Increasing uptake of NHS Health Checks – A behavioural insights approach to invitation letters and text messages

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Southwark have a centralised system that sends invites on a monthly basis. Trial ran between November 2013 and December 2014.

N=12,234
Randomised to receive one of 4 letters

1. Original letter as control
2. Simplified Open invite Tear off slip
3. Simplified Closed invite Tear off slip
4. Simplified Social norms Testimonials
Dear <to be inserted by mail merge>

Your NHS Health Check is now due.

Please record the date and time of your appointment and stick it on your fridge.

Name: <to be inserted by mail merge>

GP practice: <to be inserted by mail merge>

I am going to my NHS Health Check on __/__/13 at ____ am/pm

Practice address: <to be inserted by mail merge>
Dear <to be inserted by mail merge>

**Your NHS Health Check is due in August.**

Please call <to be inserted by mail merge> as soon as possible to make sure you get your appointment at your GP's surgery and record this on the tear off slip below.

You can also have your health check at your local pharmacy listed in the enclosed leaflet. To book, please ring 0203 4039 9999 and quote 'NHS Health Check'.

Please record the date and time of your appointment and stick it on your fridge.

Name: <to be inserted by mail merge>

GP practice: <to be inserted by mail merge>

I am going to my NHS Health Check on __/__/13 at ____am/pm

Practice address: <to be inserted by mail merge>
Dear [to be inserted by mail merge]

Your NHS Health Check is now due.

In Southwark, thousands of people like you have attended their health check and benefited from personalised health advice.

Please call [to be inserted by mail merge] to book your appointment at your GP’s surgery.

You can also have your health check at your local pharmacy.

How an NHS Health Check helped me

“My cholesterol was a little high, but it got peace of mind regarding my state of health generally. Since the health check, I’ve cut down on alcohol and made some small changes to my diet.”

Mr RK, Southwark

“I already knew I was overweight, but having a health check was a wake-up call which helped me understand the risks of developing diabetes and heart disease. I’ve changed my eating habits, eating smaller portions, less sugar and oily food, and more salad and vegetables. I exercise a lot more - I’ve joined an aerobics class and really enjoy going for brisk walks. I’ve already lost nearly half a stone and would definitely advise others to go for it.”

Ms CD, Southwark
Randomised to 1 of 4 text message conditions:

1. **No text message**

2. **Primer and reminder**
   - Primer: One week before letter
   - Reminder: One week after letter
   - “Dear NAME, your NHS Health Check is due at your GP practice. We will post you a letter soon with info about how to book your appointment”
   - “Dear NAME, Your GP recently sent you a letter inviting you to attend your NHS Health Check. Call PHONE NUMBER to book an appointment.”

3. **Primer only**

4. **Reminder only**

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<th>Treatment Letter 1</th>
<th>Treatment Letter 2</th>
<th>Treatment Letter 3</th>
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<td><strong>Reminder Text</strong></td>
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Behavioral Insights Applied

**Active ingredients - letters**

(1) **Simplification**: The letter was shortened for less effortful processing.

(2) **Behavioural instruction**: Action focused – what to do.

(3) **Implementation intentions**: Planning prompts.

(4) **Scarcity and personal relevance**: “Your NHS Health Check is due in August.”

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**Active ingredients - SMS**

(1) **Priming**: your letter is due

(2) **Prompting**: reminder to book

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Dear \[to be inserted by mail merge\] 

Your NHS Health Check is due in August.

Please call \[to be inserted by mail merge\] as soon as possible to make sure you get your appointment at your GP’s surgery and record this on the tear-off slip below.

You can also book your health check at your local pharmacy listed in the enclosed leaflet. To book, please ring 0203 4039 9599 and quote “NHS Health Check.”

Yours sincerely

\[to be inserted by mail merge\]

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Please record the date and time of your appointment and stick it on your fridge.

Name: \[to be inserted by mail merge\]

GP practice: \[to be inserted by mail merge\]

I am going to my NHS Health Check on __/__/13 at ____am/pm

Practice address: \[to be inserted by mail merge\]
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**Standard Letter**
- 18% uptake
- 2301 HCs

**Deadline Letter + Text Messages**
- 30% uptake
- 3836 HCs

**Marginal Costs**
- £3.76 per additional HC completed
  - £1.09 next year
Conclusions

✓ Send a good letter (no additional cost)
  ✓ The use of the current national template letter (personalised commitment) was the most effective letter without text messages.
✓ Text messages can be a cost effective means of increasing uptake
  ✓ Text messages were most effective when used with the deadline commitment letter (approximately £3.76 per additional HC completed)
Authors & Acknowledgements

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• Anna Sallis
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• Annabelle Bonus
• Tim Chadborn

Acknowledgements

• Alison Furey, Southwark Council
• Teresa Edmans and team, Southwark Council;
• Southwark Primary Care Support Service
• iPlato Healthcare
• Quality Medical Solutions
• Ayoub Saei, PHE
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