

## Engaging with people and communities

Working with people and communities continues to be an important priority for the ICS and we have committed to putting patients and the public at the heart of our work. During the last year the ICB has continued to develop its approach in this area.

### Engagement governance and leadership

The ICB's [Engagement Assurance Committee](#) (EAC) is a well established part of our governance and assurance structures on engagement. Members of public form the majority membership which also includes a Non-Executive Director (who chairs the committee), the Medical Director and the Chief of Staff, who are all board members, along with the Director of Communications and Engagement, ensuring that the importance of working in partnership with people and communities is championed by senior leadership. The Director of Voluntary Sector Collaboration and Partnerships and a representative of south east London Healthwatch are also members of the committee bringing senior independence to the committee. Key engagement projects and work that the committee has provided assurance on in the last year include:

- a deep dive on equalities including a case study on working with people with sickle cell
- the evaluation of the Guide to Healthcare pilot
- engagement in the pre-conception programme
- the south east London guide to community organising
- engagement to inform the creative health programme
- engagement as part of the re-procurement of the community ear wax removal service
- developing and reviewing the annual engagement workplan

In addition there are regular reports from Healthwatch and the [Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector \(VCSE\) Alliance](#) which included the development of the [VCSE leadership programme](#) whereby senior VCSE leaders are embedded in strategy and decision making spaces in local NHS trusts; and the [Trust and Health Creation Partnership](#) supporting people to stay well through community led approaches, particularly in communities facing the greatest health inequalities.

### Developing the creative health programme

A key project in 2025 was listening to local people across south east London to understand how they think creative health activities support health and wellbeing.

The South East London Creative Health programme aims to explore how and where creative approaches are supporting the reduction of health inequalities across our six boroughs.

In our work of testing this approach alongside an intensive period of developing new partnerships and mapping what is already happening across south east London we listened to local people's stories, views and experiences on how creativity helps them to stay well, what creative activities they participate in and where.

We developed different opportunities for people to get involved in the project to ensure we reached more local people and these included:

- open recruitment to the Creative Health Co-production Group
- the Creative Health event at Southbank Centre - *"How can creative health reduce health inequalities in South East London"*
- online survey

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- [online conversation via a chat forum](#) to complement the survey to share views and recommendations
- community events and outreach and video stories

We heard from over 300 residents which provided rich insight into people's experiences and stories of the power of creativity for health and wellbeing.

In April 2025 we visited Raw Material Music and Media a vibrant community music and creative arts centre based in Brixton, Lambeth, dedicated to supporting creative and personal development for the south London community.

The Raw Material team hosted a community open day showcasing the wide range of creative activities and resources that people of all ages can access.



We spoke with some of the staff, volunteers and community members who are involved with Raw Material's programmes. The participants shared how creative activities help them to stay well and feel connected, from poetry and music making to dancing and drumming. You can see some short videos of participants talking about this on [the engagement project page](#).

Over the summer of 2025, we continued talking to local people by attending the following events across where we listened to over 100 people:

- Southwark Eid event
- Lambeth Country Show
- Carers week event - Bexley
- Bellingham Festival
- One Bromley Wellbeing Hub
- South Asian Festival - Bexley
- Thamesmead Festival
- Penge Festival



At these events we particularly wanted to hear from people from underserved communities such as: Black African, Black Caribbean, Muslim, South Asian and others across south east London.

*'I recently had a stroke and am learning to crochet one handed. It is much more challenging than creative'*

*'My way to be creative is by making creative learning resources and a beautiful learning environment for my students. This makes me feel good'*

*'I love cooking for people because I love to see the smile on their faces. Cooking is a passion of mine. I feel that food brings people together from different walks of life. Good food is essential. Cooking helps me relieve stress and makes the world go around.'*

*'Creativity is the intrigue that helps to bring people together and that togetherness'*

*then bonds people and creates relationships and creates wellbeing'*

*'Not feeling isolated and a reason to get out and socialising has made the biggest difference.'*



We gained the following insight from our listening:

- A high majority of participants across all boroughs agreed that taking part in creative activities supports health and wellbeing.
- Gardening, food learning, dancing/physical activity and crafting were noted as the most popular creative activities local residents are participating in.
- Over 60% of participants felt that taking part in creative health activities made them less stressed, relaxed, positive and happy alongside other benefits.
- A high number of people involved are engaging in creative activities at home.
- More women than men told us they are regularly engaging in creative health activities.
- 66% of people not currently involved in any creative activities are interested in participating in creative activities to support their health and wellbeing.

