

Getting started as a health anchor

What is an anchor?

Anchor institutions are large public sector organisations which are rooted in place and connected to their communities, such as universities, local authorities, and hospitals. Anchors have significant assets and spending power and can consciously use these resources to benefit communities.

As well as providing health services, the NHS and other health organisations can use their resources and influence to maximise its social, economic and environmental impacts (social value) to improve the social determinants of health, health outcomes and reduce health inequalities.

Since launching the [Health Anchors Learning Network](https://www.haln.org.uk) in February 2021, we have found that most health anchors across the UK are delivering or planning to deliver activities across these 6 strategic anchor areas:

Community engagement and civic action

Collaborating with communities to help address local priorities and build on their energy and skills.



Workforce, employment and skills

Being a good employer, paying people the real living wage and creating opportunities for local communities to develop skills and access jobs in health and care.

Working with local anchor partners

Collaborating with other anchors and partners to increase and scale impact locally.



6 ways that health anchors can consciously use resources to benefit their communities



Procurement and spend

Purchasing from organisations which consider their environmental, social and economic impacts in the local area.

Reducing environmental impact

Taking action to reduce carbon emissions, consumption and reduce waste and protect and enhance the natural environment.



Estates and infrastructure investment

Widening access to community spaces, working with partners to support high-quality, affordable housing and supporting the local economy.

The first few steps

- **Looking at what exists**
Review existing activity that may fall under the 6 strategic anchor areas and look at gaps where there is no work underway. Review existing data on local needs and priorities which could be met through anchor activity.
- **Getting to know the other anchors in your area**
Find out what other anchors (e.g. local authorities, colleges, housing associations, universities and large businesses) are already doing to benefit the local community. Discuss how to support existing initiatives and work together to support specific target communities.
- **Identifying big inward investment/infrastructure projects in your area**
Identify, explore and engage those projects which have the potential to combine anchor strategies together, such as procurement and workforce.
- **Developing an anchor mission**
To have an intentional anchor approach, a health anchor needs to develop an anchor mission - a commitment to use assets and resources in partnership with the community and other anchors to benefit the local population. A crucial part of this process is engaging with other local anchor partners to understand the opportunities to collaborate on specific goals.
- **Choosing a geographic focus**
A well defined 'local community' will help bring the anchor mission to life. The health anchor should consider which target community it wants to impact, and which local challenges to prioritise. This geographic limit will also help with data collection and evaluation.
- **Choosing one or two activities as a starting point**
After reviewing existing activity and engaging with other local partners, health anchors should choose a few initiatives to test out their new way of working and to galvanise others in their organisation. Many of the health anchors that we have spoken with started with the activities shown on the next page.

Anchors can get started with any of the 6 strategic areas, and local context and challenges will often determine what is prioritised at a starting point. We have found that several UK health anchors have used **workforce, employment and skills** and **procurement and spend** as their starting points for working as an anchor. To deliver on the anchor mission, activities need to be part of a coordinated and intentional anchor strategy involving multiple initiatives across multiple departments. These are the activities that several UK health anchors have started with:



Understanding and supporting the existing workforce

- Gathering data on staff about diversity and on how many live locally
- Staff mental health and wellbeing programme

Growing the workforce

- Targeting positions for local people by ring-fencing roles and doing place based recruitment
- Running pre-employment programmes including work placements, volunteering and work experience

Understanding existing procurement and spend

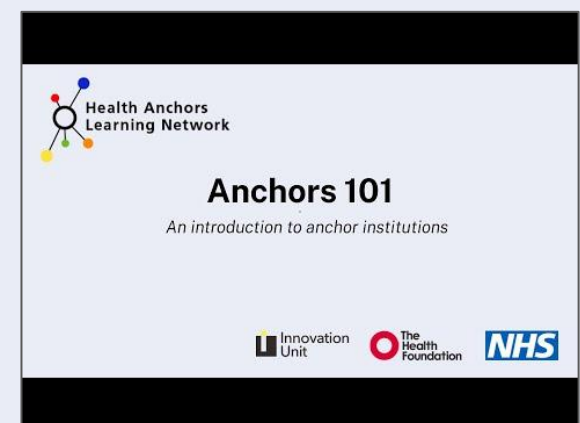
- Benchmarking current spend in the local economy
- Understanding barriers that smaller organisations based locally face

Increasing social value

- Ensuring providers embed and deliver social value
- Ensuring contracts support social value

Resources for getting started

- [Where to start with frameworks and charters](#) -blog by Julia Slay from the Health Anchors Learning Network.
- [Anchor Mission Playbook](#) -a toolkit by Rush University Medical Centre to help hospitals and health systems accelerate their own efforts to drive institutional alignment with community needs.
- [NHS Forth Valley's anchor mission](#) -recording from the Health Anchors Learning Network launch event with Cathie Cowan discussing their anchor approach to working with partners and the local community
- [Anchor Mission Communications Toolkit](#) -tips, tools and examples from Rush University Medical Center along with other members of the Healthcare Anchor Network (HAN) based in the USA.
- [Anchor Institution Progression Framework](#) -a toolkit by Les Newby at Les Newby Associates Ltd and Nicky Denison at Wordfern Ltd designed to help organisations to self assess where they are now against each anchor dimension, and to support them in deciding where they want to be and the actions they can take to get there.
- [Building healthier communities: the role of the NHS as an anchor institution](#) -a report by the Health Foundation about five ways in which NHS organisations act as anchor institutions
- [AECF's anchor Dashboard](#) -a report on the importance of anchor institutions in community wellbeing, and ways to measure the success of community engagement.
- [Tools to Get Started](#) on the HALN website -browse the blogs and events pages too.
- [HALN Future NHS forum](#) -As well as browsing resources, learning about anchor activity and making connections, here you can upload your own resources.



Anchors 101 - A 10 min video by the Health Anchors Learning Network on key anchor strategies



How different places are developing their anchor mission -a recording from a previous Health Anchors Learning Network lunch and learn event