



The  
Health  
Foundation  
Inspiring  
Improvement



# OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

Why we do what we do

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# WELCOME TO OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

*Healthcare is of profound importance to us all, and ensuring high quality healthcare for everyone is one of the greatest challenges we face.*

The Health Foundation is an independent charity working to continuously improve the quality of healthcare in the UK.

This booklet is here to tell you who we are, what we believe, and how we are helping to make real and lasting change happen. We hope it will help you understand us as an organisation, and inspire you to get involved in our work.



# WHAT IS QUALITY?

*Quality is a complex idea and means different things to different people. So before we challenge ourselves to improve quality, we need to define exactly what it means.*

Our definition of quality is essentially very simple; we see it as the **'degree of excellence'** in healthcare. Of course, excellence has many dimensions. But within the sector it is widely accepted that excellent healthcare should have the following six characteristics:



## Safe

Avoiding harm to patients from care that is intended to help them.

## Effective

Providing services based on scientific knowledge and which produce a clear benefit.

## Person-centred

Providing care that is respectful or responsive to individuals' needs and values.

## Timely

Reducing waits and sometimes harmful delays.

## Efficient

Avoiding waste.

## Equitable

Providing care that does not vary in quality because of a person's characteristics.

# WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

A decorative graphic consisting of several exclamation marks of varying sizes and colors (black and red) scattered across the page, primarily on the right side.

*The UK healthcare system is large, dynamic and continuously growing in complexity and cost. These circumstances create significant challenges to our aim of consistently achieving high quality care for everyone.*

**Shortcomings have been identified across the dimensions of quality. They are the result of many organisational, operational and attitudinal factors, including:**

- The belief that the most important investment in quality improvements is in the development of new cures.
- The failure to translate quickly research findings into practice. This means that ‘tried and tested’ interventions are often not implemented.
- Clinical autonomy can result in a lack of accountability to managers and peers. This can lead to tolerance of waste and inefficiency.
- Imperfect systems and resource constraints mean that staff constantly struggle against underlying deficiencies in the system.
- The quality of each person’s care involves many different process steps provided by many different people, yet clinicians only see a snapshot of this care.
- Aspects of the external environment, for example financing methods, performance assessment, regulation and organisational structures, often produce unintended consequences for the quality of care.
- Weak design and planning of the workforce, including team-working.

# EVERY CHALLENGE HAS A SOLUTION

*As we've seen, the healthcare system presents many challenges. But we also know that there is a wealth of potential solutions. At the Health Foundation we particularly emphasise the solutions that we believe have the greatest potential to make lasting and widespread change.*



# THE KEY SOLUTIONS

*These are the five key potential solutions to the current challenges facing the healthcare system:*

# 1

## Focus on continuous improvement

- Others work to improve health by identifying new cures, through demonstrating the clinical effectiveness of new interventions or addressing the underlying determinants of health. We believe that better health outcomes can also be achieved by improving the quality of health services.
- This area has been neglected, and it's essential that health systems focus on closing the gap between best and current practice.
- Strong leadership is important – leaders must understand improvement, and be competent in leading their colleagues towards that aim.

# 2

## Emphasise internal motivators

- For some time, the healthcare system has focused primarily on external drivers of change, such as regulation, economic incentives and performance management.
- Yet internal drivers, such as behavioural change (for example professionalism, skills development, organisational development and leadership) can often prove to be a stronger motivator.
- Both types of drivers are necessary, but there now needs to be a stronger emphasis on finding ways to support and channel the motivations of professionals.
- Good leadership is critical to achieving the right blend of drivers, and in particular appealing to the internal motivators of staff and peers.

# 3

## Align quality at every level

- To achieve high quality care for every person, every time, we need to work across the whole of healthcare to make sure that all levels of the system relate to each other in supporting quality, including:
  - one-to-one interactions between people who use services and clinicians
  - clinical micro systems
  - delivery systems
  - interventions designed to achieve change at national level.

# 4

## Redefine relationships

- The interaction between people who use services and their clinical team is a critical determinant of quality of care.
- To achieve the best outcomes, people need to be equipped to play an active role in their care, and their care needs to be personalised.
- This requires a different approach to the way clinicians and the wider healthcare system engage with individuals and local communities.

# 5

## Build knowledge, techniques, skills and new practices

- Knowledge, in the form of performance data such as clinical measures and patient reported outcomes, can identify gaps between best and current practice.
- Developing new skills is essential, for instance testing and analysing what is known about effective care, making changes across the system and supporting self-management.
- Bringing about new practices requires recognising the essential organisational and human factors. These may include varying resources, the need for teamwork in a sector with unstable and unformed teams, and the need for processes to ensure that the desires of people who use services are taken into account.

