



# Engaging with local communities

Supporting community engagement in Lambeth Primary Care Networks (PCNs)

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# About Healthwatch Lambeth

Healthwatch Lambeth is your health and social care champion. We are here to listen to your experiences of local health and care services and to hear about the issues that really matter to you. As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision-makers listen to your feedback and improve standards of care. We can also help with reliable and trustworthy information that helps you get the care and support you need.

## **At Healthwatch Lambeth we:**

- Provide information about local health and social care services.
- Help people to find the health and care services they need.
- Get people involved in how these services are monitored, commissioned, and provided.
- Make known the views of local people about their needs and experiences of health and care services, so as to influence how services are commissioned, provided and scrutinised.
- Report on and recommend how services could or should be improved.
- Make the views and experiences of local people known to Healthwatch England, the national champion of people's voices.
- Make recommendations to Healthwatch England about advising the Care Quality Commission on areas of concern (or go directly to the CQC).
- Are a member of the Lambeth Health and Wellbeing Board.

# Executive Summary

Patient engagement and consultation with community groups are gaining momentum in the health sector in a bid to ensure healthcare is patient-focused and delivered in a way that is relevant and accessible to patients. This project involved Healthwatch Lambeth partnering with Primary Care Networks (PCNs) in Lambeth to engage with specific population groups and develop plans for future pieces of community engagement.

The first phase of this project saw staff from PCNs in Streatham and Fiveways work through the stages of community engagement, which included identifying priority areas for their patient group, establishing key stakeholders and networks locally, and developing community engagement activities with patients in their network. Throughout the process, the PCNs identified existing and new ways to share and build on their learnings from each of these stages.

Two engagement activities took place, one in each PCN. Within Fiveways PCN, the community engagement focus was the patient experience of digital services, which led to the delivery of digital skills workshops for patients who were less confident in accessing healthcare online. These events led to improved digital skills and utilisation of the NHS app. Within Streatham, patients attended a health and wellbeing event to learn more about diabetes, hypertension, and ways they can look after themselves.

The second phase provided staff in each PCN within Lambeth the opportunity to participate in a workshop to develop a community engagement plan tailored to the needs of their network. Staff from five different PCNs attended and developed seven different community engagement plans to be rolled out in the future.

Throughout the PCN engagement project, we learned that community engagement is valued by staff but there are a number of challenges they experience when doing so. We met staff from a variety of roles who do community engagement as part of their work, however, we did not encounter a role that holds responsibility for bringing all of that work together or collating the insights in a way that could be shared with staff to enhance their understanding of their patients' experiences or needs.

Another challenge shared with us was a lack of understanding of the needs of their patient group due to the great diversity of patients accessing practices. We also learned about practical challenges, such as a lack of budget to text patients or provide materials translated into community languages.

The plans developed and skills learned by staff in Lambeth PCNs can be replicated for future pieces of community engagement.

## Key Recommendations

We have made a number of recommendations at SEL ICS, PCN, and practice levels. The full list can be found in the Recommendations section at the end of this report.

- SEL ICS should facilitate opportunities for PCN and practice staff to collaborate with Public Health teams in order to identify the needs of the local population and the health inequalities that exist within their patient population.
- SEL ICS should ensure Community Engagement is embedded within the PCN structure in a clearly defined way and provide opportunities for collaboration across practices as well as PCNs within Lambeth.
- PCNs should align with Public Health teams to understand the needs of the local community.
- PCNs should identify a staff member from each practice to be the point of contact regarding community engagement activities. These staff members should communicate regularly to discuss priorities, plan engagement, and share knowledge.
- Practices should ensure demographic information about their patients is complete and up to date. This information is essential for identifying health inequalities.
- Practices should identify a person or team of people within the practice who can lead community engagement activities. Materials from the training workshops have been provided to all staff and can be used as a framework for developing future engagement plans.
- Practices should support engagement activities by providing resources or funding for text messages to invite patients to participate.

# Introduction

In 2022, Healthwatch Lambeth was commissioned by NHS South East London Integrated Care Systems (formerly Clinical Commissioning Group) to work with Lambeth Primary Care Networks (PCNs) to support and collaborate on community engagement activities within their locality. This report describes how the two phases of the community engagement programme were developed and implemented and identifies the success factors and challenges.

## Background

Patient and public involvement has become an integral part of health care by including and empowering individuals and communities in shaping the delivery of health and social care services. Users benefit from services that respond to and better meet their needs, with the potential for improved outcomes. Reviews of evidence in this area suggest that incorporating service user perspectives can enhance the delivery of care and inform health care planning<sup>1</sup> and is associated with improved quality, responsiveness, access to and use of services and better health outcomes<sup>2</sup>.

## Our Position on Public Participation

One of the core goals of Healthwatch Lambeth is to promote and support health and social care providers to adopt inclusive, effective, and meaningful approaches to public participation in service improvement so that people's experiences and views are central to decision-making and shaping services. This means that we support our local delivery alliances in designing and running effective participation processes by working as partners on community engagement projects and collaborating with them as a critical friend to improve their skills in this area.

## Project Scope, Aims, and Objectives

The specific aim of the project was to support PCNs across Lambeth to better engage with their local population. The objectives were to:

- Support PCNs in identifying key areas of quality improvement.
- Enhance PCN engagement by working directly with PCNs on tailored engagement activities focused on the causes of poor outcomes and inequitable access to care.
- Assist PCN community engagement by co-facilitating community conversations within each locality.
- Improve PCN engagement by providing skills and training to all PCN staff across nine PCNs in Lambeth to sustain engagement activities after the project's end.

Drawing on Healthwatch Lambeth's knowledge, training, and expertise on public and patient engagement, our role was to coordinate and bring together relevant primary care staff, such as Social Prescribing Link Workers (SPLWs), GPs, and care coordinators, among others, to identify improvement areas that would benefit from patient and public insight.

## Project Evaluation

This project sought to improve patients' experiences and impact the nature of public engagement across PCNs by creating systems change in relation to public participation. In seeking to achieve the aims and objectives outlined above, we broadly describe and assess:

1. How the community engagement programme was implemented in each of the participating PCN localities.
2. The success of the initiative/activity (met objectives and resulted in other achievements).
3. What worked well and learning for future participatory activities.

In our assessment of the programme implementation, we set out key indicators of success in relation to both the impact of the program on its beneficiaries (staff, patients, and other stakeholders) and the implementation process.

