



Bold thinking for better health

# Bold thinking for better health

The King's Fund's new  
five-year corporate strategy



June 2025

# A message from the Chair and Chief Executive

At its heart, our new strategy is about increasing the positive impact we can have to improve people's health.

Too many people are struggling to access the health and care support they need. Our NHS and social care systems are severely challenged.

For over a century, The King's Fund has worked to improve people's health and care. Over the next five years we believe that we can deliver the biggest impact by using our independent voice to help tackle the thorniest questions facing our health and care system, and in turn society. We will do this through our research, analysis and insight; leadership and organisational development with health and care leaders; convening and events; and partnering with others.

This requires a focus on both 'what' and 'how' to make change happen, a 'policy into practice and practice into policy' approach.

Our strategy puts people first. We exist to improve health and care for people, not to serve institutions. And we know that change is ultimately led by people, and that citizens and communities are often the agents of change who enable it to stick.

We will focus on fewer priorities than previously, but use our combined capabilities to both distinguish ourselves from others and ensure we are making the greatest impact.

We will build on our heritage and independence to boldly address the most pressing issues of the day, as well as looking to the future; from the core sustainability of the funding models in health and social care, to the ability of AI and future technologies to transform the way we organise, lead and treat ill health.

We will apply sustained focus to build a body of work on priority issues, offering solutions as well as highlighting challenges, and judging ourselves by our ability to help enact change with people and to policies.

All this requires a different type of organisation. One that is even more future focused, innovative, efficient and set up for delivery, to ensure we can make best use of our endowment funding and partner for strategic impact. Through this period, we will build on work to create a vibrant, energetic and supportive workplace, where everyone contributes to implementation of the strategy and feels valued.

Equally, it is important that our brand is fresh, modern, human and helps articulate our impatience for change in the world. It is an opportunity to ensure that how we communicate with our audiences and stakeholders reflects our revised vision, mission, purpose and organisational values.

We want to both collaborate with existing partners and build new relationships to deliver our vision.

**Join us in bold thinking for better health.**



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kakkar'.

**Lord Kakkar**  
Chair



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Woolnough'.

**Sarah Woolnough**  
Chief Executive

# Why do we need a new strategy?

We have a long and proud heritage as an organisation. From championing the health of disadvantaged Londoners at the end of the 19th century to illuminating the multiple issues facing the health and care system in recent years, we have worked with the public, health and care professionals and other stakeholders to challenge the status quo and secure improvements. We have done this in different ways over the years.

And while we have seen huge improvements to improve health during this time, we recognise the scale of the challenge we all face now, to create and sustain good health, deliver high quality health care in a timely fashion, and ensure everyone gets the care that they want and need.

The world is changing fast – politically, economically, socially and technologically. Our population is facing complex health issues, yet there are huge opportunities for positive disruption and innovation to find new solutions that benefit more of us.

We have worked with people, communities, partners and stakeholders to shape our new direction. They have told us they want us to face into these challenges to create bolder ideas for improvement. They want us to focus as much on the 'how' of change as on the 'what'.





Despite considerable consensus about some of the changes that we would like to see – people and patients at the centre of their health care, care delivered closer to home, systems digitally enabled to deliver better services, and a population that is as healthy as our international peers to name a few – achieving them has proved difficult.

We have a role to play in exploring how to now make those shifts a reality. We want to help move the dial on some of the challenges we can see.

Accelerating our work across sectors and disciplines offers an opportunity for fresh perspectives and greater impact. We will bring together a broader range of people cross generations, geography and world view, to host difficult and honest conversations.

Many of the stakeholders we work with are hungry for solutions and examples of where things work better. They want to learn from the best insight in the world, and so we will build our international networks further to this end.

Perhaps most notably, many of our partners want us to be bolder, more urgent and impatient for change. Building on our heritage and independence, we will challenge the status quo and create new solutions; to ‘say it as it is’ and look in new and different places. We will be compelling storytellers, support and nurture conditions for change and we will sustain focus until we achieve impact.

# A new direction

For this strategic period, we have gone back to first principles to refresh our vision, mission, purpose and values to guide and focus our work. We want to ensure we are set up to deliver and make a positive impact.

