Leveraging digital transformation to tackle the system-wide productivity challenge

Improving productivity
in health and care means achieving more value
without a proportional increase in the resources to deliver. Integrated care system (ICS)
leaders are shifting away from siloed approaches to a system-wide view emphasising joined-up
care, shared resources and designing efficient, technology-enabled processes.

The digital tools and capabilities within a system are important enablers for productivity, in the same way as workforce and capital investment. With constrained resources, ICS leaders must look to digital transformation to:

- **Increase efficiency to meet growing demand**, boost clinical and operational effectiveness, streamline workflows, empower patients to self-manage where appropriate and free up staff time to care. Poor IT systems and equipment account for an estimated 13.5m hours of clinical time lost each year.[1]

- **Enable integrated system working**, joining up information and processes across partner organisations to unlock cross-organisational efficiencies.

- **Support data-driven decision-making** through shared cross-system intelligence and analytics functions that integrate data from various sources to inform prioritisation and allow leaders to allocate resources more effectively.

Understanding your current state

Mapping system flow and the surrounding digital ecosystem is crucial for identifying pain points for improvement. As system partners move beyond siloed ways of working to create productivity gains that are greater than the sum of organisational parts, ICS leaders should:

- Empower teams to map one pathway in the system from end to end, identifying where digital is a barrier or could be a solution.

- Focus on the interfaces between organisations where digital technologies and shared data can expose and fill gaps that get in the way of a seamless journey for residents moving between services.

- Ensure leadership teams model collaboration, build trust across organisations and consistently take a system-first approach.

1 British Medical Association, 'Getting IT Right: The Case for Urgent Investment in Safe, Modern Technology and Data Sharing in the UK's Health Services', Building the Future, 2022.

The Digital Notts Roadmap focuses on increasing productivity through public-facing digital tools. Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICS's Capacity and Flow programme is enhancing patient care by using digital technology to manage how people move through and between services across the system.

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Prioritising – where to start

Start with understanding the problem. As leaders this means getting closer to the populations that you serve, ensuring there are robust channels to bring the experiences of staff and service users to the board, and supporting your digital teams to design and deliver digital tools that are relentlessly user focused.

Begin with fixing the basics. Often, the most impactful digital solutions solve a basic need for staff or service users or enable a more streamlined way of working. ICS leaders must have a clear picture of what the digital basics are within their system and the costs to collaboration that come with not getting these right. Modern technologies can help – like the focused use of artificial intelligence to support faster diagnosis and automate manual administrative tasks, and system leaders need to have a basic understanding of these technologies, their implications and how they can be strategically deployed. However, the first step toward more efficient system working will rarely be about adding digital tools on top of existing processes. It's about stepping back to reimagine ways of working and identifying what you can improve, do differently or stop doing.

> *Mid and South Essex ICS leaders set a commitment and empowered teams to take a **Stewardship Approach**. This involves tackling one pathway at a time, bringing a small multidisciplinary team together to look at the patient experience across a system and rethinking resource allocation to support process improvement that can make the most impact on population health across organisations.*

Uniting around a productivity mission

Build a compelling narrative that focuses efforts on what matters to patients and their outcomes. Prioritise creating 'value', defined through a wider improvement lens, over outputs and activity measures. Decisions made by system partners will have implications that extend beyond the walls of the organisation – both positively and negatively. For example, implementing technologies that are not interoperable with neighbouring organisations may create headaches for collaboration and integration later down the line.

Unite around a mission to support joined-up decision-making, taking care not to introduce projects in silos at the cost of future combined working. Digital can enable this mission and long-term productivity gains through using population health analytics to power targeted interventions for those at higher risk, earlier treatment enabled by innovative diagnostic technologies and investment in prevention. As a system leader, identify levers for moving resources flexibly and where capacity and capability can be shared across the system.

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> *North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust*
> *implemented local technology-enabled measures*
> *that generated benefits across the Cheshire and Merseyside ICS.*
> *The trust designed new ways of working led by clinical champions*
> *and trainers, incorporating video consultation triage which supports clinicians*
> *to better identify and manage patient risk, reducing pressure in emergency*
> *departments. Adopting a whole-system approach to productivity means that costs*
> *incurred by one trust can pay productivity dividends elsewhere in the system.*

Measuring what matters

Ensure you have the tools and processes in place that allow you to measure what matters. Building a comprehensive productivity story relies on leaders fully understanding what system data is telling them. **Can you pinpoint areas where system-working has reduced duplication or created efficiencies that can be amplified? How are you capturing evidence from service users to understand how painful or smooth their journey is?** Find simple impact measures that have real meaning for patients and staff, like hours gained that can be given back to care, reductions

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Key questions for ICS leaders to ask

1. *How are partner organisations incentivised to take on initiatives where the benefits will be felt elsewhere in the system? Where can collaborative working power productivity gains?*

2. *Does your board have a clear picture of the outcomes that increased productivity will achieve across the system? What will more efficient service delivery look and feel like for patients and staff?*

3. *How are you capturing and communicating the benefits of collaboration? What measures can signal the health of partnership working within the system?*

4. *How is your board enabling teams to bridge organisational divides?*

Further resources

Department of Health and Social Care
Shared outcomes toolkit for integrated care systems

Professional Record Standards Body
Transfers of care toolkit

Our offer

The Digital ICS programme is a free support offer to support all ICB and ICS leaders to better harness digital transformation to enable delivery of system ambitions. The programme is commissioned by NHS England as part of their NHS Digital Academy and delivered by NHS Providers in partnership with NHS Confederation and Public Digital.

Our bespoke leadership development sessions support boards in building confidence and understanding of digital transformation.

Please contact us at digital.ics@nhsproviders.org to find out more.

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