- a. There is a clear purpose for the engagement activity within each locality based on an understanding of population needs.
- b. People and organisations affected by the engagement focus are identified and involved.
- c. Methods of engagement chosen are fit for purpose (acceptable and accessible to participants).
- d. Engagement activities reached the desired community group, providing an opportunity for PCN staff to gain insight into the experiences of community members.
- e. Patients and relevant organisations feel they have benefitted from the community engagement exercise.
- f. Staff feel confident, ready, and prepared to undertake future community engagement activities.

# Project Initiation

## Establishing the Project Advisory Group

The PCN Engagement Project benefitted from an advisory group established to oversee and support the programme rollout across the Lambeth PCNs. The Advisory Group met every 2 months throughout the project. Members offered guidance and expertise during the project's development and were instrumental in ensuring all PCNs were kept well-informed about the work and had the opportunity to take part at every stage.

Their role was to:

- Contribute to and review the PCN engagement project plan.
- Provide ongoing support and guidance to the PCN engagement project and the project team, using insight from their areas of expertise.
- Ensure the PCN Engagement Project was delivered on time, on budget, and to a good quality.
- Promote the PCN engagement project amongst their contacts and networks.
- Encourage staff to actively engage with and participate in the PCN Engagement Project, especially in the workshop sessions in the second phase of the project.

## Membership

- Michelle Elston – Associate Director of Primary Care and Community Care; member of Lambeth Together
- Peter Lathlean – Head of PCN Development & Commissioning, NHS SEL ICS; member of Lambeth Together
- Janita Patel – PCN Development & Engagement Manager, NHS SEL ICS; member of Lambeth Together
- Catherine Flynn – Head of Engagement and Communications, NHS SEL ICS and Lambeth Together
- Therese Fletcher – Managing Director, Lambeth GP Federation
- Dr George Verghese – Co-Chair Lambeth Clinical Cabinet
- Dr Raj Mitra – Children's Clinical Commissioner, Integrated Health & Care Lambeth Council
- Mairead Healy – CEO, Healthwatch Lambeth
- Raks Patel and Vanita Bhavnani – Research and Engagement Manager, Healthwatch Lambeth
- Caroline O'Neill – Engagement Officer, Healthwatch Lambeth

# Approach to Community Engagement

## Project Planning/Scoping

In the early stages of planning, Healthwatch Lambeth staff met with representatives working in Lambeth from April to May 2023 to discuss the primary care health needs of the local area and identify opportunities for quality improvement. From these conversations, several potential themes emerged for the focus of the work with PCNs.

- Chronic pain
- Long-term conditions, e.g. diabetes
- Childhood immunisation
- GP Access Hubs
- High-intensity users / People with complex needs
- Digital inclusion/exclusion
- Seldom heard groups – people experiencing homelessness, new migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, non-English speakers, etc.

The themes raised by the community cross over with the NHS Core20Plus5<sup>3</sup> Clinical areas that require improvement to address health inequalities. In Lambeth, two additional factors were added to create the Core20Plus7<sup>4</sup>.

1. Maternity
2. Serious Mental Illness
3. Chronic Respiratory Disease
4. Early Cancer Diagnosis
5. Identifying High Blood Pressure
6. Chronic Pain
7. Diabetes

These early community conversations enabled the project team to establish our presence and raise awareness of the benefits of community engagement and our expertise in the area. We were able to gauge early support for the project and involve key stakeholders in the development of the project through discussion of potential areas of interest. We were also able to define the parameters of Healthwatch Lambeth's role with each of the PCN stakeholders. This included identifying objectives and broad plans for delivering local public participation.