# THE HEALTH FOUNDATION INSPIRING IMPROVEMENT

*The Health Foundation wants the UK to have a healthcare system of the highest possible quality – safe, effective, person-centred, timely, efficient and equitable. We believe that in order to achieve this, health services need to continually improve the way they work.*

We are here to inspire and create the space for people, teams, organisations and systems to make lasting improvements to health services.

We achieve this by:

- identifying evidence for change and best practice, through commissioning and synthesising research and evaluation
- creating opportunities to innovate and test ideas in practice
- demonstrating improvement in practice by working with partners and health services to implement large-scale improvement programmes
- encouraging and inspiring transformation by sharing the evidence for change and supporting health services to put it into action.



Working at every level of the healthcare system, we aim to develop the technical skills, leadership, capacity, knowledge, and the will for change, that are essential for real and lasting improvement.

# THE PRINCIPLES THAT SHAPE THE WAY WE WORK

*The Health Foundation is a unique organisation with a unique way of working, thanks to the principles that influence the way we think and work.*

## We are a catalyst

The UK's health services employ 1.3 million people and have an annual budget of £110 billion. The only way our small organisation can make an impact is by acting as a continual catalyst for others. Through our programmes of work, we hope to inspire improvement, drive change, and build advocates for our approach throughout every level of the healthcare system.

## We are grounded in evidence

Healthcare is a very demanding sector, where every practitioner works to the limit of his or her capacity. The people we work with don't have time to speculate about the benefits of change, so we ensure that every call for change is grounded in evidence and carries a sufficient weight of learning. We're diligent in establishing the facts, and always clear and straightforward in the way we present our case.



## We are positive

Healthcare lives permanently under the gaze of the public eye, and forever at the top of the political agenda. It has no shortage of critics, but at the Health Foundation, we believe that the best way to give practitioners the confidence that improvement is possible is by celebrating success, and encouraging an optimistic approach to change. At the same time, we never shy away from highlighting problems with current practice, because only then will we find the solutions to put them right.

## We are independent

Independence gives us the freedom to innovate, to lead, and to apply all of our resources to the sole aim of improving healthcare.

**“THEY RELIABLY,  
ENERGETICALLY AND  
RAPIDLY TURN KNOWLEDGE  
INTO ACTION. AND THEY  
DO IT ALL IN DAYLIGHT,  
SO EVERYONE GETS TO  
SEE IT AND LEARN.”**

*Don Berwick, President and CEO, Institute for Healthcare Improvement*

# WHAT WE DO AND HOW WE DO IT

*Our activities are broad, yet interlinked. We've encapsulated it all in the four 'pillars' of our approach – they describe the four key aspects of what we do. Over the next few pages, you will find each of these pillars explained in more detail.*

**IDENTIFY**

**INNOVATE**

**DEMONSTRATE**

**ENCOURAGE**

# IDENTIFY



*Before we can do anything, we need to prove that change is necessary. We use our wide-ranging expertise to help people understand the consequences of poor quality healthcare at local and national levels.*

