

Strategies and policies to inform mental health innovation

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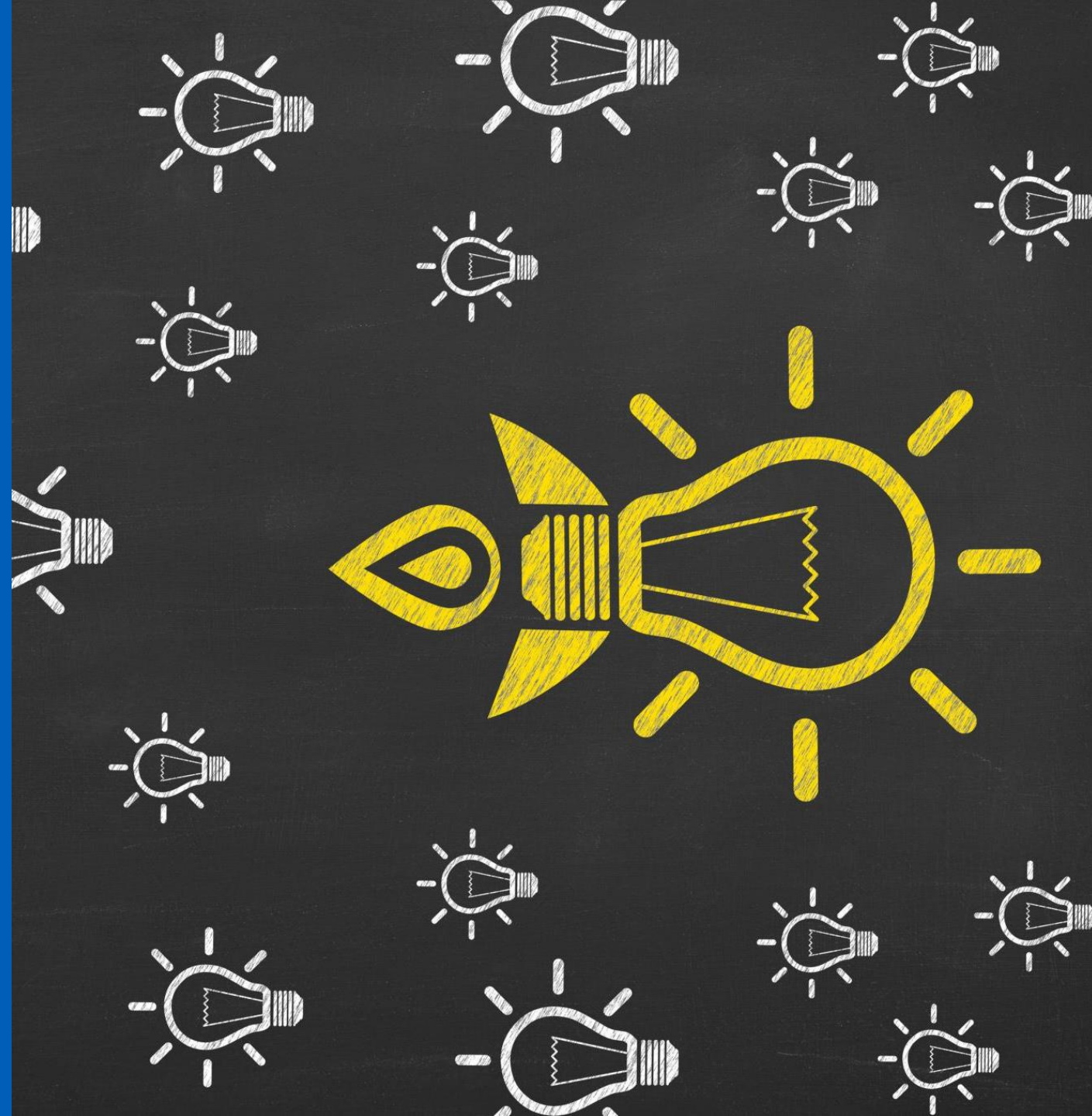
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“What are you hoping to
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Housekeeping

Duration: This webinar's duration is 1-hour session

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Not covered: Regulation tips and resources but see slide at the end for reference, to review in own time.

