line day or night: the Community Hospice (https://www.communityhospice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us-today/) gives its 24-hour number for patients, and St Christopher's (https://www.stchristophers.org.uk/contact) says its main number takes urgent out-of-hours enquiries. If your relative is not yet known to a hospice, ring NHS 111 out of hours and ask the GP to refer the next day. If your relative is in hospital, ask the ward to involve the hospital palliative care team before discharge.

Overnight help

Nights are often the hardest part. Marie Curie says (https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/information/getting-care/nursing-and-personal-care) that in some areas its nurses and healthcare assistants "can provide free care overnight", usually in the last weeks or days of life, and that "your GP or district nurse must refer you". All six south-east London borough pages list Marie Curie planned overnight care from 10pm to 7am, and the Lewisham (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-and-support/peolc/boroughs/lewisham/), Bromley (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-and-support/peolc/boroughs/bromley/) and Greenwich (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-

and-support/peolc/boroughs/greenwich/) pages also list an unplanned overnight service from 9pm to 8am. In Southwark and Lambeth, Guy's and St Thomas' runs Pal@home, an overnight nursing service from 8pm to 8am for eligible patients.

The council

Your relative's borough council can carry out a care needs assessment and arrange or fund care at home, subject to a financial assessment. It can also provide equipment and adaptations. Under the charging regulations (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/2672/regulation/3), councils in England must not charge for community equipment: aids, and minor adaptations costing £1,000 or less. Marie Curie says (https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/information/planning-ahead/getting-disability-equipment) the NHS can also lend commodes, bed pans and pressure-relieving mattresses.

A home care agency

None of the NHS services above usually provides the everyday hands-on care: help to wash, dress, use the toilet, eat and drink, turn in bed, and the hours of simply being there. Overnight services such as Marie Curie's cover some nights near the end, not every day. The council can arrange daily care after an assessment, or a CQC-registered home care agency can provide it directly. Marie Curie's guidance (https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/information/getting-care/nursing-and-personal-care) describes how it is paid for: the council may fund personal care after a needs and financial assessment, NHS continuing healthcare may pay for it, or the family can arrange and pay for it privately.

Care workers work alongside the nurses, not in place of them. The care plan should say exactly what carers do, what the district nurse does, and who carers ring if something changes.

South-east London services, and how to find yours elsewhere

The NHS in south-east London says (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-and-support/peolc/) most care is organised by where your relative's GP is, which is usually the borough they live in. South East London's integrated care board publishes a page for each borough listing its palliative and end of life services. These are the main contacts, as published on 9 October 2026.

Specialist palliative care and overnight services in six south-east London boroughs (NHS South East London, checked 9 October 2026)

Borough	Specialist palliative care at home	Other services listed

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Lewisham (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-and-support/peolc/boroughs/lewisham/)	St Christopher's Hospice, 020 8768 4500, telephone advice 24 hours	Marie Curie planned and unplanned overnight care; district nursing evening service (Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust, for professionals to refer)
Southwark (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-and-support/peolc/boroughs/southwark/)	St Christopher's Hospice, 020 8768 4500, telephone advice 24 hours	Pal@home overnight nursing, 8pm to 8am; Marie Curie planned overnight care
Lambeth (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-and-support/peolc/boroughs/lambeth/)	St Christopher's Hospice, 020 8768 4500, telephone advice 24 hours	Royal Trinity Hospice inpatient beds; Pal@home overnight nursing; Marie Curie planned overnight care
Bromley (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-and-support/peolc/boroughs/bromley/)	St Christopher's Hospice, 020 8768 4500, telephone advice 24 hours	Bromley Healthcare community nursing, 24 hours, 0300 330 5777; Marie Curie planned and unplanned overnight care
Greenwich (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-and-support/peolc/boroughs/greenwich/)	The Community Hospice (Greenwich & Bexley Community Hospice), 020 8320 5837, telephone advice 24 hours	Oxleas district nursing, 8am to 11pm, 020 3045 5159; Marie Curie planned and unplanned overnight care
Bexley (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-and-s	The Community Hospice (Greenwich & Bexley Community Hospice),	Oxleas district nursing day and night services; Marie Curie planned overnight care

Borough	Specialist palliative care at home	Other services listed
upport/peolc/boroughs/bexley/)	020 8320 5837, telephone advice 24 hours	

Most overnight and specialist services need a referral from the GP, district nurse or palliative care team. If you are unsure what help you need, Marie Curie's free Support Line is 0800 090 2309.