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- 58% of people engage with creative health every week. Regular creative health engagement is lower for global majority respondents, perhaps linked to access to information about culturally relevant activity offers.
- Caring responsibilities, affordable access to activities and knowledge of where to find them and managing long term health conditions are barriers to engaging in creative health activities.
- The need to support free access to creative health activities is highlighted as a priority concern throughout the survey.

We continue to work through our partnership between local councils, the voluntary and creative sector, the Greater London Authority to see how we can use less traditional methods to support people to live well for longer and things that make sense in their lives. We are one of two areas in London testing out this approach.

### **Re-procurement of the community ear wax removal service**

Another key project over 2025 - 2026 was to collect views and insight from people with lived experience, carers and wider communities to inform the re-design of the South East London Community Earwax Removal services as part of the re-procurement process. The project aimed to ensure that we improve access to safe, timely and effective services across all six south east London boroughs.

Over the autumn 2025 we undertook a set of engagement activities where we had the opportunities to listen to local people through a survey and two online focus groups. Over 67 people shared their experiences showing the value of the service. They also highlighted limited awareness of the service and how to access it. We also attended two in-person community events and gained further feedback on how to address health inequalities and barriers.

Issues that were highlighted as important from our listening include:

- the need for home visits for housebound people
- the need for group clinics in care homes
- importance of comprehensive access and referral processes
- improved advice and self-care support
- better joined up care
- better communications.

These issues have informed the service specification. We have also recruited three people with lived experience / carers to be members of the steering group which will guide the procurement process.

[The insights summary and a full report as well as the comprehensive information on our involvement approach is available on our project page.](#)

### **Improving preconception care**

Over the last year we worked closely with local people to understand how to better support families before pregnancy. The South East London Local Maternity and Neonatal System (SEL LMNS), in partnership with Local Government East (LGE), delivered an inclusive engagement initiative to better understand how people across south east London think about and prepare for pregnancy, also known as preconception health.

The project aimed to explore awareness, barriers and opportunities around preconception care. The project focused on equity, inclusion, and lived experience reaching people from all six boroughs of south east London through face-to-face sessions, surveys, and community events.

We engaged with 78 local people and 52 Southwark College students through 12 in-person sessions at children's centres, family hubs, and community groups.

- Ellen Brown Children and Family Centre, Babies and Us Group
- Bellingham Family Hub, Explorers Baby group
- West St CC, Bouncing Babies
- Motivational Mums Club
- Community Vision Children and Family Centre
- Waterways Children's Centre
- Southwark College
- Blenheim Children and Family Centre
- Cotmandene Children's Centre
- Young Mums Club
- Future Dads - Future Men



These conversations revealed that many people - especially young adults and men - are unfamiliar with the term "preconception" and are unaware of the steps they can take to prepare for a healthy pregnancy.

Other findings include:

- 71% of Southwark College student participants had never heard of preconception care
- 45% of participants were planning another pregnancy but still lacked knowledge about preconception health
- 52% had searched online for information, but 47% had not - highlighting the need for offline resources
- 39% of participants had not taken any vitamins before pregnancy
- 44% did not speak to anyone before deciding to have a baby

People involved shared that they often rely on family, social media, or online forums for information. Many had not spoken to a healthcare professional before becoming pregnant

and most lifestyle changes (e.g. taking folic acid or adjusting diet) were made only after pregnancy began.

*"It is easier to get information in person, but everything is online."*- Project participant

The project also uncovered emotional and cultural complexities. For some, pregnancy planning involved confronting past trauma, such as baby loss or infertility. Others described the influence of elders, religious beliefs, and cultural expectations on their decisions.

Participants also expressed a desire for more realistic information about the financial realities of parenthood, mental health and the impact on relationships. Many felt antenatal classes were inaccessible due to language barriers or inconvenient scheduling.

