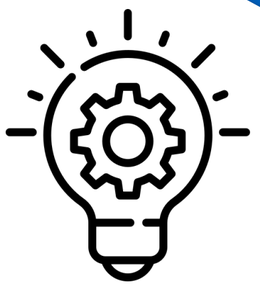
Embedding volunteering within neighbourhood health

Volunteering for Health
Learning into action guide







Volunteering for Health

Volunteering for Health is a national programme being delivered by a partnership between NHS Charities Together, NHS England, and CW+ (the official charity of Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust) to test and build volunteering infrastructure in health and care.

It is funding 15 local partnerships to deliver volunteering infrastructure projects in their geographies over three years. Local partnerships include organisations across:

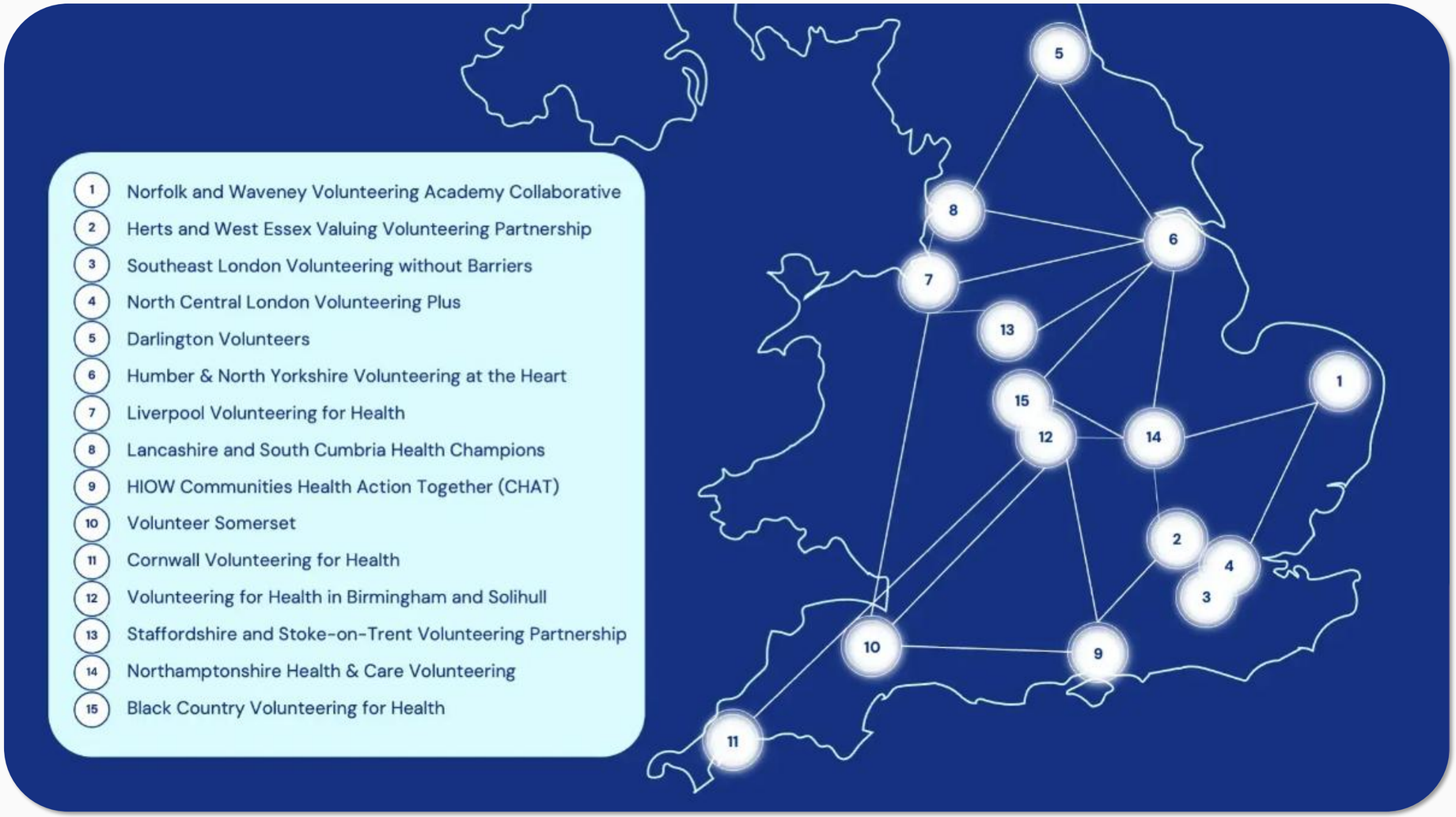
- Integrated Care Boards (ICBs)
- NHS trusts
- NHS charities
- The voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) sector including local infrastructure organisations (LIOs) which support local VCSE organisations to foster partnerships, build capacity and develop volunteering opportunities.

