Unlocking integration

Five key asks to enable and support integration across system and place

The transformation of the NHS in England to a more integrated system of health and care is well underway in many parts of the country. The long-term plan for the NHS is expected to continue promoting integration. NHS England chief executive Simon Stevens said that care redesign is already bearing fruit for the 12.5 million people covered by integrated care systems.

> "This is where the health and care sector is headed. There is no plan B."
>
> Simon Stevens

There is enthusiasm to accelerate progress as these systems start to deliver better health outcomes for their populations: aiming to be less fragmented, more person-centred, and better at meeting the needs of an ageing population with long-term conditions.

Why are changes needed?

The current architecture of the NHS, as defined in the Health and Social Care Act of 2012, has shortcomings that may not facilitate the changing landscape. Organisational boundaries and accountabilities must evolve. The way in which services are planned and commissioned is changing as commissioners take a more strategic and place-based approach and there is increasing collaboration between providers, commissioners and local authorities to deliver integrated care with a focus on population health.

While a wholesale rewrite of the Act is neither likely nor welcome, as it would only serve to distract from the task ahead, clinical commissioners have identified five areas where a revised approach will accelerate integration.

How can we make the changes?

Achieving these may require legislative change or they may require the use of current legislation in a different way, including bold approaches to test the flexibility of the 2012 Act. For example, clarity from national bodies about acceptable actions on payment reform, procurement, governance or regulation, or NHS England powers of direction for clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) and NHS Improvement powers of licensing for foundation trusts. Any of these approaches must support 'bottom up' aspirations around sustainability and transformation partnerships (STP)/ integrated care system (ICS) place and system integrated working.

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