How to find your local services elsewhere in London

Outside south-east London, the services have different names, hours and phone lines. London has four NHS integrated care boards, and your relative's GP practice decides which one plans their care:

- **NHS West and North London** (https://www.westandnorthlondon.icb.nhs.uk/): Barnet, Brent, Camden, Ealing, Enfield, Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringey, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster.
- **NHS North East London** (https://northeastlondon.icb.nhs.uk/): Barking and Dagenham, the City of London, Hackney, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest.
- **NHS South West London** (https://www.southwestlondon.icb.nhs.uk/): Croydon, Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth.
- **NHS South East London** (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-and-support/peolc/): Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark, as in the table above.

To find the hospice that covers your relative's address, put their postcode into the Hospice UK hospice care finder (https://www.hospiceuk.org/hospice-care-finder). Then ask the GP practice which hospice or community palliative care team they refer to, because a hospice nearby may not cover your relative's street.

Services are changing too. In north west London, community specialist palliative care is run by hospices in some boroughs and by NHS community trusts in others: the NHS July 2026 update (https://www.westandnorthlondon.icb.nhs.uk/news-and-updates/news/adult-community-specialist-palliative-care-north-west-london-update-july-2026) names Meadow House Hospice for Hounslow and Ealing and Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust for Harrow. In that update the NHS said it was planning a single 24/7 specialist advice line for north west London, reached through NHS 111, with October 2026 as the target date. When we last checked, on 4 November 2026, we could not find an NHS announcement that it had started. Its programme page (https://www.westand

northlondon.icb.nhs.uk/our-work/programmes/compassionate-care-all-adult-community-specialist-palliative-care-services-north-west-london) expects full roll-out of the changes to run to October 2027. Until the line is confirmed, use the number your relative's team gave you, or NHS 111 out of hours, and ask the GP or district nurse whether the new line is running.

How do you arrange palliative care at home?

1. **Talk to the GP.** Ask for referrals to the district nurses and the specialist palliative care team. Ask whether your relative is on the palliative care register.
2. **Ask about fast-track funding.** If your relative is getting worse quickly, ask the GP, district nurse or hospice nurse to consider the Fast Track Pathway Tool. Our guide to fast-track continuing healthcare explains exactly what to say.
3. **Ask for form SR1.** A doctor or other medical professional completes it. It supports a claim under the special rules for people nearing the end of life.
4. **Ask for just-in-case medicines.** These are prescribed in advance and kept at home in case of sudden pain, sickness, breathlessness or agitation.
5. **Ask for a Universal Care Plan.** A doctor or nurse creates it with your relative, recording what matters to them and their wishes about care. The NHS says (https://www.nwlondonicb.nhs.uk/professionals/universal-care-plan) that once it is saved, the London Ambulance Service, NHS 111 and out-of-hours GPs can see it. If your relative has decided they do not want CPR (resuscitation), ask the doctor how that decision is recorded. The NHS says (https://www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/end-of-life-care/planning-ahead/advance-decision-to-refuse-treatment/) a do not attempt CPR (DNACPR) decision goes in the medical records, usually on a form health professionals recognise, and that it helps to tell family and carers about it.
6. **Sort the equipment.** Ask the district nurse about a hospital bed, pressure mattress and commode, and whether an occupational therapist should visit.
7. **Arrange the daily care.** Ask the council for an assessment, or contact a CQC-registered agency directly if you are paying privately or want to choose who provides the care.
8. **Write down the numbers.** Pin the hospice line, district nurses, GP, NHS 111 and the care agency next to the phone.

If symptoms are not controlled, do not wait for the next planned visit. Ring the district nurse or, if your relative is under the hospice, the hospice line, or NHS 111 out of hours. Call 999 in an emergency. If your relative has a DNACPR decision, the NHS says (https://w

ww.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/end-of-life-care/planning-ahead/advance-decision-to-refuse-treatment/) it helps to make sure family and carers know about it. Our guide to dying at home explains what to do in the final days.

Who pays for palliative care at home?

It depends on which part of the care you mean.