"Volunteers are crucial to the NHS's vision for the future of health and social care. 72,000 volunteers support NHS Trusts alone, while thousands more support healthcare in other parts of the NHS and within the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector."

NHS Volunteering webpages, NHS Business Services Authority



Volunteering for Health – 15 local partnerships

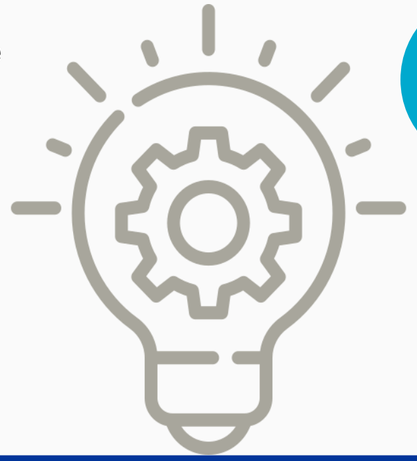


Supporting health and care services through Volunteering for Health

Sharing learning from the programme is vital to help grow and strengthen volunteering in health and care systems. This learning can improve equity of access to services and support better outcomes for everyone.

The theme of this learning into action guide is **Embedding volunteering within neighbourhood health**

This guide is one of five covering key areas of focus for the programme, presenting innovative approaches that are being taken by the local partnerships and how they can inform volunteering strategies.



The learning into action guide follows a ‘what’, ‘so what’, ‘now what’ structure:

WHAT? What is the role of volunteering in neighbourhood health?

SO WHAT? What are local partnerships doing to support neighbourhood health?

NOW WHAT? What actions can health and care system leaders take to make best use of existing work around volunteering to support wider system priorities?

WHAT?

What is the role of volunteering in neighbourhood health?

Neighbourhood health is a key ambition set out in the Department of Health and Social Care's 10 Year Health Plan.

It represents a radical shift from care delivered in hospitals to more care delivered in communities, closer to where people live and helping those of all ages to live active, independent lives for as long as possible. It involves health, social care, VCSE, and other local partners in ICBs working in collaboration to form Integrated Neighbourhood Teams, giving people easier access to the right care at the right time in their communities.

> *"Volunteers can play an important role in supporting neighbourhood services."*
>
> **10 Year Health Plan**

Volunteers are already active in supporting people's health and they are expected to play an important role in supporting neighbourhood services. They can help people access care and prevent deterioration and hospital readmission through community-based wellbeing support.

The National Neighbourhood Health Implementation Programme (NNHIP) was launched in 2025, with an initial 43 places across the country selected to test and share innovative approaches. Local partnerships in areas with these places are collaborating with health and care partners to align volunteering activities with neighbourhood health.



SO WHAT?

What are local partnerships doing to support neighbourhood health?

Supporting hospital discharge and recovery in the community

Black Country partnership has implemented a social prescribing model where volunteers work with inpatients who are ready to be discharged from hospital to support them through their recovery at home. Volunteers provide patients with emotional support and signpost them to appropriate community support.

The partnership has developed public-facing communication materials, such as patient leaflets, to enhance community awareness of the model.

Benefits of the approach

The partnership expects this initiative to improve patient confidence in the hospital discharge process and create a sustainable model for integrating volunteers and social prescribing into hospital pathways.

Further information here.

Supporting the shift from treatment to prevention

In Lancashire and South Cumbria partnership, Community CVS is delivering a pilot for bowel cancer screening champions. Volunteers have conversations with people in community settings about bowel cancer screening, raise awareness around the topic and signpost people into the service.

The pilot is supported by a steering group and is working with a place-based volunteer partnership, including members from within the NHS and VCSE sector, to explore how a cancer champion volunteer programme can be embedded at scale.

Benefits of the approach

The partnership expects the pilot to improve take-up of screening and early identification of bowel cancer.

Further information here.

Connecting people to the support they need closer to home

Herts and West Essex partnership is delivering a community volunteering initiative to support connection, prevention and inclusion for residents who face barriers to accessing care and support. The initiative is offering services including befriending, signposting, walking groups and digital support for residents.

The partnership has been focusing on relationship building with VCSEs, public health and ICB leads to support the development of community volunteering initiatives.

Benefits of the approach

The partnership anticipates improved patient access to prevention services in the community and stronger collaboration between NHS and VCSE organisations.

Further information here.

NOW WHAT?

Actions for health and care system leaders

The local partnerships have shared emerging learning on how their programmes are supporting neighbourhood health services.

Based on this learning, it is recommended that leaders across health, local government and VCSE organisations consider the following actions to ensure health and care systems make best use of the activities of local partnerships.



