

Equalities Diversity

and Inclusion Plan

2021-22

June 2021

About

As we begin to emerge from the pandemic, it has become ever clearer that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act and the most deprived sections of our society. This has shone a stark light on the need to address the continuing impact of inequalities on people's access to and outcomes from health and social care services.

This document lays out the steps we will take to apply an Equalities Diversity and Inclusion lens on all our work in 2021-22 and provides an outline of projects we will be undertaking that focus on Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion.

In 2020 Healthwatch England made an explicit commitment to put Equalities Diversity and Inclusion at the centre of our work. Last August, we published an organisational action plan setting out our approach in this area for the first time.

In May of this year, we restated our commitment when we launched our [refreshed strategy](#), which saw the addition of a new strategic objective - To seek the views of those who are seldom heard and reduce the barriers they face.

Also, in 2021 we launched new brand values with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at their core and in 2021-22, we will build on the work we have carried out over the past 12 months as we design our programmes of work to meet the diverse needs of the population we represent.

As was the case in 2020-21, our National Committee will scrutinise our delivery against the objectives of this plan to ensure that Healthwatch England lives up to commitments that we have set.

We recognise that some people and communities face multiple layers of disadvantage and discrimination. We will ensure that our approach to our work reflects the intersectional inequalities that people face.

The objective of this plan

This plan aims to ensure that we meet the commitments to addressing Equality Diversity and Inclusion in our refreshed strategy throughout all workstreams, both internally and externally.

We will do this by:

- Ensuring that every piece of policy work we undertake is designed to deliver real-world impact that addresses Equality, Diversity and Inclusion issues.
- Ensuring that we continue to develop an evidence base that informs our work more accurately and reflects the diversity of the community we represent.
- Fostering a workforce culture that promotes and embraces Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- Involving and consulting with individuals and groups as necessary and develop our workstreams through local and national partnerships where appropriate.
- Providing support to local Healthwatch to challenge local systems to be better on Equality Diversity and Inclusion and providing them with the tools and skills to carry out engagement that will put Equality, Diversity and Inclusion issues on the table of local decision-makers.

- Conducting appropriate and proportionate Equality Impact Assessments when planning our work and assessing how effective these have been in ensuring our work has factored in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion issues.

Projects with a specific focus on equalities

We will also carry out several work programs with a specific focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. These will be designed with a diverse representation from across the staff team at Healthwatch England, various input from the network, and external expertise.

1. Qualitative research programme on vaccine hesitancy among individuals from a Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi background.

- In June of this year, we published our findings from an in-depth piece of engagement with 95 people from a Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi background who expressed hesitant attitudes or low confidence towards Covid 19 vaccines.
- Since January 2021, the Healthwatch network has gathered views and experiences from 15,000 people across England about the Covid-19 vaccine and the rollout.
- Overall, feedback has been positive, but uptake of the vaccine has been significantly lower among specific communities. There remain issues of vaccine confidence among groups now being targeted for the vaccine.
- Healthwatch England commissioned Traverse to undertake in-depth conversations and online exercises with the 95 participants from African, Bangladeshi, Caribbean, and Pakistani backgrounds over five weeks during March and April 2021.
- The engagement and research were with people who have primarily hesitant attitudes or lack confidence in the vaccines, testing out several hypotheses developed from the original work of the network as to why people are hesitant and what could be done to give additional assurance.
- It is also worth noting that the findings from this research and how it was undertaken provide important lessons beyond the Covid-19 vaccines programme and can help as we all work together to tackle health inequalities.
- We will use the lessons learned from this work to inform and refine our approach to future projects.

2. Focused campaign to engage people whose experiences are not being heard

- COVID-19 highlighted the health inequalities faced by some communities, especially individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- To help address the issues some communities face, we plan to run a communications campaign to support specific communities to share their experiences and highlight the barriers they face to health and care leaders.
- This campaign will be insight-driven and run in partnership with our network and external partners.

3. Embedding best practice on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in local Healthwatch and supporting the network to understand and deliver on their duty in this area.

Last year, we initiated a programme to identify Healthwatch who carry out good work around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and understand best practices across the network. We recruited a secondee to work alongside our Learning and Development Manager to identify best practice on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion that Local Healthwatch can adopt more widely. We will continue to build on that work in 2021-22.

Specific initiatives include:

- **Board diversity** - We are running a pilot to survey Boards in the North East of England to understand their diversity with a view to rolling this out across England. This will help inform future work we have planned to support Board development.
- **Training opportunities** - We have invested in training for the network on understanding and applying the public sector equality duty. This work is being done in partnership with the Consultation Institute and has been tailored to meet local Healthwatch needs. We have also commissioned a course from the Diversity Trust to help Local Healthwatch develop their approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. We are also providing six courses throughout the year for people who want to learn how to create easy read materials.
- **Collecting demographic data** - We offered a grant opportunity for a local Healthwatch to facilitate two sessions on collecting demographics information and understanding the barriers that sometimes make this challenging. Healthwatch Tower Hamlets will be running two sessions in June and using feedback from participants to produce some resources to deliver this.
- **Peer support** - We have set up a quarterly peer support network meeting for local Healthwatch to share successes, challenges, and approaches to Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion. The first meeting will take place in June, where attendees will shape the agenda for the group and agree on what they would like to get out of it.
- **Engaging different communities**- We have published a new research guide to help local Healthwatch better engage communities we need to hear from more.
- **Communities of interest pilot** - Following a grant opportunity to facilitate this pilot, we hope to offer six local Healthwatch the opportunity to work together between June and September 2021 to understand the experiences of people from Gypsy and Irish Traveller ethnic backgrounds. We will also support another six local Healthwatch to engage people from a Black African background. The two facilitators will then run sessions in October 2021 that will be open to everyone in the Healthwatch Network to hear about their approaches and what they learned.

