

Engaging, including, impacting

Our involvement strategy 2026–2031

CANCER RESEARCH UK

Together we are beating cancer

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Foreword

from our chief executive

Note to Laura/Suki: An up to date photo of Ian/alternative to the one used last year would be good if possible?

Being drafted by Ian Walker.
Will be available for second review point on 25th February to studio.

Glossary

Many of our teams engage with people affected by cancer, our supporters and the public to inform and enhance our work. But these interactions aren't all methods of involvement.

Although the following all use similar methods, they serve different purposes and generate different outcomes. While involvement focuses on people affected by cancer and using their perspectives to shape and influence our work, insight, participation and engagement are approaches that are accessible and open to anyone.



Involvement
means people affected by cancer shaping our work and influencing its outcome. We use a variety of approaches, from working in partnership to consulting with people about what matters most to them. It's about doing 'with' people rather than 'for' or 'to' them.

Insight
involves collecting and analysing quantitative and/or qualitative data to help us understand the attitudes, behaviours, awareness and intentions of people impacted by our work – including the public, our supporters and people affected by cancer. Through methods including market research, surveys and workshops, we use this information to inform our thinking and gather feedback.

Participation
describes how people take part in opportunities we've created to help us achieve our aims. This might include someone volunteering at an event, taking part in a marathon, signing a petition or sending a letter to their MP.

Engagement
is the process of communicating and sharing information about our work with people affected by cancer, our supporters and members of the public. Good public engagement can lead to people wanting to get involved in and help shape our work, while also building trust and understanding. We recognise there are many ways people support and engage with our charity that aren't involvement, such as fundraising, campaigning and volunteering. These all play a vital role in helping us beat cancer, but fall outside the scope of involvement and our strategy in this area.

Our vision

We want to bring about a world where everybody lives longer, better lives, free from the fear of cancer.

To help make this vision a reality, our long-term organisational strategy outlines the following objective:

Put people affected by cancer at the **heart of what we do** and involve them in shaping our work as partners.

Our involvement strategy builds on a decade of progress we've already made in this area and has been co-created with people affected by cancer. Since we formed our involvement panels 10 years ago, we've established a thriving network of nearly 2,000 members who actively contribute to shaping our work. In 2025 alone, we supported more than 230 involvement activities.



Our principles for involvement

In 2022, we were the first charity to join the shared commitment to public involvement in health and social care research.

"These principles should assure everyone who gets involved with Cancer Research UK that the charity is working with people affected by cancer in ways that genuinely benefit them."

Jim, a member of our Involvement Strategy Advisory group

This partnership of organisations across the UK aims to improve the extent and quality of public involvement in health and social care research in keeping with the National Institute for Health and Care Research's UK Standards for Public Involvement.

Our involvement strategy will make sure we continue to embed these standards in our ways of working. To support our staff to confidently deliver involvement, we've collaborated with people affected by cancer to develop the following principles for involvement at Cancer Research UK:

Principle 1
Involve the right people, at the right time and in the right ways
We involve people early and often, making sure people affected by cancer help shape decisions as early as possible and supporting them to stay engaged with the process.

Principle 2
Build respectful partnerships
We work side by side with people affected by cancer, valuing and learning from their experiences and insights.

Principle 3
Communicate clearly and inclusively
We make it easy for everyone to take part, using plain English, accessible formats and approaches that meet people's needs.

Principle 4
Make involvement matter
We communicate the impact of involvement, sharing what happened as a result, what we learned and how people's input led to real improvements.

These principles will drive the behaviours that make involvement meaningful, embedding respect, inclusion, transparency and impact into our everyday ways of working so that everyone knows what good looks like and how to achieve it.

Why this strategy matters

- from the people who helped shape it

Note to Laura/Suki: A better quality image of Steve is needed please.



"I'm involved in a number of workstreams with Cancer Research UK and I'm passionate about the importance of everything they do to collaborate with and for patients. The only way to do this correctly is for involvement to be engrained across the charity, which requires a clear strategy."