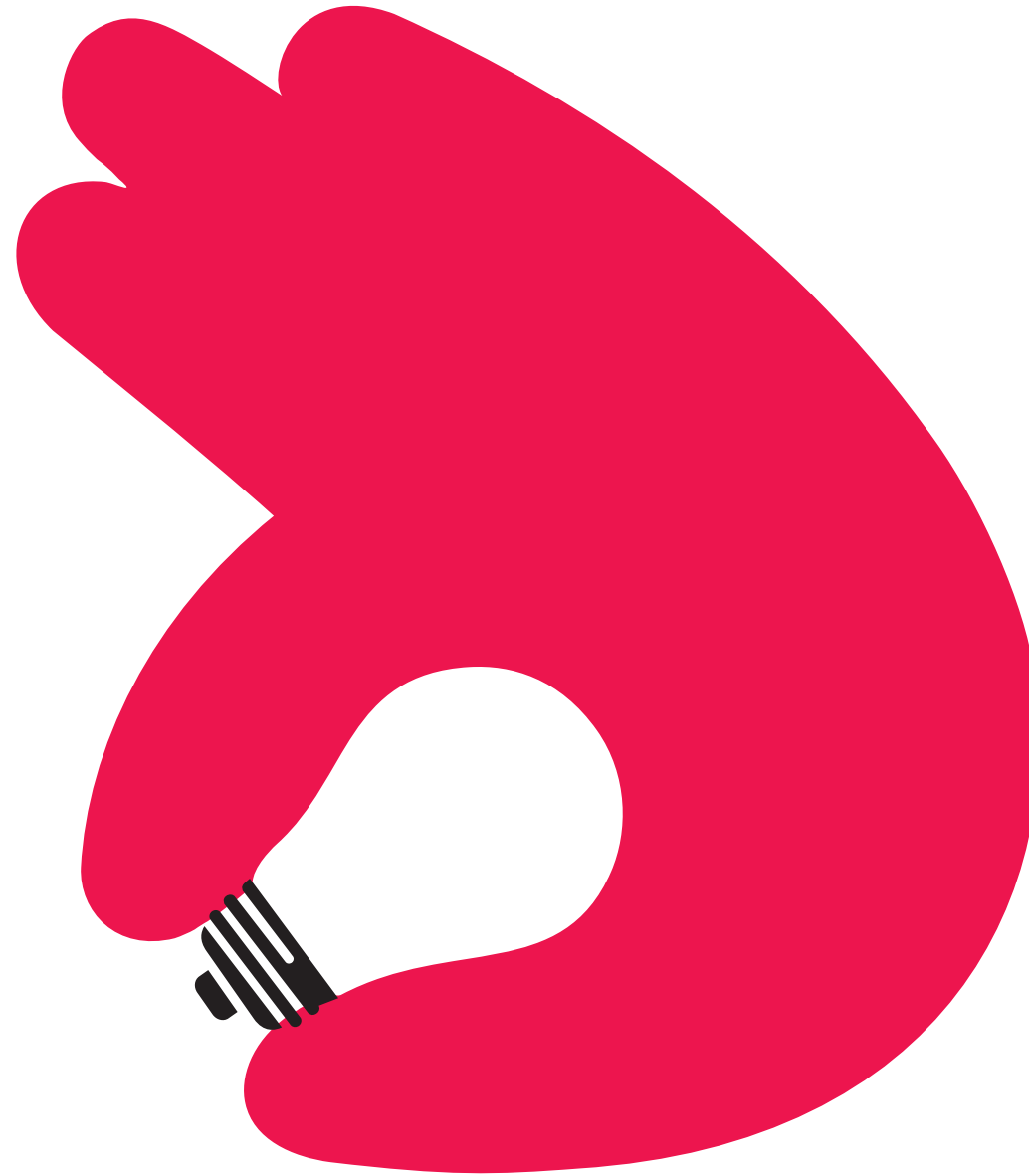
We also provide the evidence and highlight the success stories to show that improvement is possible. And by getting people thinking and talking about these important issues, we rally professional support, inspire action and build a momentum for change.

## How we do it

- We commission new research to pinpoint any gaps between best and current practice and to highlight the barriers to improvement.
- We bring clarity to existing evidence, by synthesising, reviewing and sharing learning from other sectors.
- We support the exchange of knowledge about effective methods and practice.
- We highlight the challenges and potential solutions.
- We commission independent evaluation of our programmes to generate rigorous evidence of improvement.

# INNOVATE

*There's always a different way to work, yet often it's hard to ignore what you're used to doing and find the better way. So we help people to take a step back, innovate, and plan the practicalities of change. We encourage innovation from across the healthcare system; a good idea is a good idea, no matter how small it is or where it comes from.*