Embedding a focus on Equalities Discrimination and Inclusion in all work

1. Policy and Influencing

In 2021-22 our general work will focus on the following areas:

- **Dentistry** – This has been a major theme in our feedback over the last nine months, with access and affordability issues the principle driving cause. We will be exploring how this breaks down across different demographics and how affordability and continual NHS price charges are increasing inequality.
- **Social care** – Provisional plans will look at two topics. Firstly, the level of unmet need and access to social care, particularly among people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Secondly, the information and advice available to people and how current services take account of the tailored communications needed for different communities.
- **Digital health services** – We will be sharing the findings of our work looking at digital exclusions, picking up on a strong theme around language barriers.

In 2021-22 in our responsive policy work, we will:

- Use our evidence to successfully influence NHSE and Government communications as we enter the recovery phase to ensure it addresses the needs of different communities.
- We will continue our work to push the sector to gather better demographic data to support its understanding of access to and experience of services.
- Secure references to Healthwatch work with seldom heard communities in two reviews/investigations into handling the Covid-19 pandemic.

Building on work carried out in 2020-21, we will continue to eliminate any data bias from our evidence base. This will 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 represent the needs of as many different communities as possible. We will also encourage and support local Healthwatch to identify gaps in their data and 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.

2. Working with local Healthwatch

We will continue to support local Healthwatch in understanding their duties 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.

In 2021-22 we will focus on the following areas:

- Ensure local Healthwatch services understand their legal equalities duties and take a consistent approach to champion equalities in their work.
- Encourage local Healthwatch to review the makeup of their boards to ensure a diverse range of perspectives drives their decisions.
- Identify if we are recruiting enough volunteers from the diverse communities we support and, if not, what solutions are needed.
- Improve the skills and confidence of local Healthwatch to engage and support more communities to have their say on care.
- Promote a Healthwatch culture where everyone feels welcome, that their views are valued and that they want to work with and for us to make a difference.
- We will support local Healthwatch to hold NHS and social care services to account when it comes to meeting their Equality, Diversity and Inclusion duties.

3. As an employer

We will foster a workforce culture that promotes and embraces Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and recognises that everyone adds value to a team. We are committed to supporting our workforce to develop, commission and deliver high-quality work that meets the needs of everyone.

In 2021-22 we will focus on the following areas:

- **Equalities Impact Assessment** - We have updated our Equalities Impact Assessment Template for our project work. In 2021-22 we will track how this is being used to develop work programmes. We will also assess how its implementation improves our impact and highlight where challenges still exist.
- **Talent management, learning and development** - We will ensure that all staff can develop their skills and capabilities in their roles via on-the-job, project management and academic learning. We will extend opportunities for staff through secondments and mentoring. We will ensure all staff undertake our e-learning course on Equality, Human Rights and Diversity – we will review this training and see how we might augment it to ensure that the training offer to staff is effective. We will use agencies that specialise in recruiting diverse talent as part of recruitment processes.
- **Recruitment** - We will demonstrate transparency to ensure all internal and external potential candidates are treated fairly. We will encourage candidates from all the protected characteristics to apply for roles at all levels. Candidates will be anonymous when shortlisted. We will ensure a diverse makeup for all our recruitment panels.
- **Workforce relations** - We continue to strive for a happy working environment for all staff. We will use staff surveys to identify where there may be unfairness and inequalities and seek to address and resolve any issues when they arise. Line Managers will complete unconscious bias training as part of their mandatory objectives. Our Staff Engagement Group will continue to represent staff

and escalate any issue they feel does not align with our equalities aims. We also have a Speak Up Guardian representing Healthwatch England staff.

4. 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 **2021-22** we will focus on the following areas:

- **Raising awareness of our brand** - We will focus on improving our marketing of the Healthwatch service to communities whose views are not being heard. We will use a mixture of improved brand support for local Healthwatch and national social, partnership, and PR activities.
- **Marking our advice more accessible** - We will focus on making all our content, including advice and information, more accessible to diverse communities. We will review our accessibility policy and roll out tools, such as being able to translate content on the local websites we support.
- **Increasing feedback from different communities** - We will run reactive and proactive campaigns to target communities whose experiences are not being heard, including a focused campaign referenced in the 'Projects with a specific focus on Equalities' section of this plan.
- **Evidence use** - We will focus on increasing awareness of our findings related to different communities through PR, social media, partnerships and email marketing.
- **Communicating with Local Healthwatch** - We will champion and promote the importance of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in our communications to local Healthwatch and the support we provide to staff and volunteers.