The insight has shaped plans to improve education and resources for healthier pregnancies which will result in better outcomes for parents and babies. We partnered with [Tommy's the pregnancy and baby charity](#), who launched a public health campaign for six months in 2025. Our goal was to raise awareness about pre-conception topics and encourage residents to plan their pregnancies using [Tommy's Pregnancy Planning Tool](#). This tool provides personalised insights on pre-conception health topics, including the use of folic acid and Vitamin D.

The campaign boosted awareness and generated over 3,000 tool completions and a rise in tool usage among Black and Black Mixed Heritage users, as well as increased uptake from people living in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

Everyone who completed the tool was invited to take part in a survey. Feedback was positive with most users finding the tool helpful, supported confidence-building and overall wellbeing. However, it also highlighted further targeted support is needed in certain areas, including the need to promote folic acid and vitamin D in younger age groups.

We have, therefore, launched a follow-up campaign in January 2026 to provide information about local services for those who wish to access pre-conception services. [Plan For Baby](#) contains comprehensive information on general pre-conception topics and details on accessing local services.

### **Partnership with Impact on Urban Health**

We continue our partnership with [Impact on Urban Health](#) to address health inequalities through our Black maternal health and Black mental health programmes.

We have set up a South East London Black Maternal Health Expert Reference Group made up of local Black mothers and birthing people, leaders of community organisations, and clinicians and service managers from the NHS to guide the work. A Black maternal health inequalities solutions focused workshop took place in June 2025, facilitated by JRNY Consulting and Black Mothers Matter. The solutions that came out of the workshop were further developed, scored and came to form the basis for a grant-making opportunity launched in November 2025, with a focus on community-led delivery. The expressions of interest closed in January 2026. To support the scoring, shortlisting an allocation of funding we have recruited a group of lived experience consultants.

[You can find out more about the project here including a report and short film of the June workshop.](#)

We are following a similar process as part of the Black mental health project as we did with the Black maternal health project. We have created a Black Mental Health Expert Reference Group that acts as the key strategic decision-making forum for the programme. The group

includes people with lived experience, VCSE leaders (including Black Thrive and Ndukauba CIC), NHS clinicians and commissioners, and academics. We worked with the group to co-design the agenda for a solutions-focused workshop which took place in March 2026. The event brought together over 90 people from across south east London, the majority with lived experience of mental health issues, and included clinicians, commissioners and service providers from the NHS and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE).

The purpose of the day was to generate solutions to address well evidenced inequalities experienced by Black communities accessing mental health services. These solutions will be developed and evaluated by an Expert Reference Group comprised of people with lived experience, by/for VCSE organisations and change advocates within the NHS, in order to create a grant-making opportunity later this year.

[You can read about the project here.](#)

### **Re-procuring the community wheelchair service in Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich**

We have also been reviewing the community wheelchair service for residents in Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich. The purpose of the review is to ensure the service continues to meet future needs and delivers consistent, high-quality care across all three boroughs.

We have been listening to people who use the service, their carers and professionals to understand what works well and where improvements can be made. Through surveys and focus groups, more than 200 people with lived experience shared their views. Many people spoke positively about the dedication and clinical expertise of staff. However, some told us about waiting times for assessments, equipment and repairs, and difficulties contacting the service. People also highlighted how important continuity and trusted relationships are, as wheelchairs play a vital role in maintaining independence and daily living.

Feedback showed that easier access to flexible appointments, quicker assessments, and more reliable repairs and maintenance are key priorities. Participants also emphasised the need for a more person-centred approach that considers independence, quality of life and lifestyle needs. This feedback is directly informing the service specification so that the future arrangements build on current strengths while addressing the areas that matter most to people.

These insights will guide the service design and procurement of the new service. We have recruited three people with lived experience and carers to help shape and monitor the process.

[You can read more about the project including the insight report here.](#)

### **Developing co-ordinated community-based care services to support people from being in hospital**

We know from previous engagement work that people find it hard to know where to go to access care. We want to develop a central place through which people are referred, known as a single point of access / integrated care co-ordination hub, for hospital at home and urgent community response services to help make it easier for people to access these services as alternatives for having to be admitted to hospital.