## **Our vision**

**is a world where everyone  
can live a healthy life.**

## **Our mission**

**is to inspire hope and build confidence  
for positive change.**

**We achieve this through expert insights  
and original research, developing leaders  
and their organisations, convening, and  
strategic, collaborative partnerships.**

## **Our purpose**

**is to boldly reimagine a health and  
care system that is compassionate,  
equitable and fit for the future, with  
people at its heart.**

Our values are integral to how we will achieve our mission.  
They are:

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### People first

We focus on the needs of people. We listen, we understand, we care. We put people at the centre of processes, systems and policies. We exist to create a health and care system that puts people first. We create environments where equity is promoted, diversity is valued and everyone is included.

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### Challenge the status quo

We are bold in seeking opportunity and creating change. We look to find new and better ways of doing things. We question the accepted and the existing. We do that every day, in the small details and across big processes. We never argue for change for change's sake – we always ensure there's a clear benefit.

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### Always objective

We are independent as an organisation. We are objective as people. We base our perspective on facts and evidence. We think critically, act boldly and carve out our own success, free from unnecessary influence or dependence.

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### Be courageous

We step forward with courage, creativity and vision. We speak out with knowledge, confidence and clarity. We shine a light on issues and inefficiencies to look for solutions. We encourage, support and inspire; others look to us for advice and guidance.

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### Create impact together

We are proactive in making change happen. We work collaboratively with partners to share expertise and build momentum for a better health and care system. We work together as one King's Fund, challenging and supporting each other, and sharing a common vision and direction.

## What this means in practice

We will broaden our focus beyond just health and care services, and focus more on creating and sustaining good health, as well as the delivery of high-quality care. This recognises the role of the environment in which we live, our housing – climate, our communities and our financial circumstances – as having a big impact on our health. Likewise, the opportunity to enhance people's lives through the provision of great care is something we want to more actively work towards.

We will put people – citizens, patients, staff – at the heart of our work, recognising that services and work environments must serve them, and that lasting change is led by people: a 'do with' rather than 'do to' approach.

**The 'how' of change is as important as the 'what'. We will pursue a 'policy into practice, practice into policy' approach to make sure that policies work on the ground, and are informed by what we are hearing from our partners.**

Our leadership and organisational development work, convening and partnering with health and care professionals, and others, allows us this unique insight into what really works. We believe we are at our best when we use this 'combined impact' approach and provide a strong feedback loop to policymakers about the deliverability of solutions.

We will learn from the best in the world. To enable this, The King's Fund will build our international learning, reach and insight.

We will facilitate more global thinking and conversations to bring fresh challenge and new perspectives to answer the toughest questions, and take our highly valued leadership development capability across borders and learn together in an international community to gain insight and drive action.

International collaboration will be key to our work: we will seek to build strategic partnerships with global organisations to tackle shared challenges that affect health.

We will start immediately with a focus on several 'wicked' policy and practice issues, and sustain focus until we achieve change.

We will work in partnership to generate solutions as well as diagnose the problems. We will continue to help partners understand the health and care system, providing insight to make sense of trends. But we will do more future-focused work and horizon scanning, understanding how our health and care system, and broader public services that affect health, can change in the wake of huge digital and demographic shifts.

## Priority areas

We have identified four particular areas of priority focus for the coming strategy period. These are the result of consultation and discussion across the organisation and beyond. They all represent pressing issues where a big shift is required to deliver positive change for people. They also reflect our ability to take a longer-term view as an independent organisation that allows us to work beyond financial and political cycles, to build on our previous work in these areas and influence the debate over coming years.

**People first.** We will put people at the heart of what we do. Only by listening to those who use services and those who work in them can we design a health and care system that meets people's needs and improve the health of the nation.

**Creation of good health for all.** We will work for the creation of good health across the life course, including the broader socio-economic, physical and policy environments that shape population health and inequalities in health.

**Reimagine social care.** We will value the vital role of social care in giving people the dignity and freedom to live a fulfilling life for longer. We will shine a light on solutions needed for meaningful reform.

**Innovate now and for the future.** We will take a longer-term view, identifying and modelling future trends to better comprehend the impact of demographic and technological changes. We will consider the huge potential of innovation across the life sciences, and of digital, AI and future technologies for health and care. We will support people to navigate these changes and learn from the best.

