

POLICY ESSENTIALS: NEIGHBOURHOOD HEALTH





ABOUT

The County Councils Network (CCN) represents 39 county and unitary councils across England. We are a councillor-led, cross-party organisation that works on behalf of our member councils and their communities to ensure they have a strong voice with national government, and to help deliver positive change for those authorities and the residents they serve.

The CCN aims to articulate the challenges and opportunities of its member councils, alongside their priorities, to the government and other key organisations. This is primarily done through original and impactful research across areas such as adult social care, children's services, housing and planning, and local government finance.

Building on our **Guide to CCN**, our updated series of **Policy Essentials** aims to give county and unitary councillors a short and concise overview of the most important policy issues facing their councils. This includes an overview of the key service responsibilities of councils; why it is a national advocacy priority for CCN; key developments in the national policy landscape; and CCN's key policy positions and advocacy priorities.

This Policy Essentials is focused on **Neighbourhood Health**. For more information on our policy work in this area, contact:



Chloe Reeves
Senior Policy Advisor

 chloe.reeves@local.gov.uk

 07706628701



What is neighbourhood health?

Definitions of 'neighbourhood health' vary, with the concept meaning different things depending on perspective and context. Local government versions might focus on multidisciplinary working to support people and families with complex needs. NHS versions might focus on identifying people who could benefit from proactive support to prevent hospitalisation. Community-led versions might focus on mapping community assets, considering where the gaps are, and working to fill them.

Despite the fluidity of definition, there is general consensus that the agenda places **a renewed focus on integration, prevention, personalised care, care closer to home, and community-led approaches to care.** A lot of focus has been placed on NHS, social care, and community organisations being brought together to work as a co-ordinated whole rather than in isolation.

The government is championing some key mechanisms through which to deliver neighbourhood health:

- **Neighbourhood Health Planning** is one of the only formal mechanisms for collaboration between care and health partners at a time of divergent systems policy within local government and the NHS. While the NHS is organising through ICB clustering and provider-scale integration, several county areas are experiencing disaggregation through Local Government Reorganisation.
- **Neighbourhood Health Plans (NHPs)** are the delivery plans through which national neighbourhood health goals are translated into local priorities and measures.
- **Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs)** are groups of professionals from across primary care, social care, hospital care, community care, mental health services, and the third sector who come together to deliver care for a group of people within their area.
- **Neighbourhood Health Centres (NHCs)** are physical 'one-stop shops' that bring together GP practices and a mix of community, local authority and third sector services.



What are the key pressures at the interface of care and health?

- **More people are waiting to be safely discharged from hospital, and discharge delays are contributing to people experiencing longer stays.** Much of the NHS's interest in social care has been focused on how it enables older adults to leave hospital. In 2016, the National Audit Office estimated 85% of people delayed in hospital were aged 65+, though demographic changes mean this figure is now likely to be higher.
- **Much of this issue is down to NHS practice.** This recurring issue is often viewed simplistically, as a problem for the health service driven by a lack of capacity in social care. However, CCN's 2023 report with Newton, *Finding A Way Home*, found people being unnecessarily admitted to hospital and significant delays during hospital stays, meaning people spend longer in hospital than they need to.
- **A&E attendances are also rising.** Immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019/20, there were 25.0 million attendances at A&E. This rose to 27.4 million in 2024/25.
- **Rurality and sparsity are important considerations.** For example, geographic proximity to GP practices has been found to play a substantial role in influencing A&E attendance. People who live further away from GP practices are more likely to attend A&E, with one study finding 18 more A&E attendances per 100 population for each kilometre further the average person lived from a GP practice.
- **Policy solutions by central government have tended toward short-term investments for the NHS to respond to 'winter pressures'.** However, the efficacy and value for money of such solutions is often patchy – with the additional demand often raising the cost of care beds for both NHS and local authorities, rather than incentivising an increase in capacity.
- **Instead, CCN advocates an alternative approach of investing in therapy-focused reablement at home, while improving practices within the health and care system.** Analysis in *Finding a Way Home* suggests this approach could help 175,000 older people avoid being admitted to hospital, save 6 million bed days, and mean 80,000 older adults live more independently each year.