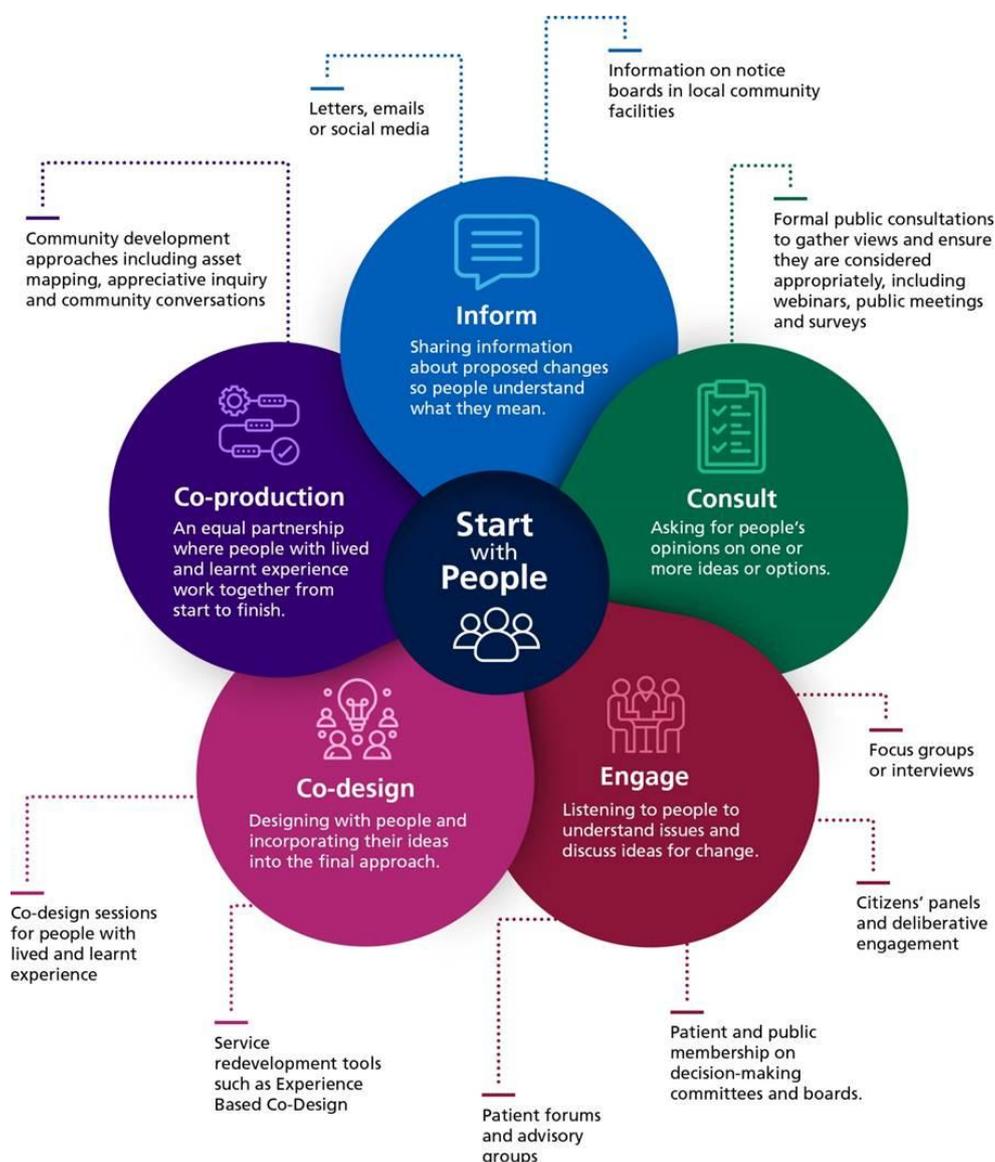
## Literature

The *NHS England 2022/2023 Working in Partnership with People and Communities: Statutory Guidance*<sup>5</sup> was utilised as the principal reference and guiding structure for the facilitation of engagement activities.

This model was selected as it was developed by the NHS and is reflective of the work of PCNs. It was developed alongside the *PCN Maturity Matrix*<sup>6</sup>, which provides GPs with directives on how to establish and develop a PCN. The principles discussed in the framework offer tangible examples of how community engagement can be embedded within the Lambeth PCNs.

The Working in Partnership guidance includes the Spectrum of Engagement (Figure 1). This diagram was utilised to introduce community engagement strategies to PCN staff, as it explains different types of engagement ranging from informing people about potential changes to services to co-design and co-production of specific services or programmes.

**Figure 1**



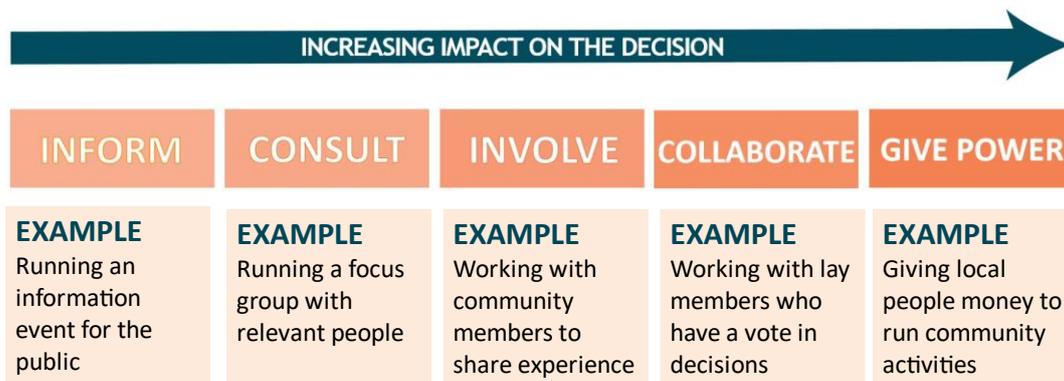
**NHS Working in partnership with People and Communities: Statutory Guidance**

Materials and resources from the *International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)*<sup>7</sup> were also utilised as a reference point and framework for this project as several Healthwatch Lambeth staff had undertaken training in public participation from the IAP2.

Aspects of this course were incorporated into the Healthwatch Lambeth approach to community engagement. Our approach is based on the principle that engagement activities should be determined based on the questions or decisions we wish to answer. Once we understand the questions we want to answer, we assess where on the Spectrum of Engagement (Figure 2) we would like these activities to fall and then determine the type of activity best placed for each scenario.

**Figure 2**

The best place on the spectrum for an engagement activity will **depend on the decision or question that needs answering.**



Alongside the literature mentioned above, additional resources informed our planning of community engagement strategies, our understanding of the local Lambeth Landscape, and the experience of patients in accessing primary care. Some of these are listed in Appendix 1:

- Our Health, Our Lambeth: Lambeth Together Health and Care Plan 2023-2028
- Next steps for integrating primary care: Fuller Stocktake report
- Primary Care Networks: briefing paper for VCSE sector organisations, *National Voices February 2020*
- Primary Care Network Maturity Matrix, *NHS England and NHS Improvement August 2019*
- PCN Engagement Series, *eGPlarning, YouTube 2022*
- IAP2 Training, *International Association for Public Participation*

## Four-Step Model of Community Engagement

Reviewing and documenting the common aspects of these materials resulted in the development of a 4-step process for community engagement. This model was utilised when working with PCNs throughout this project.

1. **Define the project** – Identify a topic area or community group you wish to engage with. Document why this topic/community is a priority, then identify the questions you want answered by the engagement work.

To help initiate the engagement project, host a kick-off meeting with practice staff to hear about the challenges they face and what they would like to see achieved for both the PCN and community members.

2. **Mapping stakeholders** – Partnering with local organisations such as voluntary sector organisations, local community groups, or faith-based groups greatly enhances the success of community engagement. This step of the engagement process involves exploring the connections that already exist within the PCNs and with local community services and organisations. Ask staff to identify the existing connections, the types of organisations it would be beneficial to partner with, and any gaps that may exist in their network. This step involves speaking with many staff members from within the PCN to ensure all connections are documented such that they could be utilised for the engagement activities in step 3.
3. **Engagement Activities** – Identify which type of engagement activity best explores the subject area or helps you gain community insight about a particular issue. It may be beneficial to host community conversations with organisations and stakeholders identified in Step 2. Consult the Spectrum of Engagement diagram<sup>5</sup> to identify the type of engagement activities that would best suit the needs of the project. Then plan, promote, and facilitate the activities in partnership with colleagues and stakeholders identified in step 2.
4. **Findings, feedback and sustainability** – The final step is about reflecting on learnings and how that information can be used to facilitate change. It is also about building sustainability for the future by continuously evolving based on lessons learned. Consider whether the engagement activities were able to answer the questions you identified in Step 1, or if you need to trial different engagement approaches. Consider the feedback mechanisms you have available to share your learnings, as well as the steps you can take to provide feedback to community members.

Healthwatch Lambeth developed templates to guide staff through each of these steps. These resources were shared with all staff who attended the workshops.

## Awareness in the Borough

The early stages of the project involved presenting our project plan at executive meetings in the borough to ensure as many staff had the opportunity to hear about the project and participate if they were interested. These meetings included:

- Practice Managers Meeting
- Practice Engagement Session
- Lambeth Together Primary Care Commissioning Meeting

# Delivery of the Community Engagement Programme

This PCN Community Engagement project was implemented over two phases. The first we called the “Focused Approach,” which involved working on a piece of community engagement with two PCNs within Lambeth. The second phase was the “Lambeth Wide Approach,” which involved delivering workshops about Community Engagement to staff from all PCNs across Lambeth.