We will sustain focus on these issues, building a body of work, to achieve maximum impact.



# Our emerging work programme

**We are already re-orientating the organisation to help us deliver the new strategy, but this work will continue and be further developed over coming months and years.**

**Our emerging work programme includes headline work on each strategic priority. A few examples of early strategy projects are set out below.**

## People first

### Giving people a voice

Building on our patient admin work and the British Social Attitudes survey we will continue to ensure that the public's concerns and challenges when accessing health and care are given voice. We will show how these issues can be addressed by working with patients and users of services.

We will work on how health and care systems can best hear from those they serve. What would it look like if the primary measure of performance for health and care systems and providers of services was how patients experience their services? How can we measure what matters to people and communities? And how can we use this to drive improvement and also ensure that no voices go unheard?

### 'Doing with' over 'doing to'

We want to help build a movement for change where the norm becomes 'doing with' not 'doing to' – harnessing the power of people and communities in driving and designing services and systems around need.

Radical and hopeful change in how public services work with people and communities is urgently needed. 'Do With' is a network of people and organisations calling for a radical shift in the public sector from 'doing to' to 'doing with'. This is about harnessing the power of community-led not just community-based approaches to how services are designed, delivered and decided upon.

### Valuing the human side of change

Profound demographic and generational changes, as well as clinical and technological change – including from the acceleration of digital and AI – all present huge opportunity and challenge for how people lead through and respond to change.

We will work with young people on what they want from health and care services in the future, recognising they are digital natives, and often have different views about work and what they want from the state.

### '10 years, 10 people'

As the government embarks on its 10 Year Health Plan, we want to understand what the changes will really mean for people and their health. In this long-term study, we'll work with a cross-section of people who interact with the health and care sector to explore how their experiences and perceptions change over the course of a decade.



## Creation of good health for all

### **Reimagining a health and welfare system – examining a modern social contract between individuals, communities and the state**

What would Beveridge's defining 1942 report look like if he were commissioned today, looking at current needs and ahead to the next generation?

We will explore and recognise the wider interrelated social and economic issues that impact health, including poverty, work and education. We will do so by looking ahead and considering various scenarios. We will invite expert thought leaders to co-create and challenge this vision and participate in a wide-ranging, high-profile conversation about what a modern health and care system – and wider social contract on the role of the state – would look like if it was imagined now and for the future.

We will learn from the Wanless review to inform our approach. We will actively seek partners to support our ambitions in this area.

### **Learning from previous successes, and from elsewhere, to drive future change**

We will explore past initiatives that have had significant positive impacts on health and care, such as the reduction in smoking, and apply these learnings to the current major challenges facing us – and particularly children – today, such as obesity and poor mental health.

We will look at the actions and levers across society that are needed to affect change at this scale, and who is best placed in government, business, the health system and other agencies, to drive this.

### **Examining how we value the creation of good health**

We want to interrogate how we value health and its contribution to people's lives in the broadest sense – a healthy society and increased prosperity – so we can understand what steps we can realistically take towards prioritising prevention. We will use evidence and insight to challenge how what we value translates into what we do for the benefit of health.





## Reimagine social care

### **Making the case for reform**

Many people do not understand how difficult the social care system is to navigate until they try to access care for themselves or a loved one. And too many people struggle to access the care they need. We will use evidence, insight and storytelling to highlight the problems and undelivered value in social care and to help build the momentum needed for change. By highlighting the human and societal impact, we will make the case for urgent reform.

### **Dismantling the barriers to reform**

We will collaborate with partners in health and social care, people who draw on services and wider stakeholders across government and beyond to identify and set out the economic, social and health-related value of social care and help to dismantle the key barriers to fundamental reform.

### **Be hungry to learn from around the world about how to improve adult social care**

We will explore the best approaches and understand what is needed to put them into practice. We will compare the approach to social care in England with other countries, identifying the common elements of different successful models.

## Innovate now and for the future

### **A 'futures lab' for health and care**

We will seek to become a trusted source of future-focused policy insight and leadership capability – developed in partnership and grounded in real-world experience. We will look ahead to the trends, scenarios and possibilities of the future and work with policy-makers and leaders to apply insights and learning now.

