

POSTER ABSTRACT

Improving health inequalities and wellbeing through the development of NHS Anchor Institutions – the Advancing Quality Alliance (aqua) using a ‘living laboratory’ approach to understand and facilitate learning into how NHS organisations engage, learn and build collaborative capacity with place-based partners and local communities to create social value

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The NHS Long Term Plan (2019) recognises the potential of NHS organisations, who are often the largest employer and procurer of services within a place, to think beyond the provision of care services. By connecting and collaborating with other public and voluntary sector organisations and harnessing the energy and passion of local communities NHS organisations can purposely use their social and economic power, by the way they recruit and employ local people, purchase goods and services and partner to sustainably develop the local environment and economy.

aqua is an NHS health and care quality improvement membership organisation. Since 2012 aqua has designed and delivered a portfolio of programmes supporting health and care systems across the North West of England to develop integrated care services and improve population health and well-being.

aqua recognised that the concept of Anchor Institutions complements and expands their place-based work programme and started to scope the development of their support offer for NHS organisations and their local partners to learn and translate national Anchor Institution policy and theory into practice.

aqua has initially forged a living laboratory relationship with the Northern Care Alliance (NCA) NHS Group, an NHS provider that operates four hospital sites and integrated community services within Greater Manchester, serving a population of nearly a million and employing 17,000 staff.

A Living Laboratory is an experiential research concept to understand, prototype and test solutions in real life contexts (Eriksson et al., 2005). This approach offered aqua the opportunity to work alongside place-based leaders to codify an approach and identify transferable change principles, building on experience of complex system change.

Working with the NCA, as a ‘system enabler’ aqua provided practical support to test and develop their anchor programme, co-design and facilitate workshops, capture their anchor story and co-design and support the launch of their Social Value Creation Community of Practice with place-based partners.

aqua also worked with the NCA to prototype and test an Anchor Institution assessment framework, to baseline and assess progress across the key pillars and enablers of anchor development.

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aqua has observed how NHS organisations need to be brave and ambitious to develop as anchor institutions. However, NHS Leaders need to respectfully engage to learn from and with system partners (who often have greater experience in social value creation) to effectively build a guiding coalition, ambition and narrative with local communities.

The Covid-19 pandemic whilst impacting progress further highlighted and exacerbated structural inequalities, the need and opportunity to leverage the collective power of place-based partners to improve the health and well-being of BAME and other hard to reach communities.

For 2021/22 aqua will use the learning from the living laboratory to extend its Anchor offer to support member organisations at different stages of their anchor journey and build a network for members to share and learn together.