

2026 – 2031

Our Strategy:

a healthier life for
everyone through care,
learning and research





A message from Nicola Ayton, Chief Executive

At CUH, we deliver some of the best clinical outcomes in the country and we should all be proud of that. Every day, we come to work wanting to provide the very best for our patients and our communities.

We have the potential to be excellent every day – to create an environment where everyone feels able to do their best work. But right now, I know this isn't always how it feels for you or our staff.

There is too much variation in how our services run, how long our patients wait, and how well our systems support us all to be our best. That's frustrating for patients and it's frustrating for us all.

Demand for our care is increasing and the needs of our population are changing. Standing still simply isn't an option.

Our new strategy: 'A healthier life for everyone through care, learning and research' is about focusing on what matters most to our patients and to us. It has three priorities:

- deliver excellent and timely care;
- transform how and where we deliver care;
- harness research and innovation to improve patient outcomes.

Above all, it's about working better together – making the best use of what we have and supporting us all to do our best work.

The strategy sets out how we build on what makes CUH strong: our people, our partnerships, and our place on the biomedical campus. That's how we'll achieve excellence every day and shape care for the future.

We want to continue to hear ideas for change. For example, we have heard about ideas from teams for removing duplication and waste, using new technology and applying world-class research to improve care. Please be honest about the barriers faced and the opportunities for change.

Thanks to our teams' commitment, we're already making good progress. If we keep working together, we can be excellent every day for our patients and create a place where everyone can thrive.

I believe that in doing so we can achieve what our strategy says in the title: **A healthier life for everyone through care, learning and research.**

I'm really looking forward to working with teams to shape and deliver the next chapter for all of us at CUH.

Nicola Ayton
Chief Executive



Our strategy: a healthier life for everyone through care, learning and research

Our strategy for 2026 – 2031 sets out the next phase for Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (CUH), building on our strengths, delivering on our opportunities and tackling the areas that are holding us back. This strategy describes how we will reach our full potential by changing the way we work and making the most of life sciences and technology.

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Our priorities are to:

- **deliver excellent and timely care;**
- **transform how and where we deliver care;**
- **harness research and innovation to improve patient outcomes.**

We know these priorities matter to our communities, colleagues and partners and they will guide purposeful decision making and focus over the next five years.

Our hospitals have served the population of Cambridge and beyond for generations, and we have undergone continual change to meet the needs of those communities. As we enter this new phase, our long-held values of Together - Safe, Kind and Excellent will continue to be at the heart of what we do and how we do it.



Our case for change

The needs of the populations we serve are changing

Cambridge has seen an increase in population of 18% over the past decade (compared to 6% nationally), and this will continue: our local population is set to grow by between 60% and 97% by 2040. We see a continued rise in the number of people who are attending our emergency department. In addition, people are living longer with more complex needs, increasing the demand for highly specialised and personalised care as well as local urgent and emergency care. Across the East of England, over 75s are projected to be the fastest growing group, which will further increase demand for specialised care at CUH.

A strong drive by the Government to modernise healthcare

The 10 Year Health Plan for England describes three shifts: from hospital to community; analogue to digital; and sickness to prevention. We are committed to these changes. This means working with others across health, social care and other sectors. It means better use of data, digital and AI, and it means delivering our next generation programmes to achieve meaningful change. It also means that over time we will see proportionally fewer patients on our main site, and more people will be able to access care locally. Our strategy will help us to deliver the ambitions set out by the Government.

We must keep building on our strengths to go further

We are proud of our hospitals, the care we provide and the many colleagues who make it all possible. Yet despite a big increase in our workforce since 2020, we are not treating substantially more patients. We know we need to reduce variation in care between and within services, and within a constrained budget. Over this next phase we will build on our strengths to bring down waiting times and deliver more effectively with the resources we have, by systematically adopting and scaling best practice and innovation across the Trust. Where we don't meet the expectations of our patients, we will be purposeful and determined in putting it right. Where change is making a positive impact, we will

be quick to share and replicate the things that work. High performance is essential to providing patients with safe, timely, and effective care, and to transforming care to meet the needs of our population in the future.

We have access to unique assets and resources which we must harness. Our position on the Cambridge Biomedical Campus, our academic and industry partnerships and our mature digital infrastructure make so much possible. We have an obligation to ensure innovations impact clinical care much more quickly. We have benefitted from recent infrastructure investment, but there is more for us to do, with partners, to maximise the impact of these assets on behalf of the people we serve – both in Cambridge, across the East of England and nationally.

Our strategy on one page

A healthier life for everyone through care, learning and research
Together: Safe, Kind, Excellent





Deliver excellent and timely care

Getting it right for patients now, and in the future, matters, so that we change lives for the better. We will strive for excellence, making our care consistently safe, effective and efficient, with the shortest possible waiting times. We want our people to work in an environment that is responsive, supports high performance and maximises everyone's contribution. We will use technology and data to help us make this happen.

