

# UNTAPPED POTENTIAL:

Bringing the voluntary sector's strengths to health and care transformation

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Summary of a report commissioned by the Richmond Group of Charities and its partners for the *Doing the Right Thing* project

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## Introduction

The health and care system is in a state of flux. Ambitious efficiency targets and rising need are forcing the NHS to find new ways of working. Integration is a watchword, and change is happening—including through Vanguard Sites and devolution.

The NHS Five Year Forward View outlines an ambition to harness the 'renewable energy represented by patients and communities'. Charities have a role to play here, with the Forward View also identifying the need for stronger partnerships with the charitable and voluntary sector.

The changes we need will not happen at the scale and pace required naturally. **The voluntary and community sector (VCS) needs to make a strategic case for its inclusion in the design and delivery of the future health system.** The Richmond Group of Charities and its partners commissioned charity consultancy and think tank NPC to undertake research to provide the evidence needed to support this.

## The issues

The charity sector has evidence of its effectiveness in improving outcomes in the health and care system, but this is fragmented and poorly understood.

The health and care system doesn't always see the breadth of what the charity sector can offer, and how this is relevant.

The charity sector struggles to articulate what it can offer in a way that resonates with the health and care system.

The health and care system instinctively recognises that charity sector approaches are essential for achieving outcomes, but doesn't effectively communicate this.

## The potential

If health and social care decision-makers have a clear understanding of the charity sector's evidence in relation to their priorities, the charity sector can be more involved in **developing and delivering better health and care services**—which will support better outcomes for people and communities.

## The approach

### Creating a shared language



To facilitate consistent messages that resonate with both charities and health and care system.

### Assessment of evidence



To see the strength of the evidence base across the charity sector and demonstrate which activities add value.

### Aggregation of findings



### Integrating the VCS offer



To support faster progress through the creation of joint solutions in the context of austerity.

The priorities of the **Five Year Forward View** have been central to all aspects of the research and analysis:



Health & wellbeing



Productivity & efficiency



Resilience & cohesion

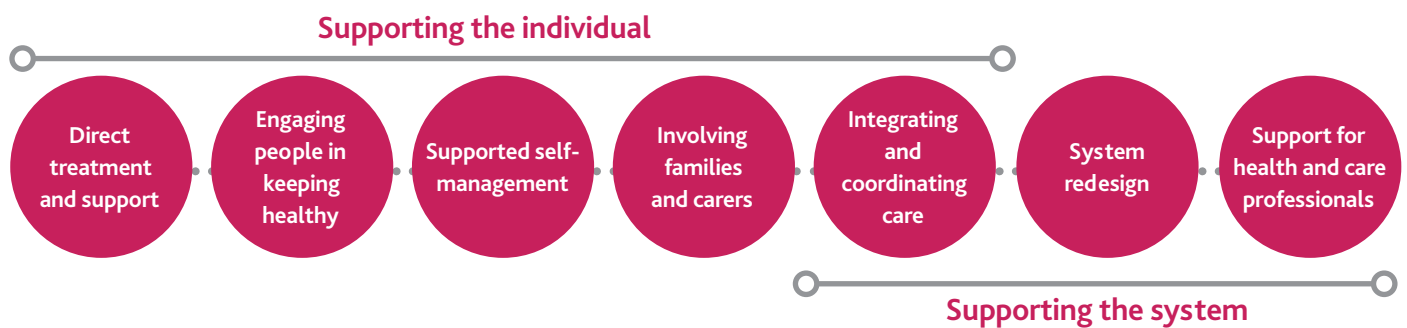
## What is the role of the VCS in health and care?

The research revealed striking differences in perceptions of the role the VCS can play and the value it can bring to health and social care—the breadth and depth is not always understood.

We developed frameworks for a shared language, to help charities describe their work and its value, and give commissioners and policymakers a way to identify the aspects of charities' work that most clearly match their needs and priorities.

## What do charities do?

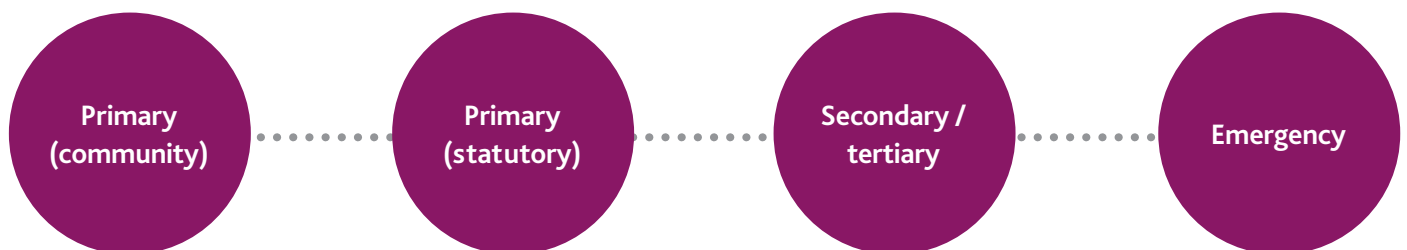
While the value of the charity sector is often thought of solely in terms of the role it plays supporting individuals, much of the value it adds is at the system level.



