

# Equality, diversity and inclusion

Our statement for 2020

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## Introduction

Equality, diversity, and inclusion are at the heart of Healthwatch England's values.

As a public sector body, we are committed to meeting the duties set out under the Equality Act 2010, which outlines the legal framework for creating a fair and more equal society. This vital piece of legislation protects people's rights in law and keeps all of us from unfair treatment and discrimination.

But as an organisation whose sole purpose is to give a strong and powerful voice to people who often go unheard, the Equality Act serves as the minimum for our work. We believe that everyone should have a fair and equal experience using health and social care. We recognise that some people and communities face compounding layers of disadvantage and discrimination, and we will ensure that our approach reflects the multiple inequalities that people face. We will work to prevent and challenge discrimination and inequality in all of our functions.

### Our approach

Our approach to these issues is more important than ever, as we seek to understand and mitigate the different and disproportionate impact that COVID-19 is having on people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act.

We will design our programmes of work to meet the diverse needs of the population we represent and challenge inequality in the following ways. We will:

- Work to ensure our evidence base more accurately represents the diversity of the communities we serve.
- Use our evidence base to ensure that, where possible, every piece of policy work we undertake is designed to deliver real-world impact that addresses issues relating to equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- Involve and consult with individuals and groups with specific experience of issues relating to equalities, diversity, and inclusion as necessary. Develop our services through local and national partnerships where appropriate.
- Provide support so Healthwatch locally understand their duties under the Equalities Act, and in identifying the opportunities for progressing this policy.
- Conduct appropriate and proportionate equality impact assessments.

# Meeting the Equality Act 2010 and Section 149: The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Act sets out a proactive duty on us to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations

At Healthwatch England we need to understand the effect of our policies and practices on equality and consider their impact on the whole population.

Under the Equality Act, the relevant protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race (including ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality)
- Religion or belief (or no belief)
- Gender (men, women, other)
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership (only concerning eliminating discrimination)
- Caring responsibilities

We understand that some people fall into multiple categories and therefore may well experience intersecting levels of inequality. In addition, we also recognise that socioeconomic factors have an extensive impact on people's experience of health and social care, and we will consider this in how we approach our programmes of work.

## 1. Policy and Influencing

We will ensure that the promotion of equality, diversity, and inclusion is reflected in all our policy development and influencing work. It will play a key role in helping set out policy influencing priorities for the year. Each individual proactive and reactive project will always be explored through an equalities lens to ensure that we deliver real-world impact in showing how excluded communities experience health and social care.

In 2020/21 our four key policy influencing programmes for the year - on digital healthcare and inequalities, primary care, social care, and integration, will include the following principles:

- Analyse our evidence to identify issues within these topics that may disproportionately affect people with protected characteristics and create or perpetuate inequality. These will help us narrow down specific activities throughout the year and develop concrete and actionable recommendations for the sector.

- Work with partners to understand the evidence we gather in more detail and create a strong voice together to extend and enhance our influence.
- Our reactive work will also have an equality, diversity, and inclusion focus. We will continually encourage the health and care system to have this focus. We will horizon scan to identify issues or proposed changes to the health and social care system that may adversely affect communities we don't always hear from.
- When we identify changes that are likely to affect specific groups, we will promote Healthwatch as a potential avenue for helping the system engage with these groups. Where we see decisions being made across the sector which we think will create new or compound existing inequality we will not be afraid to offer public challenge.

## 2. Research and Insight

We will work to eliminate any data bias from our evidence base to ensure that our policy positions and influencing campaigns are drawn from insight which reflects how disadvantage and discrimination affect people's experience of health and social care.

We will continue to identify equality, diversity, and inclusion gaps in our data and access other data sources or undertake a specific engagement to fill them, to ensure that we are building awareness of the needs of as many different communities as possible.

We will continue to help enhance the skills and capabilities of the Healthwatch network through our research support service, ensuring that they can effectively engage as many different communities as possible.

## 3. Working with Local Healthwatch

We will provide support to local Healthwatch in understanding their duties under the Equality Act. In particular, we will seek to equip the network with the necessary skills and confidence to challenge local systems to improve their approach on equality, diversity, and inclusion, and to carry out engagement that will put these issues on the table with local decision-makers.

We will embed equality, diversity, and inclusion across all our workstreams, which includes:

- Caring responsibilities
- Volunteering
- Business support
- Providing a quality service
- Delivering with impact
- Effective collaboration
- Learning and development

We will share examples of best practice to facilitate learning from high-quality work on equality, diversion, and inclusion that is being delivered by local Healthwatch.

#### 4. As an employer

We will foster a workforce culture that promotes and embraces equality, diversity, and inclusion, and we recognise that each individual adds value to a team. We know our strength comes from building on and valuing our people's differences as well as their similarities. By being inclusive we encourage all staff from many different backgrounds to be themselves and apply their own unique perspectives. We recognise that we need to draw on talent from all sections of the population to be innovative, creative and effective. We are committed to supporting our workforce to develop and deliver good quality work that meets the needs of everyone.

#### 5. How We Communicate

We will ensure that all our communications take account of equality, diversity, and inclusion obligations. Through our approach to communication, we will publicly challenge inequality and discrimination, and ensure that we raise awareness of Healthwatch among a broad range of communities. We will provide a platform for seldom heard voices to influence how health and social care services are delivered.

We will ensure that our communications engage and support people from every section of the community.

#### 6. Governance

Our Committee will ensure that it is representative of the society it represents. The Committee will scrutinise our work against equality and diversity objectives to ensure that we meet our commitments.