Focus Area 1: Safety and effectiveness

We will focus on safe, compassionate and effective care for every patient. We will continue to listen carefully and learn from feedback from patients, families and colleagues, including when we don't get things right. We will work with our communities and patient groups to ensure we meet their healthcare needs as effectively as possible. We are committed to consistently high standards, and will use data to examine variation and tackle it where it is not warranted.

We will:

- Build on our culture of safety and learning;
- Strengthen our safety processes and clinical governance;
- Use digital, data and patient feedback to enhance safety.

Focus Area 2: Access and productivity

We will deliver more for patients within our available resources. We will cut waiting times, improve efficiency and maximise value for money. We will provide

our teams with data and digital tools that support this. This will allow colleagues to focus on what matters most to local and regional patients, now and in the future.

We will:

- Ensure our planning and processes enable more productive ways of working;
- Support our team leaders to focus on what matters, deliver meaningful change and adopt and scale the innovation that improves care for patients;
- Invest in data and digital solutions that drive efficiencies and reduce waste.

Focus Area 3: People and performance

Our current and future success is determined by the ability of our people and teams to be, consistently, the best they can be. This is only possible when we create an environment in which

expectations of everyone are clear, we give and seek out feedback, and we recognise contribution. We will continue to support individuals to develop at all stages of their careers including investing in building and developing our digital capabilities. We will further develop new roles and ways of working to improve our efficiency. We will also seek to standardise and simplify our processes, and evolve our operating model, so that our people can consistently do the right thing.

We will:

- Align our processes and recognition in support of performance and contribution;
- Ensure we have the skills, capability and environment to deliver modern healthcare;
- Foster and embed a high-performing, inclusive culture that is consistent with our Trust values



Transform how and where we deliver care

To meet the needs of our patients now and in the future, we must reform the way in which we deliver care, particularly where services cannot meet current or predicted demand. This means implementing new and more effective ways of preventing, diagnosing and treating ill health. We want to organise our care and expertise around patients, so people can access help earlier and, where possible, within their local community. We will work with our communities, local primary care and neighbourhood teams, moving resources and expertise to make it easier for patients to get expert advice without coming to hospital. We will use digital tools and new technology to make care more personal and more convenient. We will deliver better care for children and those with cancer, supported by the development of two new hospitals, and progress plans for a new emergency hospital.

Focus Area 4: Neighbourhood health

We will work with partners to build clinical care teams that can prevent ill health and support people to stay well in their local neighbourhoods, delivering on the ambitions set out in the 10 Year Health Plan for England. We will develop new pathways, alongside community colleagues and patients, which enable our population to access diagnostics and receive specialist input without needing to come to hospital. We will also develop new community-based models, where appropriate, for urgent and emergency care, and progress our plans for a new emergency hospital.

We will:

- Work in partnership to build and embed integrated neighbourhood teams and health centres that support people to stay well in their communities;
- Provide more accessible urgent care, closer to home;
- Design and implement impactful interventions within a neighbourhood setting, working with people in any organisation who share our values and ambition to improve care.

Focus Area 5: Personalised and convenient

Patients should be able to access effective and efficient care in a way that works for them and, increasingly, technology is making this possible. We will digitise access to outpatient services, roll out online booking, and create a digital front door for urgent and emergency care. Technology, digital and AI offer new possibilities that support proactive, personalised care through predictive analytics, risk stratification and clinical decision support. Wearables, continuous remote monitoring and digital advice will reduce unnecessary stays in hospital. We will continue to maximise the potential of these new approaches over the next five years.

We will:

- Increasingly use data, digital and AI to personalise care and make the most effective use of clinicians' and patients' time;
- Make it easier for everyone to access our services in a way that works for them, including via the NHS App;
- Expand virtual care with the aim of increasingly providing support at home.

Focus Area 6: Next generation care

We will put research, new treatments and improved pathways of care in to practice through new hospitals, reshaping care for people across the East of England. For people with cancer, we will deliver a major shift from late to early-stage diagnosis, and make precision medicine part of everyday care, improving survival rates and reducing ineffective treatment. For children, we will be a national exemplar in prevention and treatment that integrates physical and mental health for the whole child. Alongside modern estate, we will also invest in digital and data infrastructure, so our systems are secure and connected.

We will:

- Deliver the Cambridge Cancer Research Hospital;
- Deliver the Cambridge Children's Hospital;
- Develop our digital systems and data infrastructure.



Harness research and innovation to improve patient outcomes

We are surrounded by pioneering research and innovation, led by some of the best researchers and scientists in the world. We will play our full role in turning cutting-edge scientific research into better care, faster. We will work in a more systematic and intentional way with universities, start-ups and industry, to trial new treatments and bring them to patients more quickly, and to detect and prevent illness more effectively. We will focus on data, skills and undertaking more clinical trials to speed up innovation in Cambridge and across the NHS. We will prioritise the biggest challenges in healthcare, such as cancer, heart disease and metabolic diseases, to maximise our impact and deliver personalised healthcare for all.