## Where in the care pathway do charities help?

As well as supporting people at each stage of the patient pathway (and often across pathways), the work of the charity sector also relieves pressure in the health and care system across settings.

### System

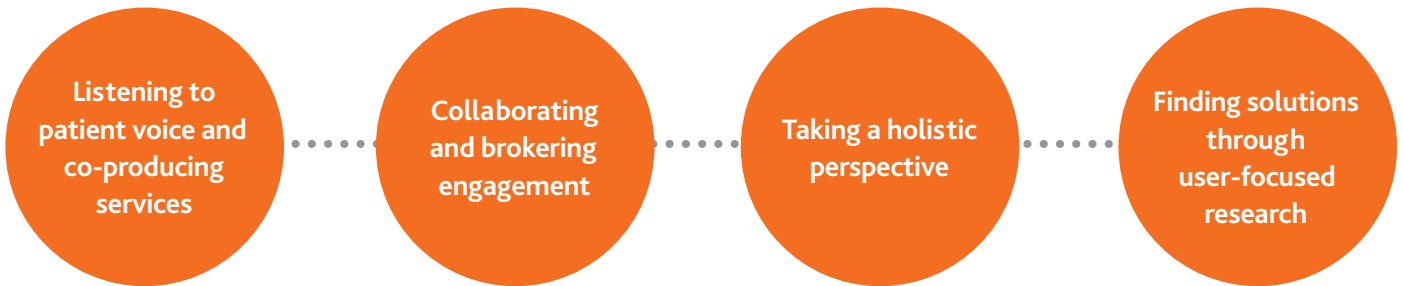


### Patient



## How do charities work?

The value offered by charities goes beyond simply the activities that they deliver and the outcomes they achieve. Instead, much of the charity sector's value comes from *how* charities deliver services. This needs to form part of the narrative about the role of charities in health and care.



## What additional value do charities bring to the system?

There are concepts particularly associated with charities that set them apart from other types of providers.



## What is the evidence to support the health and care system's increased engagement with the VCS?

The evidence review was designed to find examples of strong evidence and summarise evidence across a broad range of organisations, activities, issue areas and evaluation approaches.

It was not designed to be comprehensive and cannot identify gaps in the evidence base. The review is also not representative of health charities as a whole: the evidence review only assessed the work of project partners—a group of large, national charities.

## Characteristics of the evidence

From our evidence review, we identified 175 findings—the majority of which related to health & wellbeing.



