



# Newsletter

Winter 2025



The Primary Care Collaborative is a combined voice for dentistry, general practice, optometry, and pharmacy, working together to improve people's health across the North East and North Cumbria. The PCC will act together to solve problems, influence decisions, and share good ideas.

## Welcome

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Since our last newsletter was published, we know that a very difficult winter has meant that primary care has been under significant pressure, alongside our wider NHS colleagues. We have seen very visible signs of this pressure in secondary care, with queueing ambulances a frequent sight on the news, but we are very aware that practices from all primary care sectors have been putting huge efforts into supporting patients facing a wave of respiratory illnesses and conditions brought on by the cold weather. The Acute Respiratory Infection Hubs and vaccination services that many of you have been involved in are a great example of the invaluable contribution primary care makes during increased winter demand.

However, spring is coming, and with it the launch of the [10 Year Plan](#), something we're hoping to see build on the principles of last year's Darzi review. The plan promises to take NHS focus from hospital to community, sickness to prevention, analogue to digital. As it is launched and organisations begin to take stock of how the next decade may take shape, it will be important to make sure all our primary care voices are strongly heard – one of our central aims when we set up the Primary Care Collaborative.

Wes Streeting's open consultation to inform the plan is still running. We'd urge you to [share your experiences and perspective as a primary care workforce member](#) and enrich our input.

# Optimising access to patient records: NCRS expansion pilot update

**Efforts to improve patient experience and ensure seamless continuity of care are advancing through the initiation of a new pilot focused on expanding access to the National Care Records Service (NCRS).**

Led by the North of England Commissioning Support Unit (NECS) on behalf of the Primary Care Collaborative (PCC) and the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB), the project seeks to transform care delivery across optometry and dentistry.

This pilot builds on work conducted by NECS that underscored the potential benefits of NCRS access for optometry and dentistry providers. Key areas of impact identified include improved access to medication lists, medical conditions, and allergy information—elements critical to delivering timely and accurate patient care.

The pilot officially launched on 9th January 2025 with enthusiastic participation from dental and optometry sites across the region. The project has expanded its scope, with additional licenses enabling participation from 13 practices in phase one, providing a broader opportunity to gather valuable insights.

## Phase one focus

The pilot's initial phase is centred on testing and refining processes, technology, and workflows to integrate NCRS access into primary care pathways. It emphasises a collaborative approach, fostering open communication among optometry and dentistry providers, NECS, and the broader NHS. Participants have received detailed training, technical support, and governance plans to ensure smooth implementation.

## Objectives and outcomes

The primary goals of the NCRS pilot include:

- Enhancing continuity of care.
- Supporting clinical decision-making.
- Improving patient safety and service efficiency.

The project also aims to strengthen care coordination by addressing challenges specific to each provider group:

- **Optometry:** Reducing time-consuming processes by providing essential patient details, such as medication lists and chronic condition histories.
- **Dentistry:** Mitigating fragmented care and inefficiencies by enabling seamless access to diagnostic and medication data.

Phase one of the pilot will evaluate the impacts on patient outcomes, workflows, and clinician experiences, with the goal of refining processes for a broader rollout.

As the project progresses, the PCC will continue to share updates and outcomes.

# We need your views to inform the Primary Care Workforce Strategy

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The Primary Care Collaborative was asked by the ICB to create a Primary Care Workforce Strategy. It aims to address challenges and opportunities across General Practice, Dentistry, Optometry, and Pharmacy.

Your insights will help us create a practical, inclusive, and impactful strategy. To ensure this strategy truly reflects the voices of the entire primary care workforce, we're hosting a series of engagement events and a workplace wellbeing survey.

[Engagement Events](#): These sessions will be interactive opportunities to share your thoughts on Staffing Issues and Health and Wellbeing (Workshop 2A) and Developing Leaders, Access to Services and Opportunities for Change (Workshop 2B). Feel free to join sessions of both or either workshop.

[Workplace Wellbeing Survey](#): The survey only takes 5-10 minutes, and your anonymous feedback will be invaluable in shaping the discussions and final strategy.

[Workshop dates and registration here.](#)

## Help the PCC define its priorities – we want your views

Take this [quick survey](#) to share your opinions on what the Primary Care Collaborative's priorities should be.