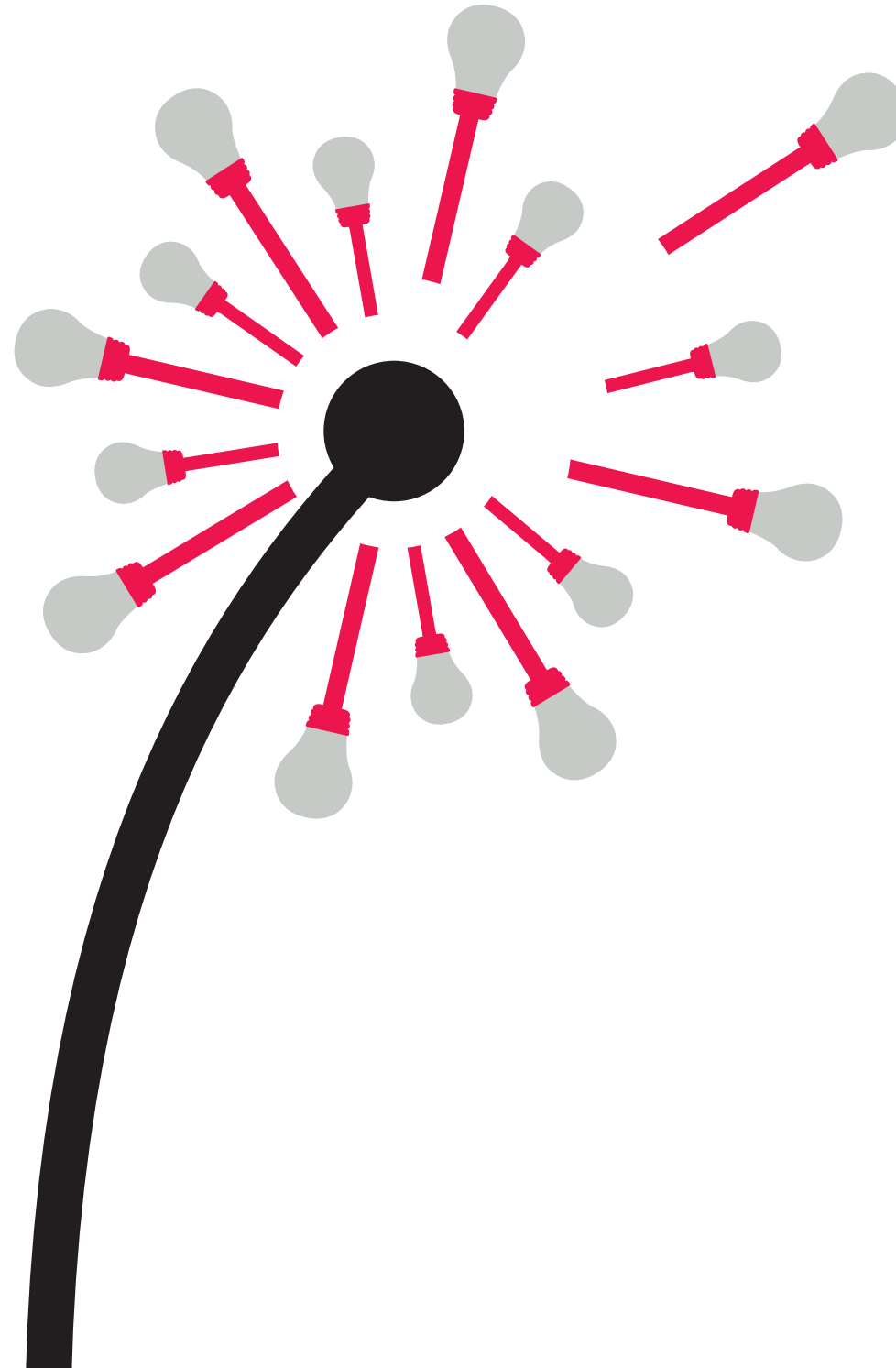


## How we do it

- We provide opportunities for leaders, teams and organisations to think creatively and come up with new ways of working.
- We support people and teams in the health service to try out their ideas in a way that can be measured and proven.
- We bring in learning and initiatives that have been shown to be successful elsewhere, and support organisations to implement them in the health service.
- We design innovative leadership and organisational development programmes to help make change happen.

# DEMONSTRATE

*Showing people real improvements in health services is the best way to convince them that change is achievable. So we put ideas to work and share our learning. And by showing our ideas being implemented on an ever-larger scale, we create excitement about quality improvement, and turn demonstration into accepted practice.*