Policy insights

NHS England and Department of Health and Social Care

- Fit for the Future: 10 Year Health Plan for England
- Medium Term Planning Framework
- Neighbourhood Health Framework
- Life Sciences Sector Plan
- SEND Reform: putting children and young people first
- Independent review into mental health conditions, ADHD and autism: interim report

NHS Wales

- Mental Health and well-being strategy 2025 to 2035

NHS Scotland

- Population Health Framework
- Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework
- Public Service Reform Strategy: Delivering for Scotland
- Life Sciences Strategy for Scotland 2035 Vision

Health & Social Care N. Ireland

- HSC Reset Plan
- Digital Mental Health Action Plan

National priorities



The Mental Health Innovation Landscape: Changes, trends and opportunities

Care access and provision redefined	Neighbourhood Health	Cross-department collaboration
Crisis care	24/7 care	New teams and expansion of existing teams to support CYP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - £120m to create 85 Mental Health Emergency Departments (MHEDs), co-located with Type 1 A&E. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NHS England piloting 6 adult MH neighbourhood centers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Best Start Family Hubs to support those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), with a focus to support neurodevelopmental conditions for under 5s.
Whole-patient pathway shift	Integrated Neighbourhood Teams	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moving from diagnosis-only support to whole-pathway. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ICBs to commission INTs to deliver physical and mental health, at a neighbourhood level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family Hubs expansion to support and work closely with CYP, families, schools and Alternative Provisions (APs). - Young Futures Hubs to support adolescent mental health.
Direct care access and patient data sharing	Commissioning opportunities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patient self-referrals to specialist care through My Specialist tool. - Access to care plans via My Care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hardware-based technologies. - Neuromodulation technologies not suitable for home use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changing Futures Programme to support individuals with socioeconomic disadvantages and mental health needs.

Priorities overview

Children and Young People

Neurodiversity (ADHD and autism focus)

Severe mental illness

Dementia

General adult mental health

Digital (incl immersive tech)

Children and Young People (CYP)

Trends:

- Rising distress linked to school disruption, persistent absence, disengagement from work/training.
- Increasing social isolation, affecting wellbeing and early development.

Specific Commitments:

By March 2029:

- 10% reduction in acute outpatient appointments for under-16s.

By 2028:

- INT access for every child who needs one.

By 2030:

- Mental Health Service Teams (MHSTs) covering 60% of pupils by April 2026 and all schools/colleges by 2029 - 2030.

General priorities:

- Earlier identification of emotional, developmental and behavioural needs.
- Reduced outpatient activity, ED attendances and hospital use where appropriate.
- Better coordination across specialties, including more supportive mental health in primary care.
- Health practitioners included in child protection teams (Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill).
- Reduced community waits for children.



Neurodiversity

Trends:

- Rising ADHD referrals, waiting lists and recorded diagnoses, especially among adolescent and young adult females.
- Stable underlying prevalence coexisting with rapidly rising diagnosis, referral and service demand for ADHD.
- National taskforce for ADHD.

Rising need may reflect greater severity, impairment or pressure on daily functioning. Substantial growth in autism referrals, with longer waits for assessments.

Specific Commitments:

By 2026:

- Minimum 10% year-on-year reduction in reliance on mental health inpatient care for people with a learning disability and individuals with autism.
- None explicitly set or ADHD.

General Priorities:

- Reduce assessment and treatment waits for ADHD and autism.
- Improve data quality and interpretation, ensuring population surveys, administrative data and lived experience are used together.
- Strengthen support for specialist services to manage rising demand.



Severe Mental Illness (SMI)

Trends

- Stable prevalence of psychosis, bipolar disorder and related severe conditions.
- Rising demand for support, including access to Individual Placement and Support (IPS).
- Comparatively limited data for lived-experience insight for SMI relative to other mental health conditions e.g. depression .
- Innovators should not de-prioritise severe conditions in favour of high-volume mild-moderate markets.

Specific Commitments

- None explicitly set out for SMI. NB An NHS Modern Service Framework is due to be published for SMI

General Priorities

- Expand and strengthen IPS for people with SMI.
- Improve integration across mental health, physical health, social care and employment support.
- Ensure services for psychosis, bipolar disorder remain accessible, evidence-based and responsive.
- Use multiple evidence sources (quantitative, clinical, lived experience) to guide service design and investment.



Dementia

Trends

- Dementia as a continuum > categorical, with growing focus on biomarkers, early identification, and mild cognitive impairment to support earlier intervention.