The Healthwatch Lambeth Four-Step process detailed in the Project Initiation section was utilised throughout both the Focused and Lambeth-wide approaches to plan, develop, and implement community engagement activities.

## Phase One: Focused Approach

The Focused Approach phase involved Healthwatch Lambeth working alongside two PCNs to undertake a piece of community engagement work. The subject area for this engagement was identified by the PCN staff, who then worked alongside Healthwatch Lambeth to plan and implement the engagement activities.

### Selecting PCNs

With the assistance of staff from the NHS South East London ICS, as well as our Advisory Group members, all 9 PCNs in Lambeth were made aware of this project and had the opportunity to nominate themselves to be part of the Focused Approach phase. Seven of the 9 PCNs in Lambeth expressed an interest in working with us, demonstrating the desire within PCNs to undertake community engagement work. Each of these seven presented us with a topic area they wished to explore. These were varied and included some of the topics which emerged from our community consultations, as well as additional topics such as looking at general patient access, support establishing a PCN-level Patient Participation Group, working with young people, and focusing on mental health.

Two PCNs were selected to be part of the Focused Approach. The selection was based on a combination of factors including:

- The topic area they wished to focus on or identified as an area of quality improvement.
- Their geographical location within the borough.
- The deprivation within their local area.
- Health inequalities in their local area.



# Case Study: Tackling Digital Exclusion

## Fiveways PCN

### Background and Key Issues

As the NHS supports primary care to move towards a Digital First approach, there is the danger that the drive for greater digital access leaves behind those unable to engage with technology and, therefore, deepens existing health inequalities. The needs of digitally excluded residents must be embedded within delivery plans. Staff in Fiveways PCN are conscious that more services are moving online and want to ensure patients are brought along on that journey and feel supported.

### Step 1: Define the Project

Healthwatch Lambeth and Fiveways PCN staff established the objective of carrying out a piece of engagement focusing on digital inclusion:

- a. To understand how patients feel about using online services, including practice websites and the NHS app.
- b. To understand the nature of the barriers and challenges faced by patients.

### Step 2: Mapping Stakeholders

Through discussion with PCN staff, we identified the following stakeholders:

- Residents using primary care services in practices within the Fiveways PCN locality.
- Practice staff including front-line GPs, social prescribers, equity champions, reception staff, care coordinators, and more.
- Local service providers offering digital skills training (ClearCommunityWeb) and digital devices for people experiencing digital exclusion (Community Tech Aid).

### Step 3: Engagement Activities

#### Community Conversations

In Fiveways PCN, we connected with organisations that provide digital devices and digital skills training for people experiencing digital exclusion. Through these conversations, we learned about the support they provide and the impact it has on the community. Using insight from the community conversations, we consulted the Spectrum of Engagement<sup>5</sup> to identify the type of engagement activities that would best suit the needs of the PCN. We thus decided on a patient survey which falls within the Consult area.

## Patient Survey

To understand how patients feel about using online services and hear their experiences of digital exclusion, a face-to-face survey was administered to patients who were attending appointments in four GP practices within the PCN. A survey was selected as the engagement activity because it can be completed in several ways and the PCN wished to hear the experience of as many patients as possible.

The survey was developed in close collaboration with PCN staff, focusing on key aspects they wished to explore including:

- How patients made their appointments for that day.
- Patients' experience of using online services to make appointments.
- Smartphone ownership and usage of the internet and apps.
- Preferences for receiving reminders for appointments and health checks.

Equity champions and reception staff worked alongside a Healthwatch staff member to approach patients and ask them to complete the survey. Most patients were happy to complete the survey independently whilst a few required some assistance to note down their responses.

In addition to the paper copies, flyers with a QR code link to the survey were also posted in GP waiting rooms. The same flyer was circulated to social prescribers within the PCN who promoted the survey with patients. However, no surveys were completed in this manner with all 66 responses received from the time spent approaching individuals in person to complete the survey.

### **Step 4: Findings, Feedback, and Sustainability**

The information captured in the survey gave us insight into the experiences and preferences of patients.

- Of the 66 patients who completed the survey, most (76%) had made their appointment by telephone.
- Many patients did have smartphones (92%) and access to the internet (82%) and were comfortable using online services (85%).
- However, we found that confidence was the greatest barrier for patients when it came to using digital or online options.
- Many reported they did not know how to navigate and use apps effectively in the correct way. This meant they weren't confident to take the next step and manage their healthcare online.

## Using the Feedback and Learnings

From the survey in Fiveways, we heard that many patients lacked confidence in their ability to coordinate and manage their healthcare using apps and websites. As a result, we partnered with ClearCommunityWeb to deliver digital skills workshops for patients in the PCN with a focus on introducing them to the NHS app. Staff in the GP practices in Fiveways PCN sent a text message to patients over age 65 to invite them to attend this workshop. 37 patients attended, many of whom had not tried to download or use the NHS App before. The workshops increased awareness and understanding of the NHS App, and how patients can use it to have greater autonomy over their own health care by accessing their health records, booking appointments, and arranging repeat prescriptions.

*“The session was really useful...being able to check my records, book appointments and anything that helps me get to see a doctor sooner.”*

Whilst the Digital Skills workshops were not part of the original engagement strategy, the conversations at these workshops gave greater depth to our understanding of the challenges patients face. During the workshops, we heard many examples and stories from patients, which included difficulties downloading and using the My Chart app that is used for outpatient hospital appointments, as well as changes to the way blood tests are being booked in the borough. As a result of the feedback provided during the sessions and the questions raised by participants, some of the practices in Fiveways PCN are now offering patients drop-in sessions where they can meet with GP staff members to assist them to download the NHS App and set up their NHS account.

# Case Study: Engaging Better with South Asian Patients

## Streatham PCN

### Background and Key Issues

Lambeth is home to diverse population groups, and as such, GPs care for patients from many different backgrounds. Practices within Streatham PCN have very diverse patient populations, with one practice (The Vale) reporting that over 50% of their population group is from South Asian backgrounds.

Streatham PCN wanted to undertake community engagement activities to help staff better understand the needs of the South Asian community and identify improved ways to support this patient group. The PCN acknowledged that they often host programmes and events for patients from Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds but have never done so for any other population groups.