### **A new offer: navigating and embracing the opportunities of digital and AI**

We will develop a new digital and AI leadership capability offer, focused on the human side of innovative change and designed to equip leaders with the tools to navigate complexity with confidence.

We will convene organisations that are getting to grips with using AI to transform health and care in this country and internationally. As part of our 'policy into practice, practice into policy' approach, we will work in partnership with people and providers to explore how AI is being used, across the workforce and for service delivery.

We will undertake a comparative analysis and provide alternative perspectives by showcasing AI deployment in other countries. We will use this insight to shape how policy could better embrace innovation and roll it out more equitably.

### **Cross-border leadership development to shape and prepare for the future of work**

We will build an international community of practice around demographic change and workforce leadership. This will harness collective insight about how careers and workforce mix will need to change in future, and how we can learn from places and people leading the way.

### **An International Alliance for Children's Health, to drive change now and for future generations**

To confront the root causes of poor mental and physical health in children and young people – from early childhood through to working age – and to understand the best approaches to support improved health, we will examine the evidence on poverty, education, digital environments, safe play, physical activity and more. Most importantly, we will centre the voices of children and young people: shaping the vision, setting the priorities and guiding the work to build an alliance for change by learning from what's working around the world to create meaningful change – for every child now and born in the next generation.



# Embracing our new direction and values

## **Our own organisational development will reflect this direction and our values**

Our strength is our people, and our value comes from their skills, expertise and commitment.

We want The King's Fund to be vibrant, energetic and supportive, where everyone contributes and feels valued.

We will set goals and measures for each priority and across our work programme and regularly review, focused on impact.

Our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion is core to our purpose of reimagining an 'equitable health and care system'. It is an essential thread that runs through all our work and is a part of everyone's role. We continue to prioritise anti-racism and gender equity, and this new strategy will see us extend our focus to disability and neurodiversity, as well as socio-economic status and class.

We will actively prioritise the development of new skills linked to the strategy – for example AI and digital skills – either by partnering with others or by further developing our own expertise.

We will continue to ensure the good financial stewardship of the organisation by ensuring we're managing our resources both sustainably and to achieve maximum impact.



## What will be different?

We want to coalesce more around our strategic priorities, so reduce some smaller pieces of work to allow us the time and resources to focus on larger, more impactful work.

We will endeavour to integrate even more closely across the Fund, to use our unique combined capabilities – policy and research, leadership and organisational development, convening and partnerships – so our partners will notice a broader, mixed-method offer from us.

We will use our independence to hold space for important and sometimes difficult conversations, bringing together more cross-disciplinary, cross-geography and cross-demography groups, seeking different views across sectors and spanning different political persuasions, to ensure we are robustly testing ideas and hearing a wide range of voices.

We will increase our capability to work with international partners, so The King's Fund becomes a key conduit for how our health and care system learns from and shares knowledge with peers in other countries.

We will pay more attention to what it takes to secure enduring change. This will require us to develop our storytelling and movement building skills to increase the salience of issues like social care as a precursor for change. It will involve working with others to deliver a people centred health and care system via a 'do with' approach.

We will build our skills and partner to better horizon scan, model future trends, and support leaders and others to adapt to new innovation, particularly around AI and other digital technologies.

We will build relationships with new audiences to bring more people closer to the work of The King's Fund and build broader partnerships to influence the change we want to see.

## What does success look like?

Ultimately, we want to move towards a world where everyone can live a healthy life.

We will regularly measure progress against our strategic priorities and other core elements of our work programme.

We will build a more active culture of feedback and continuous improvement across the organisation and with our partners, so that we can learn and evolve our offer further. We will reflect on the impact we are having against this strategy in our annual reports and at other key moments. We will engage our staff and broader stakeholders in monitoring how we are doing.

**Join us to be part of our bold, visionary new work to reimagine health and care.**

**Let's share our insights and our expertise to illuminate challenges and develop innovative, creative solutions.**

**Together, we can bring about real, lasting change so everyone can live a healthy life.**





**The King's Fund is an independent charity working to improve people's health. Our vision is a world where everyone can live a healthy life. Our mission is to inspire hope and build confidence for positive change. We achieve this through expert insights and original research, developing leaders and their organisations, convening, and strategic, collaborative partnerships.**

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