

Equality, diversity and inclusion

Our work plan for 2020-21

Introduction

Equality, diversity and inclusion are at the heart of Healthwatch England's values. We will design our programmes of work to meet the diverse needs of the population we represent and to challenge inequality.

We believe that everyone should have a fair and equal experience of health or social care. We recognise that some people and communities face multiple layers of disadvantage and discrimination and we will ensure that our approach to our work reflects this.

We will work to prevent and challenge discrimination and inequality in all our functions.

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.

This plan lays out the steps we will take to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion is an integral part of our work. It also provides an outline of two specific projects we will be undertaking which have a specific focus on equality, diversity and inclusion.

Our Committee will scrutinise our delivery against the objectives contained within this plan to ensure that Healthwatch England lives up to our commitments.

The objective of this plan

The objective of this plan is to ensure that we have a focus on equality, diversity and inclusion issues throughout all workstreams both internally and externally.

We will do this by:

1. Ensuring that every piece of policy work we undertake is designed to deliver real-world impact that addresses issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion.
2. Ensuring that the evidence base that informs our work more accurately represents the diversity of the community we represent.
3. Fostering a workforce culture that promotes and embraces equality, diversity and inclusion.
4. Involving and consulting with individuals and groups as necessary to develop our workstreams through local and national partnerships where appropriate.
5. Providing support to local Healthwatch to challenge local systems to be better on equality, diversity and inclusion, and to carry out engagement that will put these issues on the table with local decision-makers.
6. Conducting appropriate and proportionate equality impact assessments.

We will also carry out two programs of work with a specific focus on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDHR). These will be designed with a diverse representation from across our staff team, input from the network and with external expertise.

Projects with a specific focus on equality

1. Identify best practice on equality, diversity and inclusion in local Healthwatch and support the network to understand their duty in this area.

Healthwatch England is aware of local Healthwatch who carry out good work around equality, diversity and inclusion, yet we do not have a full picture of that activity and what the best practice looks like across the network. We believe there is a variance of capability in equality, diversity and inclusion, and we need a better understanding of the number of Healthwatch who prioritise work relating to these issues.

Healthwatch has a public equality duty. We want local Healthwatch to have a strong understanding of this duty to ensure their work is framed in those terms which could further strengthen their value to the health and social care system.

We will support Healthwatch locally to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion is at the core of their approach and how they operate. We want to bring best practice from outside of Healthwatch and use the learning from within local Healthwatch for their benefit – and ours.

We will second expertise from local Healthwatch to help us identify best practice on equality, diversity and inclusion and develop resources to help improve the knowledge of Healthwatch staff and volunteers.

Through this piece of work, we will:

1. Work with sector experts on equality, diversity and inclusion.
2. Identify best practice from Local Healthwatch on engagement with people from groups we don't usually hear from, including those with protected characteristics.
3. Develop a working group to test and develop resources on best practice.
4. Produce resources for our staff and volunteers about our public equality duty and approach to EDHR.
5. Develop an implementation and evaluation plan to improve our collection of evidence that relates to equality, diversity and inclusion.

2. Partnership research project on the impact of COVID-19 on Black and Asian communities.

Public Health England has published two reports showing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on people from Black and Asian communities and groups. The findings of these reports suggest that much of the disproportionate impact is linked to existing inequalities experienced by these groups.

- Read more about the [review](#) and [report](#).

The issue of race is likely to be a major theme of reviews into the handling of COVID-19. Indeed the [EHRC has already announced an inquiry](#). In this project, we will carry out research that will add value to this process of review and improve our work on challenging inequality.

The focus of our research will be to ask - how do members of specific communities think the issue of race has affected the outcome for them or their family in relation to COVID-19?

Working with local Healthwatch we want to ensure that the views of local communities inform the growing policy debate around the impact of COVID-19 on people from Black and Asian communities/groups and ensure that we have a strong evidence base from which to contribute to any future inquiries.

At the heart of this proposal, will be a partnership between several local Healthwatch with an organisation with an established reputation in the area of equality, diversity and inclusion. We will provide grant funding opportunities for local Healthwatch to participate in this project.

By taking a partnership approach we can ensure our work sits alongside broader expert research and helps to build good reach to under-represented communities.

Embedding a focus on equality, diversity and inclusion in all 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.

In 2020-21 we will

Embed the following principles in our key policy influencing programmes that relate to (a) digital healthcare and inequalities, and (b) people's experiences of primary care.