### Step 1: Define the Project

Healthwatch Lambeth met with staff from the Vale practice to learn about the challenges they experience within their practice. Staff felt that many patients face challenges when navigating the Primary Care setting. For instance, the self-check-in kiosk is only available in English. This is an immediate barrier for patients, and as a result, the kiosk is not used at its full potential. Instead, reception staff must always be available to check people in for their appointments.

The Vale Practice has such a high South Asian patient population because some of the clinicians and reception staff speak community languages, such as Tamil. As a result, a large number of Tamil patients register at the practice, many of whom live in neighbouring boroughs and travel long distances to speak with doctors who can communicate in their familiar language. This was also raised as a challenge for the practices, as the services they refer patients to are local to the practice but are not always local to the patients. Additionally, because of their language needs, many patients want to see the same GP each time they visit, which can increase waiting times for all patients.

Staff also identified that many patients from South Asian backgrounds are reluctant to attend their regular screening appointments, and the uptake for cancer screenings with this population group is also very low. To combat this, staff members undertake several interventions to encourage patients to attend these visits. This often includes a clinician who can speak a community language calling the patients to explain the importance of the checks and personally inviting them to attend.

The PCN wished to start the conversation with patients to:

- a. Understand the needs of patients from South Asian backgrounds and how they can best be supported.
- b. Understand why patients don't attend regular health checks.
- c. Encourage patients to attend regular health screenings and cancer checks.

## **Step 2: Mapping Stakeholders**

The following were identified as key stakeholders:

- Staff within the Vale practice.
- Staff at all GP practices in Streatham PCN.
- Patients who have identified as "South Asian" in their demographic information.
- Local services and organisations which specifically support South Asian community members.
- Local/national organisations that are condition-specific, e.g. Diabetes UK.

## **Step 3: Engagement Activities**

Through discussions with the PCN and The Vale practice staff, it was learned that the PCN had previously hosted Health and Wellbeing Events for patients of Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds. They wished to replicate these events to start conversations with patients from South Asian backgrounds.

The Spectrum of Engagement<sup>5</sup> was used to identify the type of engagement activities that would best suit the needs of the Streatham PCN. Both the community conversations and the Health and Wellbeing event detailed below fall within the Consult/Engage areas of the Spectrum of Engagement as they involve community consultation and public participation.

### **Community Conversations**

To understand the health priorities of local community members, Healthwatch Lambeth met with staff from the Vale practice to hear their own experiences working with this patient group. Additional conversations were hosted at a local Diwali event for Tamil families and a seniors lunch club at a local temple. Individuals raised priority areas for their health, including a better understanding of being a carer and cancer screenings, as well as conditions such as dementia, diabetes and hypertension. This list of priorities informed and shaped the engagement activity.

## Health and Wellbeing Event

The staff in Streatham PCN coordinated a Health and Wellbeing Event for patients from South Asian backgrounds. Many staff members were involved in the planning and delivery of the event. Staff contributed by delivering clinical presentations, speaking with patients, and capturing their feedback on their care experiences.

Stallholders were present representing organisations that aligned with the health priorities identified through our community conversations such as Diabetes UK and Age UK, offering advice and information about Dementia, and the Carers Hub, advising people about the support they offer. In addition, several public health professionals were present to speak about different types of cancer screenings, and local Health Clinics and PCN staff offered Blood Pressure and Glucose tests. GPs from the local practice gave a talk about Diabetes and opened the floor to questions, and a health coach gave culturally specific information about diet and diabetes. The Lambeth Health & Wellbeing Bus was also present to give information about the support available across Lambeth.

To encourage members of this community to attend GP practices texted patients who had identified as “South Asian” inviting them to the event. A healthy lunch was provided after the clinical talk, which proved to be a very popular part of the day. Approximately 60 patients attended the event.



*Participants at the Health and Wellbeing Event in Streatham.*

## Step 4: Findings, Feedback, and Sustainability

As the Health and Wellbeing Event had several elements, feedback about the event was captured in several ways:

- Feedback from stallholders included information about the number of patients they each spoke with, the topics raised by patients, any challenges they experienced with language, and suggestions for how to enhance similar events in the future.
- Social Prescribers and Healthwatch Lambeth volunteers spoke with patients to hear if they found the event beneficial and ask what is important to them with regards to their own health and that of their family.
- Large sheets of poster paper were placed in the event seeking patient feedback. The prompt questions were suggested by the PCN staff:
  - *How can health services better support you?*
  - *If you could change one thing about your GP, what would it be?*

Overall, many people found the event beneficial, particularly the information shared by the stallholders as well as the clinical talk about Diabetes from the GP staff. Language was raised as a challenge by a couple of stallholders but was not a barrier for most people who attended the event. However, it should be noted that the communications about the event were in English and therefore those who attended were most likely confident speaking English.

## Phase Two: Lambeth-Wide Approach

The second phase of this project, the Lambeth-wide Approach, involved facilitating workshops about community engagement with staff from PCNs in Lambeth. All 9 PCNs were offered the Community Engagement workshop, with 5 of the PCNs participating.

The workshops introduced Community Engagement theory based on the *NHS England Working in partnership with patients and communities*' statutory guidance<sup>5</sup>. Tools and materials from this guidance were used as prompts for discussion and to explore the different types of Community Engagement activities PCNs may wish to undertake. The workshop content also included the experiences and learnings from the Focused Approach.

Participants then planned their own piece of community engagement on a topic or issue identified as a priority for their PCN. This was done by completing exercises for each of the four steps of the Healthwatch Lambeth approach to community engagement.

- Step 1: Define the Project
- Step 2: Mapping Stakeholders
- Step 3: Engagement Activities
- Step 4: Findings, Feedback and Sustainability

Participants left the workshops with a working plan for a piece of community engagement they could develop further with staff in their PCN.

The group size at the workshops in Fiveways and Streatham allowed for the group to split in two and work on two separate plans. As a result, seven engagement plans were developed from the 5 PCNs.

In total, 36 staff participated in the workshop across 5 PCNs. Their roles ranged from clinical roles such as GPs and Pharmacists to Reception staff, Care Coordinators and Social Prescribers. There was a great benefit to bringing the roles together for the workshop as it allowed staff to learn about the different networks available to their colleagues, as well as anticipate any challenges they may face in undertaking community engagement activities.

The topics presented by each PCN, and the number of participants at each workshop, can be found in Table 1 on the next page.