Focus Area 7: Research infrastructure

We will strengthen our research infrastructure so that the Cambridge Biomedical Campus can be a place where care, research and industry collaborate for the maximum benefit of patients. We will enable and facilitate research collaborations that maximise patient benefit. We will do more clinical trials, and set them up more quickly. We will continue to strengthen how we use and share data and build connected data sets. We will make advanced genomics more accessible, using automation and decision-support software to lower costs, expand testing and pioneer newborn genome sequencing. By strengthening our commercial capabilities, we will also create

an environment where reinvestment accelerates research into practice and equips teams with the most up-to-date tools for patient care.

We will:

- Build a transparent, streamlined research infrastructure that makes it faster and easier to undertake research and innovation;
- Strengthen our data and digital capabilities for research, including the expansion of the Secure Data Environment;
- Develop the East Genomics Medicine Service, enabling greater impact and better access for patients and clinicians across the East of England.

Focus Area 8: Increasing participation for patients and colleagues

We will increase patient participation in research and expand access to clinical trials. Currently less than 5% of CUH patients participate in research; we will grow that number annually by making opportunities for involvement clearer, extending research and innovation beyond the hospital, and making consent processes easier. We will actively work to improve research participation for under-represented groups. We will also seek to increase the number of colleagues contributing to research at CUH from all professional groups.

We will:

- Widen patient participation in research by making the processes simpler and easier to navigate;
- Embed research opportunities in care pathways and use patient-facing digital tools such as MyChart to show recruiting studies based on clinical history and eligibility;
- Support more colleagues to be involved in research and its translation into clinical practice.

Focus Area 9: Impact-led research

We will focus our research and innovation to accelerate improvements in health outcomes where the population need is greatest. This will be supported by a clearer and more consistent approach to intellectual property, commercial research and innovation support for staff. This will be combined with streamlined processes that enable faster industry collaboration and increased clinical trial delivery. Where there is opportunity to generate commercial income from this, it will be reinvested for patient benefit.

We will:

- Turn cutting-edge research into benefits for patients, starting with cancer, children's health, and metabolic disease;
- Accelerate collaboration with industry to make the most of our commercial research opportunities for patient benefit;
- Support entrepreneurial colleagues to engage in commercial research and innovation.



What this means for you

The choice of our strategic priorities has been shaped through in-depth engagement with our population, people and partners.

Our population

We will be here for everyone, when they need us. We will provide timely access to safe, effective care for our growing local population, increasingly bringing specialist expertise closer to home. We will listen to feedback and work with our patients and population to design services that meet their needs, paying particular attention to inequalities. We will increase patient participation in research and speed up access to innovative therapies.

Our people

Delivering this strategy will require all of us to do things differently. We will be a high-performing, inclusive organisation, committed to delivering change. We will foster strong leadership, recognise achievements and will keep expectations clear and consistent, so that everyone can fully contribute. We will invest in training and development, and help people make better use of technology. Our workplace will be one where people feel valued, supported and able to focus on patient care, research and education.

Our partners

We will co-design care with others, aligning priorities, sharing data, and removing barriers to working as a team. We will commit to working collaboratively and transparently with a focus on the patient, and to being open to new partners who want to work with us and share our values. Together, we will accelerate the implementation of research into practice, to improve outcomes now and in the future.

Our future

We will make choices that promote the long-term future of CUH. As the current stewards of this organisation, we maintain our commitment to environmental and financial sustainability and healthcare excellence. We will make decisions that balance short term pressures with genuine transformation over time. As a teaching hospital, we will continue to play our full part in education, training and development of the workforce.

Delivering the strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to focus on the priorities that matter. Together, we must now take the practical next steps and actions that will bring it to life. Our strategy has been shaped by what we've heard from our population, people and partners and it belongs to all of us. We will back people and teams who take up this invitation to deliver this change and will take the following steps to make this happen.



We will:

- Use our time and resources purposefully, supporting what delivers benefits for patients and stopping activity that does not;
- Be clear about the choices and trade-offs required, and how we will make decisions, so that leaders and teams can respond effectively;
- Encourage, back and empower teams to deliver the improvements they want to make;
- Align accountability, investment and incentives around our priorities and focus areas, and properly develop the major change programmes on which this strategy depends;
- Communicate clearly and frequently, helping teams to understand the contribution they are making, and celebrating small improvements, however small;
- Continue to build the capability and capacity for delivery at all levels of the organisation, supporting teams to work through priorities for their area through a toolkit and case studies;
- Build and nurture the partnerships, relationships and networks that create the coalition for meaningful change;
- Work directly with people across sectors and organisational boundaries to deliver our vision for patients and the population;
- Track progress through clear, meaningful and transparent metrics so that we hold ourselves to account for delivery;
- Continually learn and adapt as the context, the evidence base or the needs of our populations, change.



To find out more, visit:
www.cuh.nhs.uk/strategy