What role do councils play in neighbourhood health?

- No aspect of Neighbourhood Health is a new policy area for local government. Councils hold a wealth of evidence and practical experience to contribute to both local and national efforts to progress neighbourhood health.
- Councils hold institutional knowledge - not always held within the NHS - that can help ensure work builds on previous initiatives. Aligning services, pooling budgets, co-locating staff, and sharing information are all aimed at improving the experiences and outcomes of people drawing on services. Councils have led previous iterations of this work, including through Local Area Agreements, Total Place, and Neighbourhood Community Budgets.
- Despite councils being the leaders of place-shaping, much of the neighbourhood health agenda is sited with the NHS and primary care, including the creation of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams. This is largely due to neighbourhood health being heavily promoted through the 10 Year Health Plan for England.
- Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) have been tasked with leading most aspects of neighbourhood health. At least one ICB member should be jointly nominated by the local authorities whose areas coincide with the ICB area (or include the whole or any part of it). However, ICB membership, participation and relationships vary across areas. Councillors should seek to understand from their senior officer team what engagement with their local ICB looks like in their area.
- Health and Wellbeing Boards have a lead role - working with ICBs - in neighbourhood health planning and developing Neighbourhood Health Plans (NHPs). NHPs should translate the national goals (including the three shifts of the 10 Year Health Plan - from hospital to community, from sickness to prevention, and from analogue to digital) into local priorities and measures. Councils' established community infrastructure and networks will be critical to this.
- ICBs are the local leads for delivering Neighbourhood Health Centres. Delivery is expected to be through a mixture of upgrading, repurposing and building anew. Councils may be partners, linking healthcare with social care, prevention, housing, and broader place-shaping.



What are CCN's key policy positions and advocacy priorities?

CCN's Business Plan 2026/27 sets out the network's priorities for neighbourhood health over the coming year. CCN will champion the central role of councils in delivering prevention, integration and place-based care. In particular, we will:

- **Promote councils' central and longstanding role in place-based care**, as the experts in managing the wider determinants of health and shaping the social infrastructure that influence physical health and mental health.
- **Advocate a preventative, independence-focused approach to adult social care reform** – for both working age and older adults – that complements the neighbourhood health agenda.
- **Protect and enhance preventative public health approaches**, ensuring national reforms build on – rather than duplicate or undermine – existing council-led prevention activity.
- **Call for a fair distribution of neighbourhood health investment**, with county areas on an equal footing with metropolitan areas, particularly in terms of funding for Neighbourhood Health Centres.
- **Support member councils to develop Neighbourhood Health Plans**, with a new research project looking at what effective planning looks like in county and rural areas, with practical prompts, questions and examples.
- **Influence national decision-makers to ensure neighbourhood health policy, funding and expectations reflect county and rural realities.** Provide insight and guidance to member councils to ensure decisions work well in county contexts rather than defaulting to metropolitan assumptions.
- **Collaborate with government to ensure the planned reforms of the Better Care Fund prioritise funding for council-led services** – including reablement services – that promote independence and support people, including unpaid carers, to remain safe, well and independent at home.

[Read more about all our advocacy and research in the CCN Business Plan & Work Programme 2026/27.](#)





Reports

- [Health and Social Care Committee Inquiry: Adult Social Care Reform – The Cost of Inaction \(2025\)](#)
- [Newton - Finding A Way Home \(2023\)](#)
- [IMPOWER – The Evolving Role of County Authorities In Integrated Care Systems \(2022\)](#)

Press Releases



- 10 October 2025 – [‘Make or break’ for social care as councils warn of a ‘triple whammy’ of risks from government reorganisation plans](#)
- 3 January 2025 – [Independent commission on adult social care announced: CCN responds](#)
- 3 July 2025 – [NHS 10-Year Plan published: CCN responds](#)
- 20 Nov 2023 – [New report sets out how hospital admissions can be avoided and how patient flow can be improved ahead of busy winter period](#)