Specific Commitments

By March 2029:

- 10% improvement in evidence-based clinical outcomes, using the Quality and Outcomes Framework.
- Keep growth flat and work toward reducing non-elective admissions for high-priority cohorts.
- Contribute to improved Type 1 ED performance, supporting a 4-hour trajectory of 85% (interim 82% by March 2027).
- Contribute to reducing Type 1 ED attendances for high-priority cohorts.

General Priorities

- Better continuity, earlier identification, and improved treatment for dementia.
- INTs to maintain strong focus on frailty.
- Strengthen post-diagnostic support, staff training, and high-quality care across hospital and community settings.
- Support people to live well with dementia through integrated, consistent pathways.



General adult mental health

Trends

- A&E attendances increasing for adults with mental health needs.
- Ethnic patterns are complex and vary, data occasionally poorly captured.

Specific Commitments

By March 2029:

- 10% improvement in evidence-based clinical outcomes, using the Quality and Outcomes Framework.

By Autumn 2026:

- DHSC to issue further guidance on MHEDs.

General Priorities

- Improve diagnosis and treatment for long-term mental health conditions.
- Reduce avoidable A&E attendances and admissions, make use of the MHEDs where appropriate.
- Ensure seamless follow-up care, aligning physical and mental healthcare delivery in primary care.



Digital

Trends

- Focus on genomics, artificial intelligence, machine learning and big data to predict and prevent mental health and offer personalised treatment.
- New digital tools for real-time suicide surveillance, to improve mental health and reduce suicide rates.
- Digital talking therapies for anxiety and depression.
- In Northern Ireland, VR and 360° environments is used support people with PTSD, depression, and social anxiety, including low-cost trauma-focused interventions co-designed with service users.

Growing support from HINs: The UKRI Mindset XR Innovator Support Programme, £20m investment. Projects scaled focus conditions that affect education, employment, and quality of life.

General priorities:

- Co-production, optimising accessibility and minimising digital exclusion.
- Immersive tech to reach those in remote or underserved areas.



Funding

Funding routes and priorities

Funding routes:

- NIHR, Innovate UK, i4i, NICE Technology Appraisal

Priorities:

- Prevention*: Innovate UK funding success for dementia biomarkers and diagnostics.
- Prioritisation of funding to boost productivity and efficiency > clinical need
- Encouraged to develop solutions for whole pathway support > isolated point-solutions.
- Part of the £688 million investment is going into digital talking therapies for CYP.

Location dependent priorities and previous success:

Scotland: ADHD and addictions

Ireland: CYP, Perinatal psychiatry and forensics, in VR: addictions

England: Focus on CYP, local-needs dependent

Wales: Mixed

Payment reform to reward high-value care

Pay only for effective, ICB-commissioned care:

- Bonuses for high-quality care, while decommissioning services that consistently deliver poor quality outcomes.