- **NHS and hospice care is usually free.** Marie Curie says (https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/information/getting-care/nursing-and-personal-care) care from the GP, district nurse or hospice teams "is usually free", and South East London's NHS pages (https://www.selondonics.org/our-residents/your-health/care-and-support/peolc/) say "hospice care is free".
- **Fast-track continuing healthcare** is "free health and social care arranged and funded solely by the NHS". The NHS says (https://www.nhs.uk/social-care-and-support/money-work-and-benefits/nhs-continuing-healthcare/) that if your health is deteriorating quickly and you are nearing the end of life, you should be considered for it, and the package should be in place "usually within 48 hours". The fast-track guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-continuing-healthcare-fast-track-pathway-tool/fast-track-pathway-tool-for-nhs-continuing-healthcare-guidance) says the test is whether your relative has "a rapidly deteriorating condition" that "may be entering a terminal phase", so ask early.
- **Council-funded care** follows a needs assessment and a means test. The council may pay all, part or none of the cost. Our paying for care in London (/paying-for-care-london) page explains the rules.
- **Paying privately** is always an option, and some families top up NHS or council care with extra hours.

Benefits that help with the cost

Under the special rules (https://www.gov.uk/terminal-illness-benefits), someone who has been told they might have 12 months or less to live can get certain benefits more quickly and at a higher rate. For people over State Pension age, that means Attendance Allowance at the higher rate of £114.60 a week (https://www.gov.uk/attendance-allowance/claiming-end-of-life) in 2026/27. People under State Pension age claim Personal Independence Payment: under the special rules, gov.uk says (https://www.gov.uk/pip/claiming-end-of-life) they get the higher daily living part, and whether they also get the mobility part depends on their needs. The same special rules also cover Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance (https://www.gov.uk/terminal-illness-benefits) for people under State Pension age, if your relative is eligible, and one SR1 form covers every benefit claimed. If you spend at least 35 hours a week caring and earn £204 or less a week after deductions, you may be able to claim Carer's Allowance (https://www.gov.uk/carers-allowance/eligibility)

once your relative gets Attendance Allowance or the daily living part of PIP. If you are the main carer, our guide to the carer's assessment (/blog/carers-assessment-guide) explains how to ask the council for support for yourself.

What can a home care agency add?

The NHS team visits; an agency can be there for longer. In practice, that can mean:

- help with washing, dressing, mouth care, the toilet and changing position, done gently and at your relative's pace
- preparing small meals and drinks, and helping your relative eat when they want to
- support with medicines as set out in the care plan, while injections stay with the district nurses
- noticing changes and passing them to the district nurse or hospice team
- sitting with your relative so you can sleep, shower, see the children or simply leave the house
- live-in care (/live-in-care-london), where a carer moves in, for families who want someone in the house through the day

Before you choose an agency, ask how its carers work with district nurses, who carers ring when your relative's condition changes, and how quickly the care plan is updated as needs change. Check the agency's registration on the CQC website.

Questions families ask

Can my relative have palliative care at home if they live alone?

Can we change our minds and go into a hospice?

Can family give the just-in-case medicines?

What happens if my relative's needs change quickly?

How we can help

We provide palliative care at home in London (/palliative-care-london) from our office on Lewisham High Street, working alongside your relative's GP, district nurses and hospice team. Visiting care is for Lewisham, nearby south-east London and parts of central and east London; live-in care is available across London. A live-in carer sleeps at night, and we do not currently provide waking night care, so for nights when someone needs to be awake and working, ask the district nurse about the overnight services above. We are a small, owner-managed agency, registered with the CQC in October 2023 and not yet inspected or rated.

Jackie, our registered manager, will visit for a free assessment and write a care plan with you, then give you a quote. If your relative is being fast-tracked, you can ask the integrated care board whether we can provide the care. Visiting care depends on carer availability in your area, so call early and we will tell you honestly what we can staff. You can check the areas we serve (/areas-we-serve).

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Talk to Jackie about care at home: ask for a call back (#callback) or call 07446 010486 (tel:+447446010486).

About this guide

Written by the JNP Sidona team using the official sources listed above, which we checked on 9 October 2026. Rules, rates and thresholds change, usually each April, so always confirm the current position with the source or your council. This guide is general information, not medical, legal or financial advice. If you spot something out of date, email info@jnpsidonasupportservices.co.uk (mailto:info@jnpsidonasupportservices.co.uk) and we will correct it. Read how we write and review our guides (/how-we-write-our-guides).