**Table 1**

PCN	Topics	Participants
AT Medics	Increasing cancer screening rates	8
Croxted PCN	Understanding health inequalities in the local area	4
Fiveways PCN	Digital Inclusion; Reinstating a PPG or establishing a PCN-wide PPG	12
Streatham PCN	Diabetes in BAME; Chronic pain	8
North Lambeth PCN	Chronic kidney disease	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>7 plans</b>	<b>36</b>

# Evaluation of PCN Engagement Project in Lambeth

The Project Evaluation section of the Introduction details the framework developed to evaluate the success of the PCN Engagement Project. The information below relates largely to our experiences with the Focused Approach, however, some aspects are also relevant to the Lambeth-wide workshops. This same framework can be applied to the engagement projects developed by staff within the community engagement workshops, or any future community engagement they undertake.

## **a. There is a clear purpose for the engagement activity within each locality based on an understanding of population needs**

The focus of the engagement projects conducted in Fiveways and Streatham PCN were decided based on priorities identified by PCN staff. These reflect the feedback practice staff have heard from patients as well as the challenges they face in supporting their patients. Staff in Fiveways responded to the increased use of digital tools by GP practices and proactively sought to understand their patients' experience of this. In Streatham, staff recognised the needs of the South Asian community may be addressed in a tailored way. They sought to understand the challenges their patients face and find ways to support them better.

In the Lambeth-wide approach, staff from different PCNs developed engagement plans based on the needs of their local community as well as the priorities identified within their PCN. During the Community Engagement workshops, some staff members reported that they did not have a clear understanding of the health needs of the different community groups located within their PCN. These staff were unsure how best to support these groups. We suggested local NHS teams and community organisations they could liaise with to learn more about their local population.

Conducting community engagement from a PCN level presented the challenge of identifying a common priority across all GP practices within the PCN. Many practices have very different population groups and therefore different priorities for their patients. Whilst undertaking engagement at a PCN level allows for the sharing of resources and the collaboration of staff, finding a common priority may limit the topics that can be explored at this level.

## **b. People and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement are clearly identified and involved**

Step 2 of the Engagement process involves identifying existing stakeholder connections that can contribute to the success of the project. The Digital Inclusion project with Fiveways involved speaking with local organisations who support people experiencing digital exclusion (e.g. ClearCommunityWeb, Digital Tech Aid) as well as surveying patients about their own experiences of accessing digital services in primary care.

In Streatham, connections were made with local community organisations that support members of the South Asian community. This resulted in Healthwatch Lambeth attending a Seniors Lunch Club at a local temple as well as a Diwali event for Tamil families which were great opportunities to hear about the health needs of these community groups.

In both PCNs, the practice staff identified patients who were part of their target demographic and invited them by text message to attend events.

During the Community Engagement workshops, PCN staff identified the community group their engagement was focused on and documented stakeholders who would be relevant to the project. This gave an opportunity for both community members and local organisations to be involved in the community engagement activities.

### **c. Methods of engagement chosen are fit for purpose (acceptable and accessible to participants)**

The method of engagement in the Focused approach was selected after conversations with staff about what they would like to achieve from the project. In Fiveways we utilised a patient survey, and patients were allowed to complete this themselves or have some support from staff. Healthwatch Lambeth staff attended GP practices at clinic times and asked patients to complete it. The survey was also offered online however no responses were received this way; this is not surprising given the topic area was digital exclusion.

The Health and Wellbeing event hosted for patients from South Asian backgrounds in Streatham PCN was chosen as an engagement activity as they have successfully hosted similar events for members of the Black African and Black Caribbean communities in the past.

The event was well attended with approximately 60 patients present on the day, however when speaking with patients it became obvious that many of those who were present already attended their regular health checks and cancer screenings. Whilst we were able to reach members of the South Asian community, further engagement is required to reach those who are hesitant to attend their health checks.

When looking at the spectrum of engagement<sup>5</sup> in the workshops, staff identified that prior community engagement activities undertaken by PCNs focused largely on informing patients about services or changes. These types of activities tend to be shorter and do not allow many opportunities for patients to give feedback or contribute to the process. Only a few practices were able to give examples of undertaking coproduction and codesign, with much of the focus of engagement being on the needs of the practices/PCN rather than those identified by patients. The staff mentioned time and budget constraints as their main challenge in undertaking these longer-term engagement activities.

**d. Engagement Activities reached the desired community, providing an opportunity for PCN staff to gain insight into the experiences of community members.**

The patient survey administered in GP waiting rooms in Fiveways PCN successfully reached patients, with over 60 patients completing it. The responses provided great insight into their experiences with digital services. The digital skills workshop successfully reached patients aged over 65 who lacked confidence in using the NHS app and online tools more broadly.

During the digital skills workshop, we met a number of participants who were fearful about the way the internet can track them and see what they are doing online. It is important to understand the experience of a range of community members we also need to remain neutral and open to hearing all experiences without one particular experience being representative of the whole group's experience.

Streatham PCN invited patients to the South Asian Health & Wellbeing event by first identifying those whose demographic profile identified them as South Asian, thus ensuring they were reaching their target audience. We had strong attendance and have seen similar success at health events organised by social prescribers.

Whilst the Health and Wellbeing event at Streatham PCN was well-attended staff felt it did not assist them in engaging with the specific patient group they were hoping to reach; that being those patients who do not attend for their regular health or cancer screenings. Patients who have not engaged in the past did not necessarily engage when invited to the event. Groups that are challenging to reach may require more personalised invitations or a variety of approaches to encourage them to engage. The practices are now planning different strategies to engage with those members of the community.

At the Health and Wellbeing event, we encountered challenges in engaging with patients who could not speak English. Having translators available at such events would provide greater opportunity for more patients to share their experiences, and for staff to gain deeper insight into the experience of community members.

**e. Patients and relevant organisations feel they have benefitted from the community engagement exercise**

The community engagement activities in the Focused Approach (Phase One) benefited patients, PCN staff and stakeholder organisations.

36 patients in Fiveways PCN received digital skills training which introduced them to the key features of the NHS App. These patients left the session more confident in their ability to use the app and ask their practice for support. Many continued their learning by attending future digital skills workshops facilitated by the same organisation (ClearCommunityWeb).

The Health and Wellbeing event in Streatham PCN provided patients with the opportunity to learn about different support services available to them, have Blood Pressure and Glucose checks, listen to a clinician speak about Diabetes and meet members of their GP practices. In their feedback about the event, patients mentioned that the information available from the local organisations and the PCN staff was the greatest benefit of the day. PCN staff also had the opportunity to speak with patients and learn about the challenges they face when accessing GP services.