As part of our approach we developed a survey in autumn 2025 to understand what is working well and what could be better about virtual wards and urgent response teams. We also had conversations with over 60 people at the Bexley Aging Well Festival. Participants welcome services at home, the kindness and compassion of people who visited and knowing how to contact the virtual ward team. We also heard that communication could be better in

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some circumstances including active listening to patient and carer views and knowing when people were going to visit. In some cases, carers had to spend a lot of time. We are exploring these issues further in a focus group held in March 2026.

[You can read more about the project here.](#)

### **Community sickle cell services in south east London**

This year we continued to strengthen sickle cell services across south east London by listening to local people. Through a survey and evaluation including feedback from individuals living with sickle cell, families and carers using the new community services, we have been able to understand the impact of the service on their lives and develop our next steps and further improvements including:

- increasing the number of specialist community nurses for both children and adults and introducing a wider multi-disciplinary team bringing together dietitians, physiotherapists, pharmacists and psychologists in one appointment to support overall health and wellbeing
- bringing in welfare advice services
- peer mentoring for young people through the Sickle Cell Society
- developing educational resources for patients, schools, workplaces and healthcare professionals

*'The combination of a dietitian and a pharmacist in one session proved to be a game-changer for us. This new way of working is a huge step forward for families like ours. It offers us peace of mind and ensures that our children receive comprehensive, compassionate care.'* -Parent

One of the year's highlights was a community picnic at Crystal Palace Park this summer. Planned and informed by people with living with sickle cell the event brought together families, young people, mentors, clinicians and other supporters to celebrate progress and share ideas for the future strengthening of the sickle cell community in south east London. These changes are helping people feel seen, supported, and empowered to manage their condition.



[You can read more about the project here.](#)

### **Improving services for autistic adults**

In 2025 we engaged with autistic people to better understand their experiences of health and care services to help inform us of how to improve them. Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition that affects how people communicate and interact with the world. Autism is not a medical nor a mental health condition, but some people need support to help them with certain things.

Through an online survey and two focus groups, autistic people and their carers shared their experiences, highlighting key gaps in support and making recommendations such as: more

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tailored mental health support, the need for education in 'understanding my autism', services to help with communication needs, and daily life skills. Carers identified similar insights, with 75% highlighting the gap in services that support the person's mental health needs. They recommended, as a high priority, the need for services to help autistic individuals build independence and navigate transition to adulthood.

People highlighted the need for information about support available, including developing life skills, employment support, easier transition between children and adult services and more support for families and carers. We also heard that the gap in support services particularly exists for autistic people who do not have a learning disability or a diagnosed mental health condition although the support that these services can offer may be the types of support that autistic people need. As a result, autistic people are often unable to access support, particularly when they need it most.

Following the engagement in 2025, we worked with partner organisations and two people with lived experience of autism to design a community autism service. This service will provide multidisciplinary, person-centred support to autistic adults whose needs are not able to be met by existing services.

The new service will launch in spring 2026 and will be delivered across south east London by South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust and Oxleas NHS Trust.

[You can read more here](#)

### Engagement infrastructure

We continue to develop and have good engagement with our on-line engagement platform, [Let's talk health and care in south east London](#). We have published 11 new south east London wide projects in the last year and continue to update on-going projects. Since April 2025 we have had over 17,000 visits to the site with over 4,000 informed visits (such as people clicking through and downloading documents) and over 1,000 engaged visits (people responding to a survey or chat forum). We promote all our projects as well as those of partner organisations in our monthly Get Involved newsletter which has a combined circulation across south east London of over 2,000 people with partners also sending it on to their mailing lists. You can read and sign up to our Get Involved newsletter at [Engagement newsletter - sign up | South East London ICS](#).

Commented [RW1]: Figures at 17 March to update at end of March

We have developed and published a [guide to community organising](#) as part of our [engagement toolkit](#) to support colleagues further in how to listen, share power, build trust and create actionable solutions with local people and communities.