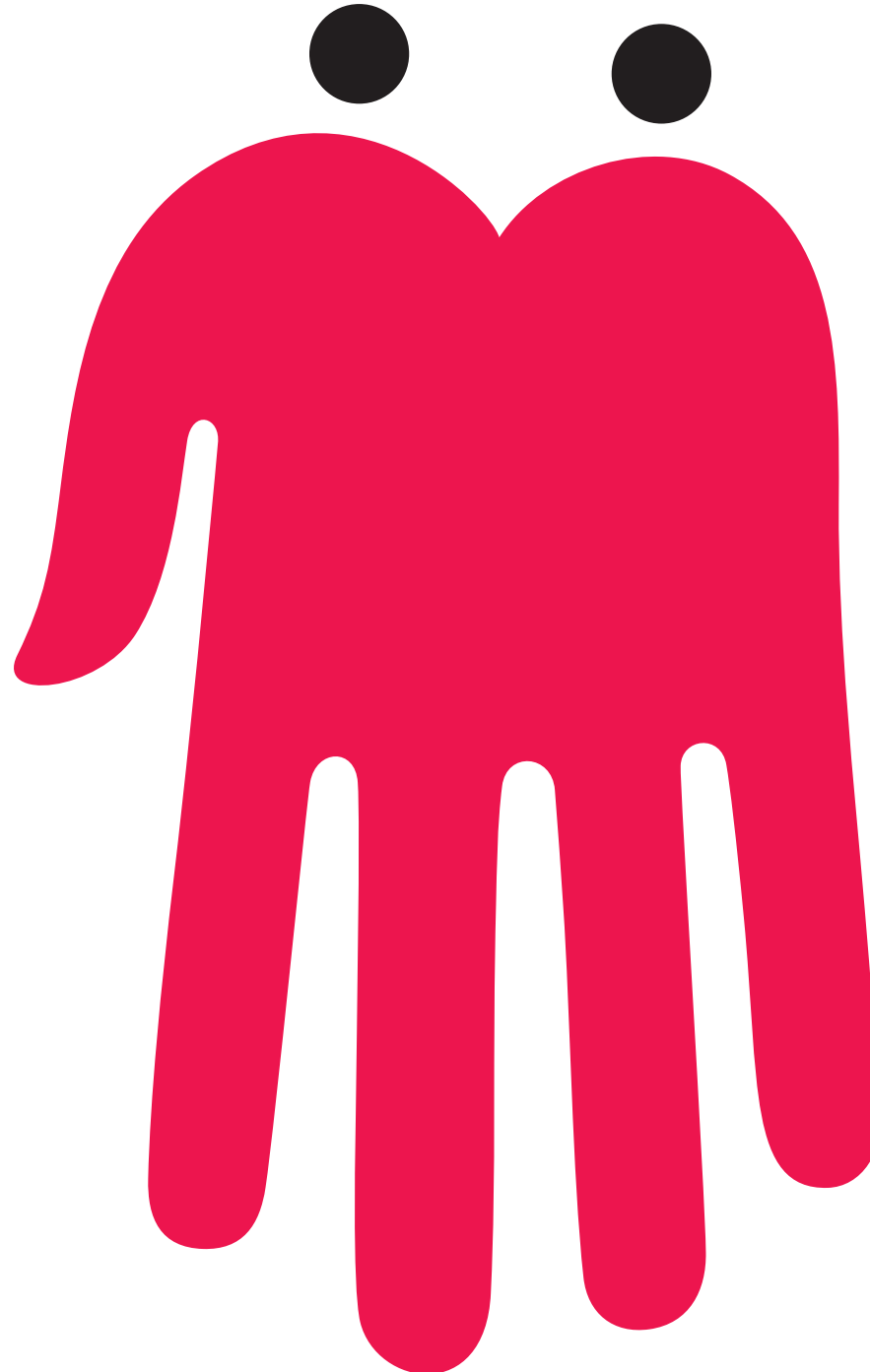


## How we do it

- We invest in, and work with, healthcare teams and organisations to close the gaps between actual and best practice.
- We show how barriers to quality can be overcome in everyday practice, and create working models that can be refined and developed at a local level.
- We share our ideas and the emerging lessons and dilemmas as the programmes develop.
- We invest significantly in demonstration programmes and improvement collaboratives to show how new ideas can be implemented at a larger scale.

# ENCOURAGE

*From politicians to patients, we work at every level of the healthcare system to create advocates for our approach. By inspiring people, giving them the evidence for change and the opportunity to put it into action, we aim to put quality at the top of the health agenda.*



## How we do it

- We build knowledge and stimulate leading-edge thinking on the science of healthcare improvement.
- We collaborate with others to spread our learning.
- We support leaders across the health system to build skills and create supportive organisational cultures.
- We support networks of individuals, teams and organisations to create the space and skills to reflect on and devise new solutions.
- We engage with professional bodies and the health professions to develop knowledge, skills and approaches.
- We inform the development of health policy.

**“THEY’VE ENHANCED  
OUR SELF-CONFIDENCE  
AND SELF-PRIDE AS AN  
ORGANISATION, AND HAVE  
HAD AN IMMEASURABLE  
EFFECT WAY BEYOND  
PATIENT SAFETY.”**

*Frank Hamill, Clinical Audit and Assurance Manager, North Bristol NHS Trust, Safer Patients Network*

# THE WAY FORWARD

*At the Health Foundation everything we do is dedicated to improving the quality of healthcare in the UK. But to make real and lasting change, we need you.*

There are many ways that you can become involved in our work. We are continually developing new programmes and projects which create space for practitioners from every level of the healthcare system to improve the quality of their services. We need advocates to spread the word about how to improve quality and put it on to personal, organisational and political agendas. And we always need new ideas and innovations to test and develop.

If you are interested in our work or in the wider issue of improving quality, please visit:

[www.health.org.uk](http://www.health.org.uk)  
or email [info@health.org.uk](mailto:info@health.org.uk)

to find out how we can create an ever-improving healthcare system for everyone.

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