The local organisations who were stallholders at the event also benefited as they were able to engage with members of the South Asian community and introduce their organisations to the patients who attended. Many of the stall holders such as those representing cancer screening services also actively seek to engage with community groups who are underrepresented in their work, so this event was a great opportunity for them too.

**f. Staff feel confident, ready and prepared to undertake future community engagement activities**

One objective of this PCN Engagement project was for staff across Lambeth PCNs to have greater confidence in their ability to develop community engagement strategies, facilitate engagement activities and utilize the information gathered to place the patient experience at the core of service design and address health inequalities.

In the course of the work with PCNs on the Focus Approach it became clear that many staff were very stretched in their workload and community engagement was not the responsibility of any particular staff member within the PCN. Roles such as Social Prescribers undertake community engagement as part of their work, however, this was not the case in all PCNs.

The delivery of the community engagement workshops to multiple PCNs provided the opportunity to introduce staff to all aspects of community engagement and provide them with skills and tools to replicate the process in the future. In the workshops, we met staff who were hesitant to undertake community engagement activities as the benefits are not always experienced quickly or from a single activity. It was challenging for staff to justify the time and input required to undertake community engagement as part of their established roles within the PCN.

# Impact and Sustainability

The impact of this project can be documented in both the short-term impact of the engagement activities undertaken in the Focused Approach, as well as the long-term sustainability of the project facilitated by the delivery of training to staff in how to undertake community engagement with their patient group in the future. The legacy of this project is that of staff understanding the benefit of community engagement and having the confidence to involve their community in future service delivery and planning processes.

## Short Term Impact

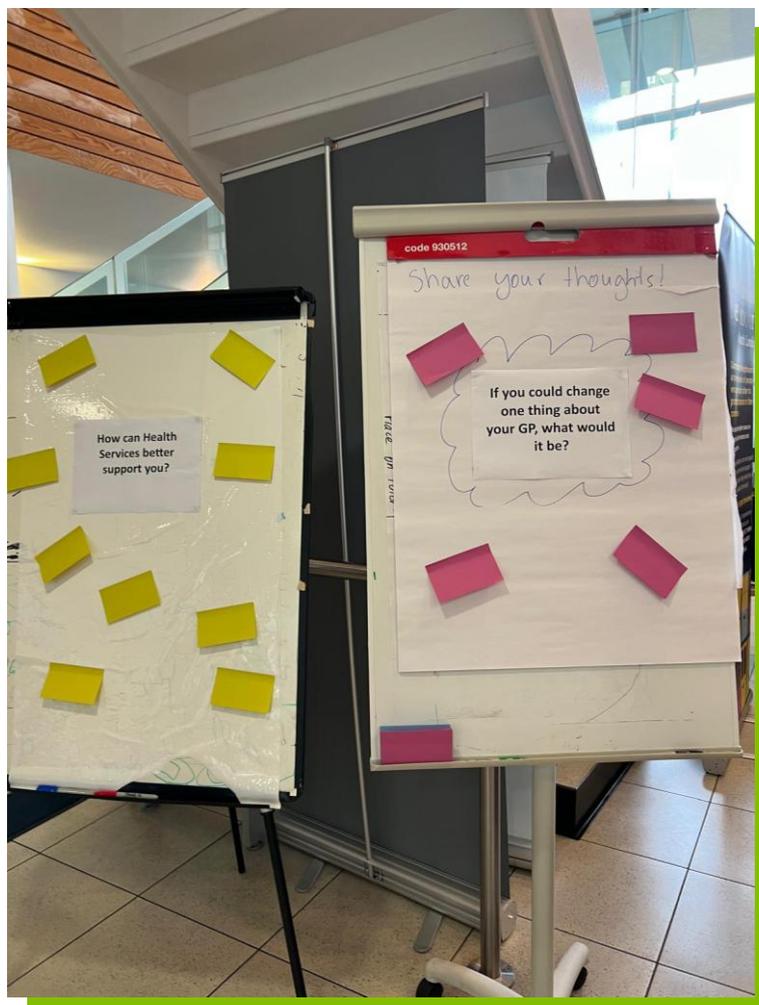
- Patients in Fiveways PCN received digital skills training which gave them more confidence in their ability to use the NHS App and ask their practice for support.
- Staff members from 5 PCNs attended workshops on community engagement. 7 engagement plans were developed on a range of topics. Staff are now trained in how to plan a piece of engagement, as well as different strategies they can implement.

## Long Term Sustainability

In addition to evaluating the PCN Engagement project and the various engagement activities undertaken, it is also important to look at the sustainability of this project in supporting community engagement activities in the future.

- Staff at practices within Fiveways PCN continue to support digital inclusivity by offering drop-in sessions to patients. These sessions help patients set up their NHS Account which they need to access the full features of the NHS App. Fiveways PCN is planning to do a further piece of work with Healthwatch Lambeth on Digital Inclusion.
- During the digital skills workshops the MyChart app used by hospitals was raised by patients who were struggling to understand what it is and how it should be used. As a result of this feedback, the workshop facilitators contacted the NHS Trust and suggested similar workshops explaining the My Chart App be made available to patients which the Trust has agreed to roll out.
- Several PCNs have taken steps to implement the plans they developed at the community engagement workshops. AT Medics hosted their usual quarterly Health & Wellbeing event and made increasing cancer screening awareness the theme of the event, this was a continuation of the theme of their workshop. For the remaining PCNs, there is a desire for implementation of their plans, but many have not been able to do so as yet with resources cited as the major barrier.

- Staff from The Vale practice in Streatham PCN have recently been in touch with Healthwatch Lambeth to further discuss the challenges they face with their large population group who is non-English speaking. Practice staff have found that the transition to more digital services is highlighting the lack of support available in other languages. At present all their communications are in English and there is a need for more materials to be translated. Healthwatch Lambeth suggested ways they may wish to engage with this group to overcome the challenges both the practice and patients are experiencing. One suggestion was to host sessions/workshops for this community group and include a translator. Topics to be covered could include an introduction to the NHS which Healthwatch has delivered to different community groups in the past, or a session introducing the NHS App. These sessions would require a translator to co-facilitate to enable more patients to take part.



*Patient feedback boards during the Health and Wellbeing Event in Streatham.*

# Staff Insight and Experiences

Through the course of this project, PCN staff shared their past experiences undertaking community engagement and some of the challenges they have encountered. These range from budget and resource constraints to finding ways to report on their learnings in a way that stimulates change.