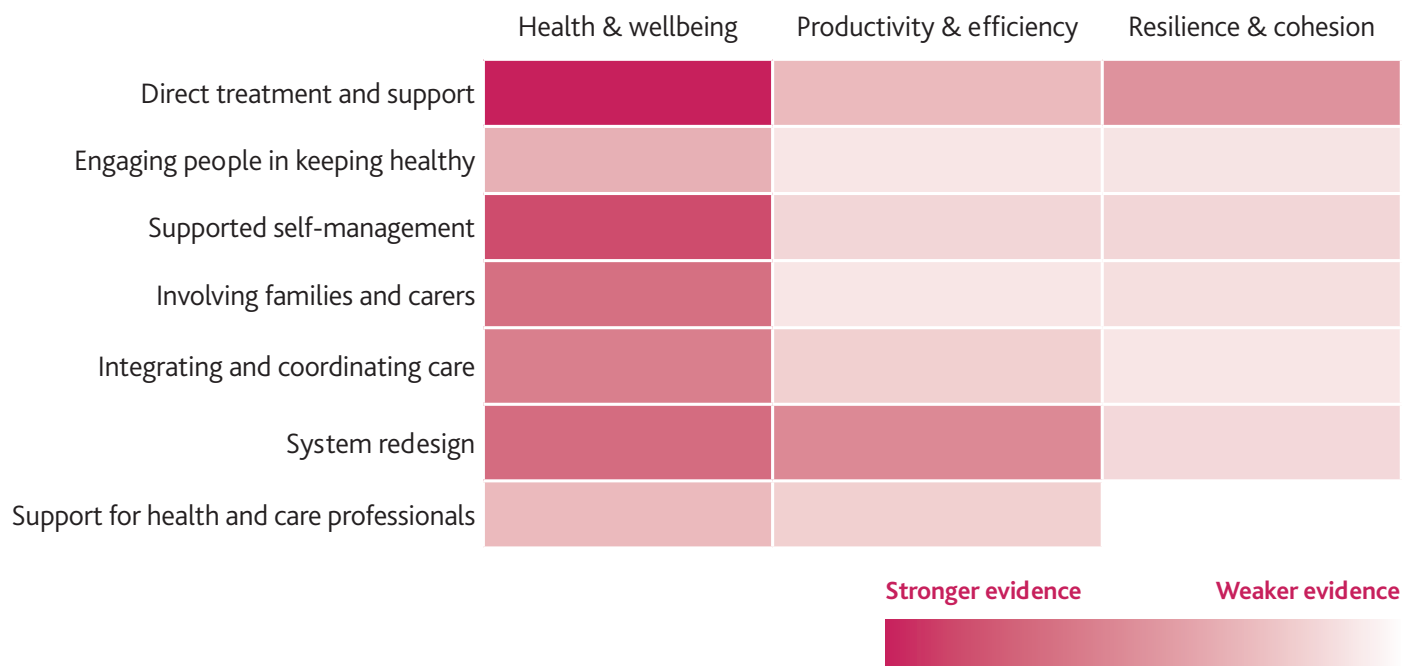
**88%**

of the findings reported an overall **positive impact**. None reported a negative impact, 3% were neutral and 9% were mixed.

**44%**

of findings were assessed as using **high quality evaluation approaches** (mixed methods, comparative approaches or RCTs).

## Strength of evidence across areas of work



There is **strong evidence** that charities achieve health & wellbeing outcomes through direct treatment and support and supported self-management.

There is **good evidence** that charities deliver health & wellbeing and productivity & efficiency outcomes through system redesign.

**71%**

of cases targeted multiple points in the **patient pathway**.

**48%**

of cases targeted multiple points in the **system pathway**.

**35%**

of findings related to improvements in the way the **system functions**.

The evidence review shows that charities can add value to the health and care system in a range of ways, and have a legitimate role in the transformation of the NHS and the wider health and care system.

## How can the VCS and the health and care system work together?

The relationship between charities and the health and care system is already changing. Clinicians and managers recognise the need to do things differently and the charity sector has started taking a more strategic role. We have identified a number of areas that could support this change to happen at a faster pace, with recommendations developed through qualitative research involving charities, commissioners and policymakers.

Our recommendations make clear that there is work to do for both charities and health and care system partners. However given that NPC is already engaging closely with charity partners, we have pulled out the priority actions for the health and care system.

## Recommendations: Creating evidence-based solutions

### The health and care system needs to:

- Enable and support good evaluation—rather than simply demanding it—through data sharing and investment in scaling effective approaches.

### The charity sector needs to:

- Collect and manage data in a way that is useful to partners.



#### Priority action

Check that evidence standards are not a barrier to testing new approaches, and be pragmatic about the evidence required.

## Recommendations: Properly integrating the VCS offer in health and care

### The health and care system needs to:

- Draw on the strengths of the VCS in reshaping the NHS.
- Ensure more consistent representation of charities in bodies leading transformation efforts.

### The charity sector needs to:

- Find a set of 'good enough' common messages and coordinate the way these messages are communicated at both a local and national level.
- Be clear where individual organisations have strengths and where others can add more value.



#### Priority action

Incorporate the VCS perspective into decisions about health and social care at a national and local level. Seek out existing forums through which to do so, or create them where they don't exist.

*'The statutory sector cannot fully meet needs without engaging the voluntary sector. They're absolutely crucial in knowing what people at the grassroots need.'*

Helen Walker, Deputy Director for Equity and Communities,  
Department of Health

## Recommendations: Making progress within austerity

### The health and care system needs to:

- Ensure funding and contracting arrangements support collaboration between charities and other providers, and minimise the burdens on providers.

### The charity sector needs to:

- Be wary of 'asking for more' in a resource-starved system. Frame conversations in terms of added value, not just the resources required.



#### Priority action

Review commissioning and procurement processes and consider how they could be made less adversarial.

Our current model of health and care is unsustainable and this presents an unprecedented opportunity to redesign systems to focus on holistic, integrated, preventative and person-centred care. This research shows that **charities can add value** to the health and care system in a range of ways.

But to make the changes required a reality means both the VCS and the statutory system shifting their behaviour, with a sense of urgency. By fully understanding each other's needs and priorities, and by making small compromises, partnership between charities and statutory organisations can **build a health and social care system which is sustainable and fit for purpose.**

*'The NHS is beginning to recognise that health is about more than just health care and living longer—it's about living with good health, and that's affected by a much broader array of factors.'*

Duncan Selbie, Chief Executive, Public Health England

This research has been made possible through the contributions of a wide range of individuals and organisations who have given time and expertise. NPC would like to thank all those who supported the research. For any questions about the research approach, or to talk further about NPC's work with charities and the health system, get in touch via [info@thinkNPC.org](mailto:info@thinkNPC.org) or visit [www.thinkNPC.org](http://www.thinkNPC.org).



The full *Untapped potential* report can be downloaded from [www.richmondgroupofcharities.org.uk](http://www.richmondgroupofcharities.org.uk).

For more information about the *Doing the Right Thing* project or the Richmond Group of Charities, please contact Dr Charlotte Augst, the Richmond Group Partnership Director at [caugst@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:caugst@macmillan.org.uk) or on **020 7091 2091**.

## The Richmond Group of Charities



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