- Analyse our evidence to identify issues within these topics that may disproportionately affect people with protected characteristics. These issues will help us narrow down specific activities throughout the year and develop concrete and actionable recommendations for the health and care 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.
- On digital health and equalities:
 - We will establish partnerships with at least two organisations representing specific traditional 'seldom-heard' communities to help carry out our project.
 - Ensure that NHSX acknowledges the findings of our research and agrees to undertake further work to support the system to address these emerging gaps.
- On the other policy priorities:
 - Ensure we have at least one piece of work under each priority addressing the needs of a specific 'seldom-heard' community and/or protected characteristic. For example, when it comes to health and care service integration, we will encourage NHSE's approach to the development of the Integration Index to include a focus on tracking people with protected characteristics, such as:
 - People transitioning from childhood to adulthood
 - Pregnant woman
 - Working-age disabled individuals living at home with care support
 - Older people living in a care environment
 - Individuals with multiple conditions and/or a long-term condition
- On reactive policy work we will:
 - Use our evidence to successfully influence NHSE and Government communications as the nation seeks to recover from COVID-19 to ensure the needs of different communities are addressed. This work will include contributing to NHSE's Health Inequalities Task and Finish Group. This group aims to set out an action plan for reaching out to those most affected by COVID-19 to ensure they have the support they need.
 - Ensure that our evidence from 'seldom-heard' groups is referenced two reviews and or investigations into the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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 that 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 specific engagement to fill them to ensure that we are representing the needs of as many

different communities as possible. We will also encourage and support local Healthwatch to act to identify gaps in their data and take action to address this.

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 different communities.

In 2020/21 we will:

- Provide a suite of guidance on how to collect insight from groups and communities who find it difficult to be heard as part of the roll-out of our Research Governance Framework.
- Include a demographic breakdown in our reports, cutting across any unique issues that different communities in England face when accessing health and care.
- Develop our equalities monitoring framework to collect the information that Healthwatch needs to help promote greater equity of access and inclusion of all voices when gathering feedback in local health and care services.
- Review the experiences of at least one group of people who represent the protected characteristics or are part of a group who find it difficult to be heard as part of the quarterly review of our insight.

3. Working with Local Healthwatch

We will provide support to local Healthwatch in understanding their duties to under the equalities act and seek to equip the network with the necessary skills and confidence to challenge local systems to be better on equality diversity and inclusion.

We will share examples of best practice to facilitate learning from some of the high-quality work on Equality Diversity and Inclusion that is being delivered by local Healthwatch.

In 2020/21 we will:

- Run sessions for local Healthwatch on equality and diversity including their approach to their public duty.
- Strengthen the equalities element of the annual data return local Healthwatch provide to Healthwatch England and explore different methods to collect this information.
- Analyse the data return to understand the priorities of local Healthwatch and how this relates to 'seldom-heard' groups or those with protected characteristics.
- Share examples of best practice to facilitate learning from some of the high-quality work on equality, diversity and inclusion that is being delivered by Healthwatch locally.
- Produce and promote at least one volunteering case studies highlighting diversity per quarter.

4. As an employer

We will foster a workforce culture that promotes and embraces equality, diversity and inclusion and recognises that each individual adds value to a team. We are committed to supporting our workforce to develop, commission or deliver high-quality work that meets the needs of everyone.

In 20/21 we will:

- Run a series of workshops with staff to address issues regarding equalities and discrimination.
- Ensure all staff undertake CQC e-learning on Equality, Human Rights and Diversity
- Update the Equalities Impact Assessment Template
- Ensure all managers undertake unconscious bias training
- Ensure all staff complete the next staff survey to enable us to measure our performance as an organisation
- Ensure all staff will complete their mandatory objective concerning equalities on CQC Academy

5. How We Communicate

We will ensure that all our communications take account of equality, diversity and inclusion. We will publicly challenge inequality and discrimination and ensure that we raise awareness of Healthwatch among a broad range of communities.

In 2020-21 we will:

- Continue to ensure that all our websites and those we provide to local Healthwatch will meet W3C AA standards for accessibility.
- Make sure that 100% of our reports are made available in large print and all our external video content will be subtitled
- Roll-out new support for the network, including how to make communications accessible
- We will secure at least one partner based on protected characteristics for each one campaign we run to help us secure more views from 'seldom-heard' communities
- Ensure our brand awareness PR will include a specific strand focused issues affecting on Black and Minority Ethnic Communities and we will secure at least four items of coverage in media which specifically reaches Black and Minority Ethnic Communities.