The key messages we heard include:

- Many practices and staff already do a lot of community engagement. However, their work is not promoted within their practice or fed back to colleagues in a way that informs decision-making or improves service delivery.
- Many roles within a PCN play a vital role in community engagement (e.g. Social Prescribers, Care Navigators, Reception Staff, Community Pharmacist, Clinicians), however, it isn't clear to staff whose role community engagement falls under.
- Each PCN facilitate community engagement activities differently. Some have a budget for social prescribers or other staff to host events, whilst others do not.
- Despite GP practices having full patient information which can be used to communicate with and invite patients to engagement activities, we heard that this often requires clearance from different levels of staff which slows down the process. For example, a supervisor may be required to approve any text message/communications being sent from a practice, whilst a different staff member has authority to send the text messages meaning many staff members are required before any messages can be sent to patients.
- The cost associated with sending text messages to patients was also raised as a challenge for practice staff, with many practices holding their text message budget for specific times of year such as flu clinics.
- In addition to the cost of text messaging, communications by text may exclude patients who cannot read English well, aren't literate, or do not have a mobile phone from participating in engagement activities. Promoting engagement activities through a range of channels will help overcome this.

Despite these concerns, the staff we met conveyed a strong desire to conduct more community engagement work and continue to be informed by patient's feedback.

# Future Considerations and Next Steps

This project highlighted opportunities for future pieces of community engagement and knowledge sharing within the borough. These include:

- Exploring the opportunity for warm spaces, GP practices, libraries and such to be used as a hub for training such as digital skills literacy. There is an opportunity to use these spaces to train residents about how to use both the hospital-based My Chart App and the NHS App used by GPs.
- Celebrating success and sharing positive stories with the local community. PCNs and GPs do a lot of good work in the community, they can utilise community engagement to promote good practice and share positive experiences with their patients.
- Sharing examples of the impactful work of social prescriber link workers (SPLW). The role of SPLWs is different in each PCN, there is great benefit in understanding how these roles are being utilised in each PCN with regards to their interaction with patients and exploring how they can be involved in community engagement activities.
- Exploring the care needs of residents and carers- consult with residents to understand the type of care they wish to receive close to home rather than in a hospital setting, this includes the type of support available to carers.
- Explore patient access and the patient experience of making an appointment, separately from the quality of care they receive. Comparing the increase in appointments available versus the reduction in patient satisfaction.
- Continue to ensure patients are at the heart of thinking and planning within both PCNs and GP practices. Share experiences and embed examples of best practices.

# Recommendations

## SEL ICS

- SEL ICS should facilitate regular meetings for PCN and Practice staff to collaborate with Public Health teams in order to identify the needs of the local population and the health inequalities that exist within their patient population.
- SEL ICS should continue to encourage PCNs to engage at the population/community level in order to tackle health inequalities affecting communities in Lambeth. This includes providing opportunities for practices within PCNs to collaborate and understand the needs of each of their patient groups.
- SEL ICS should support engagement activities to assist PCNs and practices to enhance their reach to population or community groups. Some examples include translation of materials into different languages, funding for Social Prescribers to make use of translation services, or additional staffing to participate in engagement activities.
- SEL ICS should ensure Community Engagement is embedded within the PCN structure in a way that is clearly defined and provides an opportunity for collaboration across practices as well as PCNs within Lambeth. This may look different in each PCN and could include a staff structure with a staff member who is responsible for community engagement and thereby ensuring the practices within the PCN are collaborating where possible, as well as sharing knowledge and skills with other PCNs in Lambeth.

## PCNs

- PCNs should align with Public Health teams to understand the needs of the local community.
- PCNs should continue to prioritise community engagement and invest appropriately to reflect the needs of their patients and practices.
- PCNs should identify a staff member from each practice to be the point of contact regarding community engagement activities. These staff members should communicate regularly to discuss priorities, plan engagement, share knowledge, etc.
- PCNs should continue to establish connections and partnerships with local community and voluntary sector organisations.
- PCNs continue to seek opportunities for community engagement and support the development and implementation of engagement plans.

## Practices

- Practices should ensure demographic information about their patients is complete and up to date. This information is essential for identifying health inequalities.
- Practices should continue to establish connections and partnerships with local community and voluntary sector organisations.
- Practices should identify a person or team of people within the practice who can lead community engagement activities. Materials from the training workshops have been provided to all staff and can be used as a framework for developing future engagement plans.
- Practices should seek opportunities for community engagement such as local community events, outreach to faith-based organisations, housing providers or libraries etc.
- Practices should support engagement activities by providing resources or funding for text messages to invite patients to participate.



*Healthwatch Lambeth banner during the patient engagement.*

# References

1. Bombard et al. Engaging patients to improve quality of care: a systematic review. [Implementation Science](#) volume 13, Article number: 98 (2018).
2. Olsson, ABS et al. *How can we describe impact of adult patient participation in health-service development? A scoping review.* Patient Education and Counselling. Volume 103, Issue 8, August 2020, Pages 1453-1466.
3. Core20Plus5. [NHS England » Core20PLUS5 \(adults\) – an approach to reducing healthcare inequalities.](#) Accessed May 2023.
4. Core20Plus7. [Lambeth Together health and care plan 2023-28.](#) Accessed July 2023.
5. NHS England. [Working in partnership with people and communities: Statutory guidance 2023.](#) Accessed May 2023.
6. NHS England. [Primary Care Network Maturity Matrix, NHS England and NHS Improvement August 2019.](#) Accessed May 2023.
7. International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Training materials 2022.

# Appendix 1: Resources Used for the Project

- Lambeth Together – Our Health, Our Lambeth: Lambeth Together Health and Care Plan 2023–2028 – Available at [Our Health, Our Lambeth Lambeth Together health and care plan 2023-28 – Lambeth Together – accessed June 2023](#)
- NHS England Next steps for integrating primary care: Fuller Stocktake report. Available at [NHS England » Next steps for integrating primary care: Fuller stocktake report](#) – Accessed December 2022
- National Voices. Primary Care Networks: briefing paper for VCSE sector organisations, *National Voices February 2020*. Available at [Primary Care Network Briefing Paper for VCSE – National Voices](#) – Accessed December 2022
- PCN Engagement Series, *eGPlearning, YouTube 2022* – Available at [PCN DES 2022/3 Guide \(youtube.com\)](#) – Accessed May 2023



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