Volunteering and social action

A narrative to complement the six principles for engaging people and communities

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This narrative was developed by the People and Communities Board, with particular support from the organisations below. The Board operated between 2015 and 2017. The narrative is designed to read alongside the six principles for engaging people and communities (www.bit.ly/thesixprinciples). In particular it supports Principle 6: “Volunteering and social action are recognised as key enablers”.

National Voices

navca

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE

Together for older people

VOLUNTEERING MATTERS

Volunteering and social action narrative
1 A clear narrative for volunteering and social action in health and care

What is this narrative?

A narrative that articulates the value of volunteering and social action must speak to:

- The individual
- Communities in all their forms
- The health and care system and allied services
- Society

Volunteering is time given freely for the benefit of others. It takes many forms and may take place through organisations (formal) or with friends and neighbours (informal). In health and care, it can happen in any services, including GP surgeries and hospitals.

Social action is time freely spent with others to tackle local problems, negotiate with public services, and improve conditions that benefit all. It is often carried out through independent community groups. Social action can be aimed at improving the health of individuals or the community. It can also ensure that the wellbeing of people involved is maintained or improved.

The value of volunteering and social action

Volunteering and social action matter to people, communities, health and care services, and society because of the impact they have:

- **People who volunteer or take social action have better health and wellbeing.** They experience quicker recovery from ill health, lower risk of mortality, better functioning, increased life satisfaction, reduced loneliness and isolation, and less chance of developing depression.

- **Volunteering and social action give people more control over their lives and communities.** They enable people to influence and take control of their environments, including health, social care, education, education, and leisure.

- **People who take part in volunteering and social action develop new skills** which they can use in other parts of their lives.
• **Volunteering and social action help health and care services do better.** They enable the health and care system and allied services to deliver improved person-centred, integrated health and care outcomes.

All these effects help to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the health and care system.
Volunteering and social action narrative in the future health and care system

What will it look like in 2026 if volunteering and social action have become key enablers in our health and care systems?

People see volunteering and social action as normal, enjoyable, and valuable. They recognise the role it plays in improving their health and wellbeing, and that of others.

People using health, care, and support services are as likely to be giving their time and sharing their skills and assets as taking or receiving, and as a result will have improved health and wellbeing.

People feel part of their community and are able to look to that community when things get difficult for them.

Communities are better places to live because there is a web of mutual support which has become the norm, and which is not mediated by commissioners or services.

Volunteering and social action are recognised and valued by commissioners and providers.

Community development support is available where needed to remove obstacles to greater involvement in health and care.

Local health and care service policies and practices are more transparent, better understood, and held to account.

People who are employed to provide services see volunteers as equals with a vital contribution to make to health, care, and wellbeing. This means that there is a wider range of person-centred support available, and that providers and professionals can use their time and skills to best effect.

The NHS has become a social movement for health and wellbeing and everyone feels they have a role to play in this, whether or not they currently use or need health and care services.

The NHS is therefore sustainable within available resources.