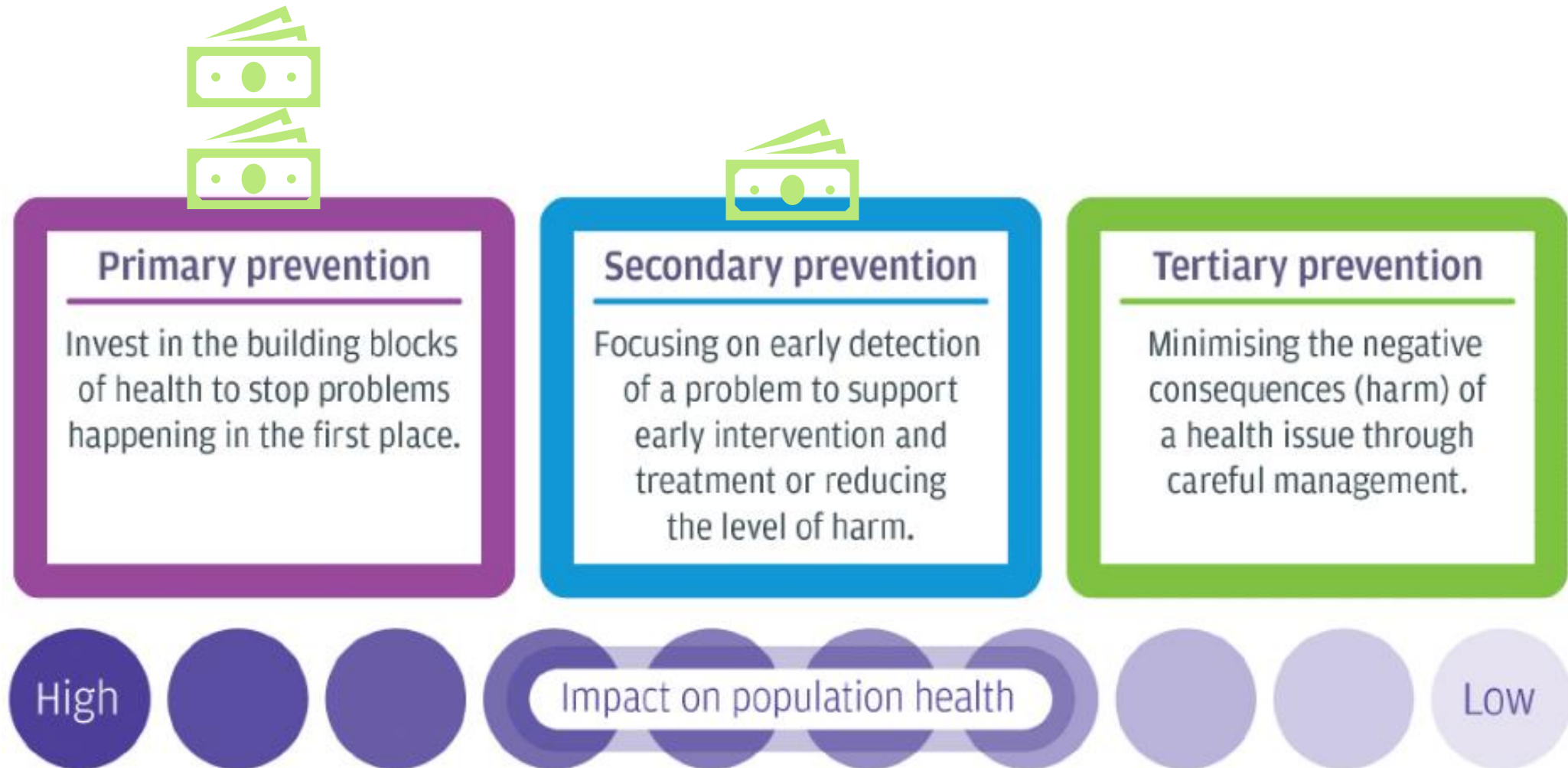
Neighbourhood health:

- Introduce year-of-care payments (YCPs) to shift activity from hospitals to neighbourhood care, using test-and-learn models.

Strategy to acquire funding

Aligning proof of concept and pilot endpoints to specific priorities and goals for respective mental health areas mapped out in national policy papers.

Funding for children and young people



Takeaways

Opportunities

- Strengthen prevention, early detection, early support, self-management and community-based tools.
- Neurodiversity support across the lifespan.
- Tools that reduce pressure on overstretched services.
- Effective digital solutions should start with problem and pathway identification, not technology-led design.
- Evidence generation is essential for procurement and scale and must happen in parallel with product development and navigating requirements such as systematic reviews and ethics approval.
- Co-production must occur at procurement, testing, implementation and evaluation of all digital technologies.

Redefined care pathway:

- Core services now extend well beyond traditional psychiatry. Care provision spans community MH teams, crisis response & home treatment, GPs, psychologists, specialist nurses, acute inpatient care, (incl. PICU) education and more.
- The pathway is being redesigned through MHEDs, stronger community-based support, and enhanced primary care integration, creating faster, more responsive access to mental health care.

Previous funding success stories:

- Explore within your respective mental health space which type of product(s) have got funding for pilots and entered the market

Collaboration, trust, and system fits:

- Use the INTs, local support, HINs, use of academics as trusted intermediaries/champions.
- Use advisory panels or innovation forums to sense-check ideas early and align products with real service need.