We continue to develop our [insight library](#) on the ICS website to share insight from people and communities across partners and programmes to maximise the value of engagement, avoid duplication and engagement fatigue and enable programmes to focus engagement activity on working with people and communities to identify solutions to issues raised rather than gaining further insight. Key insight reports we published during 2025 – 2026 include insight gained as part of the national Change NHS conversation and insight gained during the engagement in creative health programme. We also produced a summary of community insight from previous projects to support the development of the strategic commissioning plan.

The engagement team continues to organise and facilitate the ICS Engagement Practitioners' Network (EPN) to share insight, align engagement and share good practice and learning across partnerships and place. The network brings together engagements

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leads and practitioners from across health and care partner organisations across south east London including Healthwatch and the Director of Voluntary Sector Collaboration and Partnerships. A key focus of discussions in the last year has been on engagement in developing neighbourhood health services from across different partners and places including co-design with people with multi long term conditions in Lewisham, Healthwatch engagement in Lambeth and participatory budgeting in the Royal Borough of Greenwich.

The engagement team also convene the Coordinator of Community Champion programmes which also meets on a bi-monthly basis. Each borough has community champions schemes and the purpose of the network is to share good practice, promote key messages, campaigns, awareness, and engagement opportunities for them to share with their champions and their networks and communities.

### **Development of integrated neighbourhood health service**

In our boroughs a key focus on engagement activity this year has been around neighbourhood health.

As part of One Bromley health and care partners [integrated neighbourhoods teams \(INT\) programme](#) development, in September 2025 Bromley patients were invited to help shape a new model of care for people with multiple long term conditions in the borough. We held two workshops – one on-line and one face to face.

The sessions focused on diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic kidney disease, hypertension, depression, chronic pain and respiratory diseases (asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease COPD). Participants shared their lived experiences of managing these conditions; what is working well and suggested where improvements could be made. Residents highlighted the importance of involving carers and adapting to patients' needs and preferences. People valued the chance to be listened to and asked for follow-up and to be involved in the next steps of the project. The feedback gathered will play a key role in shaping how health and care services in Bromley are designed and delivered in the future.

[You can read more here.](#)

In Greenwich we work closely with Royal Borough of Greenwich (RBG) to develop and cultivate relationships through a community organising approach across all four neighbourhoods. As part of this approach with RBG residents were invited to [Community Voting Days](#) vote for the projects they want to see funded to help improve the health and wellbeing in their area. Community leaders set the priorities for the funding that included: social and community connection, physical activity, mental health and wellbeing, built environment, raise awareness or improve access to local support and services, and food. Projects could bid for up from £250 to £1,000.

In Lambeth we worked with Healthwatch Lambeth to engage local people to inform the development of neighbourhood health services. They held two workshops in July 2025 to discuss and understand people's views of what would make a good neighbourhood health services, their focus and ways of working. They also ran a survey between October 2025 – January 2026 aimed at people with experience of the priority areas of children and young people with complex needs, people with three or more long term health conditions, people who are frail and people who need support with their mental health conditions. They also ran a series of focus groups over the winter to explore issue in more depth.

[You can read more here.](#)

In Lewisham we developed a co-design project with people with lived experience to support the development of INTs with a focus on communication preferences, the lifestyle questionnaire, group consultations and the approach to patients discharge.

The outcomes were celebrated during a 'thank you' event held on 21 May, where all codesign members heard the You Said, We Did elements resulted from the codesign. Their input has been included in the INT Patient guides, and [their experience as part of the project recorded](#) to encourage other teams and patients and highlight the value of patient involvement.

[You can read more here.](#)

Across boroughs, a range of other engagement activity has taken place ranging from discussions in public forums and People's Partnership, outreach to communities to support relationships and developing trust to shaping integrated neighbourhood health models, particularly for people with long-term conditions. We have also supported engagement in changes in general practice. A range of engagement methods across the six boroughs of south east London ensured that feedback directly informed service models, patient information and next steps. You can read more about local engagement by following the links below:

- [Bexley Wellbeing Partnership](#)
- [One Bromley](#)
- [Healthier Greenwich Partnership](#)
- [Lambeth Together](#)
- [Lewisham Health and Care Partnership](#)
- [Partnership Southwark](#)