

Policy Briefing: Health and Social Care Integration

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Original Document: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Health-and-social-care-integration.pdf>

Purpose of document

Integration in health and social care is about putting patients at the centre of the design and delivery of care to improve patient outcomes and satisfaction and achieve value for money. Currently, there is a rising demand for care services combined with limited funding. This is putting pressure on the capacity of local health and social care systems. The Department of Health, the Department for Communities and Local Government and NHS England made a number of commitments as part of a plan to address funding and meet the pressures on both systems. The purpose is to transform the delivery of care and support local authorities and NHS bodies to integrate health and social care services across England by 2020. A couple of their commitments include: 1) the transfer of £2.7 billion from the NHS to local authorities to promote better joined-up working and 2) the creation of the Better Care Fund by the two Departments, NHS England and the local Government - this requires local health bodies and local authorities to pool existing funding and produce joint plans for integrating services and reduce pressures on hospitals. The National Audit Office (NAO), which is responsible for scrutinising public spending, analysed how the commitments for integration within and between adult social care and health systems has been progressing. They have put together their analyses in a substantial report.

Summary of contents

The report examines the progress the Department of Health, the Department of Communities and Local Government and NHS England has made towards integrating health and social care services, divided into 3 parts. The first part discusses the case for integrating health and social care. The second part looks at the progress of national initiatives. The third part considers the plans for increased integration. The report also focuses on services providing direct care to patients. However, it does not cover other public services that affect people's wellbeing, such as housing and leisure activities.

Summary of outcomes

Progress with integration has, so far, been slower and less successful than originally expected despite much effort. It has not delivered the benefits that were expected for patients, the NHS or local services in terms of the expected value for money, planned savings, better outcomes for patients and reduced hospital- and emergency admissions. The three main barriers to integration that have been identified include misaligned financial incentives (where the incentives of those involved in integration are not aligned to achieve the intended outcome); challenges within the health care and social care workforces and not being open to information-sharing. As a result of this, the plan for integrated health and social care services across England by 2020 is at significant risk. Despite the above, the NAO found some good examples of integration at local level. More than 90% of local areas agree or strongly agree that delivery of the plan for integration has motivated local areas to work together and improved joint working between health and social care systems. The Departments and their partners are still developing their understanding of how to measure progress in integrating health and social care and are agreeing a definition of integration focused on patient experience.

Summary of recommendations

- Confirm whether the aim of integrating health and social care services across England by 2020 remains achievable.
- Review current approaches to integrating health and social care and establish whether the approaches that are being developed, trialled and put into action are the most appropriate and likely to achieve the desired outcomes.
- Gather a robust evidence base to establish what works well in integrating health and social care and on the best way(s) to improve care and save money through integration.

- Bring greater structure and discipline to the coordination of work specifically to address the three main barriers to integration.
- Plan for integration using a whole-systems approach where the NHS and local government are involved as equal partners.
- Put in place more appropriate national structures where all integration initiatives are aligned and overseen as a single, coordinated programme.

Further information and resources

Health and Social Care Integration - Summary Report

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Health-and-social-care-integration-Summary.pdf>

Better Care Fund

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/part-rel/transformation-fund/bcf-plan/>