

NICE Strategy 2021 to 2026

Event Write-Up

Event Summary

On 28th April, Baroness Walmsley chaired a virtual roundtable event with key speakers from the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE), Chairman Sharmila Nebhrajani and CEO Gillian Leng.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) plays an important role in providing information, quality standards and guidance for health care professionals. The organisation is involved in many activities from approving the use of medicines to evaluating new technologies, and collaborates with organisations on a national and international level. All of NICE's activities are designed to ensure that patients receive the best evidence-based care at all stages from referral to treatment.

The newly published NICE strategy, covering the 5 years from 2021 to 2026, was developed during the global Covid-19 pandemic. This is reflected in the ambition for increased agility and collaboration in NICE's vision. The strategy also acknowledges that beyond the pandemic, the health landscape is changing. Increased innovation, digitalisation and shared decision making is likely to affect not just the advice NICE produces, but the speed it will need to work at and the audience its information is aimed at.

Six challenges and opportunities

NICE have identified six key themes over the coming years that are likely to have the biggest impact on the way that the health service is organised and on patient care. Sharmila Nebhrajani outlined the following.

1. Rapid pace of innovation in health technologies.

The world is moving at a rapid pace in the development of new technologies, from drugs and devices to diagnostics and digital health. NICE must be able to identify, assess and prioritise these new technologies. NICE must also ensure that new technologies are effective and affordably priced.

2. Digital, data and real-world evidence revolution

The digital revolution in health is already underway and NICE has identified the need to respond to these technologies, identify future areas of development, and assess how digital and data solutions work in practice.

3. Integrated care systems and removal of traditional barriers

The Health and Care White Paper blurs the boundaries between primary and secondary care and between the health service and local authorities. Integrated Care Systems will bring services closer together and change how the service is organised.

NICE also predicts a shift towards shared decision making, while personalised care represents a shift in health service towards self-care. Health care professionals will not be the only users of guidance. Patients, carers, and the public will expect information that is up to date, easy to understand and continuously evaluated. Only then will guidance be adopted and trusted.

4. Increasing collaboration post Covid-19 and EU exit

The Health and Care White Paper aims to embed the collaboration seen over the course of the pandemic across primary, secondary and social care, and NICE as an organisation must reflect this in its values and guidance.

5. Increased focus on tackling health inequalities

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted health inequality in a way rarely seen before. Tackling inequalities means producing information and guidance that addresses the problem for all and that is adopted by all to avoid inadvertently creating new disparities.

6. Economic challenges and a push to optimise resources.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, it is likely that public spending may be constrained. This could lead to difficult decisions for commissioners regarding technologies and investment. A focus on efficiency, providing clear direction on technologies that are effective and represent value for money will be important to benefit everyone from patients to the health service and life sciences sector.

How will NICE address these challenges?

The new strategy contains four key pillars each designed to allow collaboration and flexibility to be built into NICE's work using key lessons learnt during the pandemic. Gillian Leng discussed how these pillars are designed to address the six important themes identified during the event.

Pillar One- Rapid, responsive, and robust technology evaluation

NICE is at the forefront of evaluating existing and emerging technologies and is making changes to ensure that the organisation can be flexible and adapt to a rapidly changing health landscape. Event attendees highlighted difficulties finding the "front door" to the NHS and how NICE could be more accessible. In response, the organisation outlined several measures. These include:

- Continuing its current review of how technologies (from drugs to digital) are evaluated and approved.
- The creation of an office for digital technologies as a clear route for technology producers to interact with NICE.
- Developing an online life sciences hub.
- Continuing to foster and increase international partnerships to offer a model of guidance and remain a leading voice.

Pillar Two- Dynamic living guidelines/ recommendations

To ensure that the guidelines NICE produces are relevant, trusted and adopted, the organisation is focused on creating "living guidelines" using the rapid guidelines developed during the pandemic as a model. As real-world evidence develops and evolves, guidance will be updated to stay relevant and reflect best practice. This is partially in response to changes in patient pathways and debate around the right place and time for various diagnostics and technologies, as highlighted by some attendees.

This work involves making existing guidance more accessible, embedding technologies into the clinical pathway in the right place, prioritising health inequalities and promoting shared decision making with patients and health care professionals.

Pillar Three- Effective evidence uptake to maximise impact.

To promote adoption and increase impact, NICE is seeking to increase collaboration with clinical staff, patients, carers and the public at a local, regional and national level. NICE aims to create buy-in from as many organisations and individuals as possible to explore the best ways to present its guidance, receive feedback and reduce barriers to adoption of guidance and technologies.

Increasing the adoption of guidance is vital to ensure all patients get the best evidence-based care, to reduce variation in the use of guidance and to reduce health inequality. NICE will need to examine differences in adoption by region, disease site, clinician and patient demographic.

Pillar Four- Leadership in data, research, and science.

As health research moves towards new technologies such as personalised medicine, NICE is adapting its appraisal of health technologies and increasing the use of real-world evidence. The amount and types of data being collected across the health service creates increasing evidence types that can be used in technology evaluation.

The organisation is a global leader in technology appraisal, but it recognises the need to continue to innovate and collaborate to make the best use of available data and engage with more stakeholders. To capture the broadest

range of views and understand population need, the organisation is launching “NICE listens” to hear the views of the public at large, not only patients and patient organisations.

What next?

NICE will be implementing this strategy and continuing to adapt its practices over the next five years. Each pillar of the strategy has been developed along with measures to assess progress and to give clear accountability. NICE will play a crucial role as the pandemic continues and beyond. It will be counted on to help embed innovation, identify new technologies and ensure that the health service offers value and equality for all.