



Time to accelerate the local transformation we have pioneered in ICSs: A statement from England's 42 ICS-VCSE Alliances on the 10-Year Health Plan

10 July 2025

- 1. We call on DHSC and NHSE to support ICS-VCSE Alliances as the partnership infrastructure which can mobilise the resources of the local voluntary sector (VCSE) behind the ambitions of the 10-Year Health Plan.**
- 2. We call for a designated ICB Board-level executive with strategic responsibility for VCSE partnerships across all ICBs.**
- 3. We will work with the new ICBs to secure or renew funding for the ICS-VCSE Alliances for the full three financial years period from 2026-30.**

Hundreds of thousands of voluntary organisations, charities, social enterprises and community groups support health and wellbeing in neighbourhoods up and down the country every day. Across England, 162,000 registered VCSE organisations employ over 1 million paid professionals, spend £44.5bn, mobilise over 4 million volunteers and serve millions of citizens per year – including NHS staff and patients (see Endnotes). New evidence published in 2025 revealed that there are additionally as many as 335,000 unregistered informal groups which form the microbiome of our communities (see Endnotes). ICS-VCSE Alliances bring together diverse local VCSE organisations in each ICB footprint to work strategically with the NHS on integrated care and Alliance42 is the network for all ICS-VCSE Alliances in England.

The 10-Year Plan offers a broad and compelling vision for the future of healthcare. It invites VCSE and others partners to “mobilise their efforts behind our Plan” and acknowledges that “so much of what determines our health and wellbeing has little to do with the health service.” The plan provides a timely opportunity to accelerate and scale up the kinds of innovative partnerships, at local and system level, that ICS-VCSE Alliances and our members have shaped with NHS partners.

“ICBs and Alliances can work together to spread and scale innovative collaborative commissioning for the implementation of the three shifts.”

Tal Rosenzweig, Director of Voluntary Sector Collaboration and Partnership, SE London ICS & Member of the Alliance42 Leadership Group

“With investment we can help define the highest need neighbourhoods and convene communities and empower patients behind the 10-year health plan.”

Manjeet Gill, Chair of the Strategic VCSE Forum & ICB Deputy Chair, Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes ICS

VCSE Role as an NHS partner: Visible and Growing

The voluntary sector already plays a key role in the future landscape of health and care as envisioned in the 10-Year Health Plan, building on existing partnerships between VCSE and NHS organisations.

According to 'Fit for the Future', this includes:

- ⇒ Supporting people newly diagnosed with long-term conditions.
- ⇒ Providing services like debt advice and employment support co-located in Neighbourhood Health Centres
- ⇒ Supporting people's health and wellbeing through social prescribing, increasingly via digital routes in the future MyCare app
- ⇒ Strengthening public trust and uptake of childhood vaccinations
- ⇒ Driving innovation that support healthier lives
- ⇒ To co-fund clinical research roles in the NHS

We know from local VCSE-NHS partnerships that there are other ways in which we can mobilise our efforts behind the ambitions of the plan. These references demonstrate that the 10-Year Plan has taken into account the evidence and experience shared by the voluntary sector through the ChangeNHS process. They reflect a growing recognition among NHS leaders and policymakers of the key role of the VCSE and the value of community and patient power alongside clinical services.

"It's great to see the focus on neighbourhood health including co-located NHS, local authority and VCSE professionals: these can be in the community buildings already owned and operated by the VCSE."

Emma Rowse CEO Voluntary Sector Forum Cornwall & Member of the Alliance42 Leadership Group

"Communities need more than clinical services: with investment in VCSE infrastructure locally, we can make sure that people are not left behind in the move towards digital, localised and preventive services."

Tracy Hopkins CEO Citizens Advice Blackpool and VCFSE Alliance Chair Lancashire and South Cumbria

Social Value: the Business Case for VCSE

In a context of constrained NHS budgets, strategically partnering with the VCSE sector is key to achieving the greatest possible impact and value for money. The evidence is clear: for every £1 invested in the VCSE sector, there is *at least* a £3.50 return in social and economic value. This is strategic commissioning for social value and development. When the public sector partners with and funds a local VCSE organisation through grants or contracts, it unlocks:

- Volunteering power that improves health
- Philanthropic fundraising that brings new resources into the system
- Direct service delivery that generates long-term public benefit
- Access to the broader VCSE sector and our local networks in which we operate with each other

"The commitment to multi-year settlements is a big positive as certainly in our patch it is still generally non-recurrent investment for the VCFSE sector and historically this has been out of our hands."