Last year, as we established NENC Primary Care Collaborative, we worked together as a group to agree our vision and set out some key priorities for the organisation.

This year, [we want to take your views](#) on board as we shape priorities for the year ahead. We strongly believe that the PCC needs the wider membership's ideas if we are to make a tangible, lasting, and positive difference for our workforce and people in NENC. With this in mind, please share your thoughts by [taking our survey](#).





**“We want to hear directly from the people working on the ground—how does it feel, what’s working, and where are the challenges?”**

**Dr Neil O’Brien**  
Executive Medical Director



In September 2024, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) published its five year [Clinical Conditions Strategic Plan](#). We caught up with the ICB’s Executive Medical Director, Dr Neil O’Brien to discuss what this plan means for frontline practitioners, patients, and the future of integrated care.

## A clear set of priorities

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The [Clinical Conditions Strategic Plan](#) identifies a set of priority areas, including lung cancer, cardiovascular health, diabetes, and children’s oral health. These conditions were chosen based on their profound impact on the population.

“These are the conditions that are having the greatest effect on mortality and morbidity,” Neil explained. “And crucially, they’re areas where we know we can make a difference.”

For the primary care workforce, these priorities provide a clear direction for the future. However, as Neil highlights, achieving progress will require collaboration across every level of the health and care system, with primary care playing a key role.



## Engaging the workforce

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One of the key questions raised during the discussion was how the lived experiences of those working in general practice and community services will feed into the implementation of the plan.

Neil was unequivocal: the voices of primary care staff will be front and centre. “Early this year, we’re going to conduct a listening exercise with general practice,” he said. “We want to hear directly from the people working on the ground—how does it feel, what’s working, and where are the challenges?”

“For now, the Clinical Conditions Strategic Plan is a broad set of aspirations,” he explained. “But as we engage with the workforce and community partners, we’ll begin to flesh out the detailed steps required to deliver on those goals.”

While the plan provides a roadmap for addressing key health priorities, the workforce will need support to deliver on its ambitions. Neil acknowledged the immense strain on general practice but emphasised that the North East and North Cumbria have a strong foundation to build upon.

“We’ve got more GPs per registered population than many other parts of the country,” he said. “And over the years, we’ve used skill mix well to strengthen general practice.”

# Sharing and scaling success

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As part of the strategic plan's rollout, sharing best practice will be critical to achieving its goals. Neil pointed to [Boost learning academy](#), an online platform developed by the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, as a valuable resource for the primary care workforce.

"The academy is part of the [Boost](#) learning and improvement community where anyone can share best practice and access improvement methodologies," he explained. "I'd encourage people to use it—it's a way for us to learn from one another and build on what's already working."

Survey responses gathered by NENC PCC also revealed a deep sense of pride among practitioners for the innovative work happening in the region. One respondent invited healthcare leaders to visit North Tyneside, where Integrated Neighbourhood Teams have shown that high-quality preventative care can be delivered at minimal cost.

This spirit of collaboration and innovation is central to the Clinical Conditions Strategic Plan. "It's about recognising that what we're doing is worth sharing and scaling across the region," Neil said.

While challenges will remain, the plan offers a roadmap for tackling them head-on. For Neil, the key to success lies in collaboration: "We've got a strong foundation to build on—and together, we can deliver the care our communities deserve.

[A full version of this interview is available to read on our website.](#)





## Save the date: Primary Care Collaborative Conference Wednesday 2nd April 2025

The first Primary Care Collaborative Conference will take place on **Wednesday 2nd April 2025** at [Ramside Hall](#) near Durham.

Speakers include **Dr Claire Fuller**, Primary Care Medical Director for NHS England.

**Demand for places is high. The next tranche of free tickets will be released week commencing 10th February.** Check our [website](#) for details and booking.

## Autumn engagement events

Our two autumn engagement events took place in early November. Presentations at the events covered an update on the Primary Care Workforce strategy, and work exploring expansion of access to the summary care record.

If you were unable to attend, you can catch up with a recording of the first event on [YouTube](#) and view [a visual representation of the attendee survey results](#).



## Stay in touch

If you have news you'd like to share in the next issue, drop us an email: [necsu.primarycarecollabnenc@nhs.net](mailto:necsu.primarycarecollabnenc@nhs.net)

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