Action 1:
ICBs should ensure a volunteering strategy is included within their workforce portfolio

Action 2:
ICBs and local authorities should partner with local infrastructure organisations to connect with the VCSE sector

Action 3:
System neighbourhood planning and evaluation should include local volunteering strategies

NOW WHAT?

Action 1: ICBs should ensure a volunteering strategy is included within their workforce portfolio

Neighbourhood health is a live and fast-moving national programme.

ICBs need to **understand the potential for volunteering** to support neighbourhood health services now and **link volunteering with other workforce programmes**.



Some ICBs do not have leads for volunteering within their place and provider teams, hampering the coordinated approach necessary to support neighbourhood health.



Some organisations are developing workforce programmes in silos and not as part of a joined-up approach.

Where is this happening now?

Humber and North Yorkshire

The ICB has appointed a senior leader to strategically align volunteer involvement across the system. Strategic alignment with neighbourhood health is supported by an innovative workforce transformation programme.
This has informed the design of neighbourhood health services, embedding volunteering into workforce priorities across the system.
Further information here.



Questions to test progress against Action 1:

- Has the ICB developed a volunteering strategy – within a wider workforce strategy – and is this integrated with local neighbourhood plans?
- Is volunteering infrastructure being built into commissioning frameworks for neighbourhood health?

NOW WHAT?

Action 2: ICBs and local authorities should partner with local infrastructure organisations to connect with the VCSE sector

The principle of neighbourhood health (providing multi-agency health and care closer to home) is well-developed in many systems, supported by volunteers and the VCSE sector.

ICBs, NHS organisations and local authorities should partner with LIOs to connect with the local VCSE sector. **Together, partners should explore collaborative opportunities to develop neighbourhood health** through health and care volunteering roles.



The NHS Volunteering Taskforce report recommended mapping the VCSE sector to explore available services and opportunities. However, local partnerships have found this is challenging, as the sector is large, diverse and ever changing. LIOs may be a more realistic and proportionate route for engagement with the sector.

Where is this happening now?

Northamptonshire

Northamptonshire partnership is working with an LIO to integrate volunteering into the system's neighbourhood health agenda. The partnership is using the launch of three new ICB neighbourhoods to explore how healthcare volunteering can support care delivery in the community. Northamptonshire has found that working with an LIO has facilitated discussions with a wide range of VCSE organisations on the neighbourhood health agenda.
Further information here.



Questions to test progress against Action 2:

- Have relationships with LIOs been developed to explore opportunities for neighbourhood health with VCSE organisations?
- Is a volunteering strategy building on the volunteering infrastructure that is already in place across the system?

NOW WHAT?

Action 3: System neighbourhood planning and evaluation should include local volunteering strategies

ICBs should consider how volunteering aligns with neighbourhood health services and include monitoring the impact of volunteering in local evaluations of neighbourhood health.

Local partnerships have designed evaluation plans for their work.



These will involve clear dependencies to neighbourhood health and should be reviewed by system leaders alongside local neighbourhood evaluation plans, to ensure alignment of key outcome measures.



This will support future business cases for a sustainable volunteer workforce supporting Integrated Neighbourhood Teams.

Where is this happening now?

Multiple partnerships

Local partnerships in Northamptonshire, Cornwall, Hampshire and Isle of Wight and Norfolk and Waveney have carried out independent evaluation of their volunteering activities and all partnerships report progress regularly to the Volunteering for Health programme team to support a programme-wide evaluation.



Questions to test progress against Action 3:

- Do evaluation plans for neighbourhood health reference volunteering activities as dependencies?
- Are programme outcome measures and evaluation timelines aligned where appropriate?

NOW WHAT?

For more information

This is one of a series of five learning into action guides.

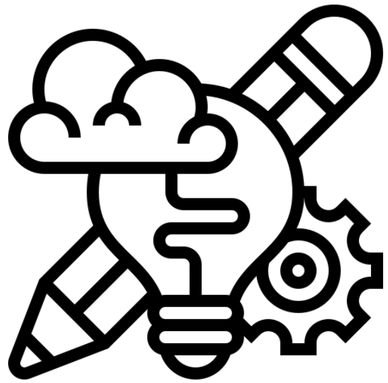
All the guides in this series provide specific examples of how volunteering can support system ambitions. System leaders should consider the actions across all of the guides when developing their volunteering strategies.

- **Embedding volunteering within neighbourhood health**
- Developing the health and care workforce through volunteering
- Training and development for people who manage volunteers
- Developing volunteer passporting across partners
- Diversifying volunteering opportunities to widen participation.

The full series of learning into action guides is available to access on the Volunteering for Health website.



Contact us



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Volunteering for Health Programme group



Acknowledgements

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This guide was prepared by The Strategy Unit.

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