Rachel Jennings, Communities Lead, Suffolk and North-East Essex ICP & Member of the Alliance42 Leadership Group

The 10-Year Plan commits to a three-year NHS funding settlement starting in 2026/27, creating the conditions for strategic commissioners to create more stable, multi-year funding arrangements with VCSE partners – and more stability in the NHS itself. Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) will be expected to shape a diverse provider landscape for neighbourhood health services—one that includes the VCSE sector as a core partner in health and wellbeing, not just a supplier in a procurement process.

Future ICBs, covering broader geographies aligned with devolved mayoral authorities, will be required to strengthen their strategy, user involvement, and partnership capabilities. NHS Foundation Trusts—some of which will transition into Integrated Healthcare Organisations (IHOs)—will need to “look beyond their narrow organisational boundaries” to focus on population health. To succeed in this, NHS organisations can work in strategic partnership with the VCSE sector—recognising its unique ability to reach underserved communities, foster trust, and deliver services rooted in local need. VCSE leaders embedded at the strategic level within ICBs, place & neighbourhood structures can support decisions that account for inequalities and allocate resources efficiently.

“This plan makes variation inevitable, but direction negotiable. That’s why we must build strong relationships, define our collective delivery models, and clearly articulate the community-centred principles we expect to underpin local health and care.”

Warren Escadale CEO Voluntary Sector North-West & Alliance42 Leadership Group member

A Call to NHS leaders: Think about the Infrastructure

We called for *consistent, long-term co-investment in VCSE infrastructure* in the ChangeNHS consultation. Matching the ICB footprints and those of devolved authorities, ICS-VCSE Alliances and the wider VCSE Local Infrastructure Organisations (see Endnotes). offer an efficient and proven route for ICBs and future IHOs to strategically connect with the thousands of trusted, locally anchored VCSE organisations and groups.

Convening this breadth of organisations requires serious time, leadership skills and sustained investment. The VCSE sector holds deep, trusted relationships with local communities—relationships built over time through consistent presence, cultural understanding and community-led delivery. This trust is essential to the future of integrated health services, enabling more effective engagement, earlier intervention, and more equitable access to care.

ICS-VCSE Alliances are paramount for enabling equitable and impactful partnership between the broader VCSE sector and statutory healthcare partners, however funding for Alliances has been inconsistent across England and in some it has been short-term and insufficient in the first three years of ICSs. Overall, it has not matched the scale or social and economic value of the whole VCSE sector.

Without sustained meaningful investment in local VCSE infrastructure, the NHS could lose the bridge to the assets, resources and trusted relationships of the voluntary. It could lose the vital connection to the people and communities it aims to serve, especially those who face substantial and entrenched health inequalities. The NHS risks having no coherent means to speak to, co-design, market-shape and partner with their local VCSE sector.

Together, we can rise to the ambitions of the 10-Year Health Plan, bringing the assets, resources and intelligence of local VCSE organisations alongside those of the NHS. We’re here to mobilise their efforts behind the plan in an equal partnership of VCSE and NHS leaders and organisations.

Notes:

1. The 10-Year Plan itself refers variously to the VCSE sector as the Voluntary Sector, Third Sector, Civil Society, Charities and Social Enterprises. VCSE stands for Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector; some ICS refer to VCFSE to highlight the role of Faith organisations.
2. Alliance42 was formed in October 2024 and is comprised of the VC(F)SE Alliances of the current ICB footprints. Its mission is to drive systemic change in health and care by embedding the local VCSE sector at the heart of decision-making and service delivery within Integrated Care Systems (ICSs).
3. The figures about VCSE sector value are drawn from Chapman T. (2022). Third Sector Trends in England & Wales 2022: sector structure, purpose, energy and impact. Web source: <https://www.communityfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Third-Sector-Trends-in-England-and-Wales-2022-structure-purpose-energy-and-impact-November-2022.pdf>
4. The figures about the community sector microbiome are drawn from Leyshon C, James S, Leyshon M, Esmene S and Hopkinson J. (2025) The Value of the Voluntary Sector Microbiome in Integrated Care Systems. Web source: <https://www.navca.org.uk/unseen-but-essential>
5. VCSE local infrastructure organisations “support local charities, community groups and volunteers — helping people work together on what matters to them.”. Find out about the four functions of LIOs at <https://www.navca.org.uk/what-our-members-do>
6. The Leadership Group of Alliance42 has been selected by the ICS-VCSE Alliances in each Region.

Alliance42 Leadership Group

Emma Rowse CEO Voluntary Sector Forum Cornwall (South-West)

Garry Jones, CEO Support Staffordshire (West Midlands)

Joe Hannett, Partnership Manager, Community Futures, Lancashire & South Cumbria VCFSE Alliance (North-West)

Lisa Taylor, Health and Wellbeing Programme Director (North-East & Yorkshire)

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