Looking ahead

Look out for:

- **Future Neighbourhood Mental Health Hubs publication:** Pilot site outcomes, future sites?
- **Modern Service Frameworks:** Emerging for frailty, dementia, MH, SMI and related pathways.
- **National Quality Board (NQB) publications:** Guidance continuing to set expectations for safe, high-quality care.
- **Healthcare Goals Programme Publications:** Advancing condition-specific ambitions, ones include the Dame Barbara Windsor Dementia Goals, Addictions, Mental Health Goals.
- **Updated school curriculum:** Changes to strengthen emotional literacy and pupil wellbeing.
- **Get involved:** Respond to a government consultation e.g. the SEND reform

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/send-strategy-division/send-reform-putting-children-and-young-people-firs/> (deadline 18th May)

- Gaps in national policy and guidance e.g NHS England and VR, so watch this space



Q&A

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You'll also get the slides and a resource pack with key policy papers and support tools.



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Any further queries, email sophika.uthayakumar@kcl.ac.uk or connect with me on LinkedIn

Regulation tips

Key Points:

- **Digital Technology Assessment Criteria (DTAC) updates:** what's changing and how this affects the tools you are building or supporting.
- **Revised SaMD definitions:** understanding what now constitutes as Software as a Medical Device and the implications?
- **Innovator Passport Scheme:** a fast-track medical technology adoption route, what this means for manufacturers and how it shapes market entry?
- **NICE HealthTech Access Programme (HTAP):** understanding how small selection of high-impact technologies will be reimbursed and made available across the entire health service.
- **Health Institution Exemption:** when products may be exempt from full regulatory approval, check criteria and eligibility.
- **Post-market surveillance:** staying alert to updates on evidence and monitoring requirements.

What support is on offer?

- Hardian Health, Software and AI Medical Device Consultancy

Hardian Health



Regulation resources (click on links)

Hardian, Software and AI Medical Device Consultancy	https://www.hardianhealth.com/
Implementation of the future regulations, MHRA	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementation-of-the-future-regulation-of-medical-devices/implementation-of-the-future-regulations
MHRA press release updates	https://www.gov.uk/government/news/mhra-issues-new-guidance-for-people-using-mental-health-apps-and-technologies#full-publication-update-history
National HealthTech Access Programme (NHAP) by NICE	https://www.nice.org.uk/news/articles/faster-fairer-access-to-healthtech-under-new-national-programme
Innovation passport	https://www.gov.uk/government/news/innovator-passports-set-to-accelerate-cutting-edge-nhs-care https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/innovative-licensing-and-access-pathway-ilap/ilap-performance-metrics-and-innovation-passport-list Apply here: https://applyforaninnovationpassport.mhra.gov.uk/

Policy papers (click on links)

Fit for the Future: 10 Year Health Plan for England	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6888a0b1a11f859994409147/fit-for-the-future-10-year-health-plan-for-england.pdf
Neighbourhood Health Framework	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neighbourhood-health-framework/neighbourhood-health-framework
Medium Term Planning Framework	https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/medium-term-planning-framework-delivering-change-together-2026-27-to-2028-29/
Independent review into mental health conditions, ADHD and autism: interim report	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69cbdb2369dd81b3f213c660/independent-review-into-mental-health-conditions-ADHD-and-autism-interim-report.pdf
Life Sciences Sector Plan	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/688c90a8e8ba9507fc1b090c/Life_Sciences_Sector_Plan.pdf
SEND reform: putting children and young people first	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69986472bfdab2546272c074/SEND_reform_putting_children_and_young_people_first_government_consultation_web_accessible.pdf
Scotland Population Health Framework	https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-population-health-framework/

Policy papers (click on links)

Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework	https://www.gov.scot/publications/health-social-care-service-renewal-framework/
Scotland Public Service Reform Strategy: Delivering for Scotland	https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-public-service-reform-strategy-delivering-scotland/
Life Sciences Strategy for Scotland 2035 Vision - Life Sciences Scotland	https://www.lifesciencesscotland.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2025-11-20-Life-Sciences-Strategy-final-high-resolution.pdf
North Ireland: HSC Reset Plan	https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/health-and-social-care-reset-plan
Northern Ireland: Digital Mental Health Action Plan	https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/mh-action-plan-plus-covid-response-plan.pdf
Wales: Mental Health and well-being strategy 2025 to 2035	https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2025-04/mental-health-and-wellbeing-strategy-2025-to-2035.pdf
Turning breakthrough ideas into the UK's next industry giants - UKRI	https://www.ukri.org/publications/turning-breakthrough-ideas-into-the-uks-next-industry-giants/innovate-uk-turning-breakthrough-ideas-into-industry-giants/