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**Road to NHS ConfedExpo 2026**



HSJ Information is delighted to be participating in the NHS ConfedExpo on 10-11 June. This year's agenda is centered around [8 core themes](#).

In anticipation of the event, we are providing insight and predictions into each of eight themes with our *Road to NHS ConfedExpo 2026* series, featuring expert input from across the HSJ Information portfolio.

This week's entry takes a close look at **Population Health and Prevention**

**#2 of 8**

## Population Health: Any Progress Yet?

Featuring contributions from



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## Population Health: Any Progress Yet?



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The NHS is undergoing significant structural and strategic shifts to prioritise population health and preventative care, though these efforts face challenges related to funding and organisational restructuring.

### ICB Restructuring and Strategic Commissioning

Recent developments in Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) show a move toward becoming "strategic commissioners." According to the HSJ article [ICBs strip digital and HR directors from top teams](#) published on March 2, 2026, many ICBs have restructured their executive teams to focus on population health and neighbourhood-level care:

*"Some have created new posts with a focus on strategy and commissioning, reflecting government's orders for them to become "strategic commissioners"... Two ICBs – Central East (covering a large chunk of the East of England) and Surrey and Sussex – have created dedicated exec posts for "neighbourhood health"."*

While some ICBs have created roles specifically for system transformation and population health, others have consolidated clinical leadership, with three ICBs cutting their Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) and Chief Medical Officer (CMO) roles into a [single clinical executive post](#).

### Primary Care and Neighbourhood Health Initiatives

The NHS is working toward a "neighborhood health" model, though formal provider contracts for this work have been delayed.

As reported in [No neighbourhood provider contracts for another year](#) (February 12, 2026), the 2026-27 period is being treated as a "stabilization" year.

NHSE Chief Executive Sir Jim Mackey noted that hospital leaders are wary of shifting funding to the community without clear evidence that it reduces [hospital demand](#).

## Data Sharing and Elective Care Prevention

To improve accountability and quality, NHS England (NHSE) is adopting a more "permissive" approach to data. A February 2025 board paper, discussed in [NHSE to take greater risks on data sharing](#), stated that NHSE will "release all (aggregate/non-disclosive) data by default" to [support third-party insights and population health tracking](#).

In elective care, the "Advice and Guidance" (A&G) scheme aims to prevent unnecessary hospital referrals. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) noted in [NHSE bid to divert referrals falling well short of target](#) (February 27, 2026) that from October 2025, the NHS began using a "single front door" for clinical triage, with A&G becoming routine practice in the 2026/27 GP contract.



### Dave West

Deputy Editor, Health Service Journal (HSJ)

### HSJ Information

*Population health and prevention (from an NHS perspective at least) are caught up in the uncertainty about integrated care boards' role, and about "neighbourhood health". People will be looking for any signs that they are being given anything other than lip service, in terms of priorities and funding.*

*Sir Jim Mackey has told HSJ that local areas must set out in May their own proposals for developing NH, including contracting changes, and who will be responsible.*

*That could be a recipe for inaction — but some of the more advanced will set out their stall at Confed.*

*More specific requirements for progress on population health and prevention — such as driving increases in primary care cardiovascular interventions — might come from the first of the "modern service frameworks", also due this year.*

## Addressing Health Inequalities

NHS health inequalities policy has evolved from an emergency response during the COVID-19 pandemic to a core strategic priority, though significant gaps remain between national ambitions and local delivery.

While there have been successes in data transparency and targeted clinical frameworks, the service continues to face deep-seated cultural and structural challenges.

## Policy Successes and Strategic Progress

- A major success in recent years has been the shift toward data-driven accountability. Following the pandemic, NHS England (NHSE) committed to restoring services inclusively, guided by core performance monitoring of service use among [deprived and ethnic minority communities](#).
- Targeted Frameworks: The CORE20PLUS5 approach, led by former NHSE director Bola Owolabi, has provided [a structured model for reducing inequalities in five clinical areas](#). Additionally, the government launched England's first Men's Health Strategy in late 2025 [to address](#) higher risks of suicide and cardiovascular disease among men.
- The 10-Year Health Plan: Published in 2025, this plan established equity as a central mission. It includes [a review of the Carr-Hill GP allocation formula](#) to ensure funding better reflects local needs.

## Persistent Challenges and Barriers

Despite these policies, leaders report that progress in routine performance reporting has been ["virtually nil" in some areas](#). Health Secretary Wes Streeting has noted that inequality remains a "matter of life and death" and that the NHS must move beyond "inputs and workshops" to [actual outcomes](#).



Join the population health conversation with NHS leaders

18 May 2026 | The Eastside Rooms, Birmingham

[Find out more](#)

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## FURTHER READING ON NEIGHBOURHOOD HEALTH FROM THE HSJ INFORMATION PORTFOLIO

### [NHS to take greater risks on data sharing](#)

**Joe Talora**  
Correspondent,  
Health Service  
Journal (HSJ)  
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Population Health's success will rely on good data about those populations – so is the NHS's move to open up more good news?

Joe Talora covers moves by NHS England to create “a more permissive environment for sharing of aggregate data across the NHS, where legal and governance advice is sought where there is specific legitimate cause for a potential exception. NHSE will, in future, release all (aggregate/non-disclosive) data by default.”

[READ MORE](#)

### [NHSE bid to divert referrals falling well short of target](#)

**James Illman**  
Bureau Chief,  
Health Service  
Journal (HSJ)  
**HSJ Information**



Diverting referrals is one of the main aims of the prevention agenda.

But NHS England is set to fall “well short” of a key target to ramp up GPs' use of “advice and guidance” from specialists – and the model is “unlikely to be the silver bullet ministers hoped for” to help cut waiting lists, experts have warned.

James Illman lays out their fears that the NHS will not deliver nearly enough requests overall, or “divert” enough referrals, to meet its ambitious targets.

[READ MORE](#)

### [The Integrator: How the 10-Year Plan got lost](#)

**Dave West**  
Deputy Editor,  
Health Service  
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Does prevention chime with the public's priorities for the NHS of the future?

In this essential Integrator column Dave West assesses the progress of the 10-Year Plan rollout, where prevention is a central shift. While some organisations are floundering on delivery, some work is being done on equalities, including a re-assessment of the Carr-Hill financing formula.

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