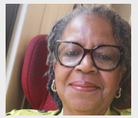
Steve, a member of our Involvement Strategy Advisory Group

"This strategy is vitally important because it ensures cancer research is of a higher quality, is more relevant and truly centred on people affected by cancer."

Anne, Lead Research Nurse, Cancer Research UK

"The voices of people affected by cancer are always valuable in improving our campaigns and validating our decisions, making sure we're as impactful as possible in the activity we deliver."

Holly Holt, Head of Marketing Delivery, Cancer Research UK



"As a Black woman, it's really important to me that the voices and views of everyone affected by cancer are heard, listened to and acted on – especially marginalised voices."

Bettina, a member of our Involvement Strategy Advisory Group

"Every opinion and idea is listened to and valued, helping to build Cancer Research UK's strength and influence as the world's leading cancer charity.''

Patrick, a member of our nvolvement Strategy Advisory Group

Our strategy

Our involvement strategy identifies **four focus areas** to strengthen Cancer Research UK's approach to involvement over the next five years. These align with our organisational strategic priorities and focus our ambitions in areas where we can make the most impact.



Our involvement focus areas

Our focus area objectives

1

Provide evidence-driven and impactful involvement

- Implement an organisation-wide framework to measure the impact of involvement on people affected by cancer, our work, our staff and our organisation
- Update our ways of working and focus our resources on initiatives that have the most impact

2

Improve the experiences of the people we involve

- Strengthen our data and digital systems to create an engaged community by linking up experiences and widening participation opportunities
- Work with our Involvement Network members to develop more flexible ways for people to engage with us

3

Build diversity and inclusion in our Involvement work

- Work with people from underrepresented groups to develop tailored routes into involvement at Cancer Research UK
- Work with our staff and a diverse range of people affected by cancer to co-create training and resources that deliver inclusive involvement opportunities

4

Strengthen involvement to drive progress on our cancer and health inequalities strategy

- Support our cancer and health inequalities strategy to help reduce disparities in cancer outcomes through targeted involvement efforts
- Partner with underrepresented groups to make sure their experiences inform our involvement work and efforts to tackle cancer and health inequalities

Enablers

Note to Jonathon/Laura/Suki: Suggest we put the Enablers on their own page and possibly add a sentence here explaining how we will enable our objectives (though attention to tools, processes and cultural adaptations).



Tools and processes

- Fit-for-purpose database
- Standards for involvement with Cancer Research UK-specific guidance
- Clear and rewarding involvement journeys
- Updated payment policy and processes
- Training and support from our Involvement team

Cultural

- Senior leaders championing involvement in their areas
- Charity-wide culture of involvement
- Partnerships with other organisations
- Guiding standards and values that shape our decisions
- Alignment with wider strategies
- Updated ways of working in our Patient Involvement team



“I’ve watched involvement at Cancer Research UK move from sparse to embedded across the organisation. Leadership that **truly values patient involvement** made the difference."

Margaret, a member of our Involvement Strategy Advisory Group

Focus area 1

Provide evidence-driven and impactful involvement

Demonstrating the impact of involvement is highly important to people affected by cancer and our staff.

We need to better and more consistently understand the impact of our involvement activities so that we can focus our efforts on projects that deliver deeper, more meaningful improvements to people's lives.

Objectives

- Implement an organisation-wide framework to measure the impact of involvement on people affected by cancer, our
- Update our ways of working and focus our resources on initiatives that have the most impact

Communicating impact, driving diversity

Our Prevention, Early Detection and Diagnosis Patient and Public Review Panel helps shape the funding decisions of two of our key research committees.

Our patient and public representatives recognised the panel could benefit from a more diverse selection of voices.

So, we worked with our Patient Involvement team and existing members of the panel to promote this opportunity through our Involvement Network, website and social media.

By working together to communicate the benefits of involvement and the impact people could have on the research we fund, we encouraged 45 people to apply. The panel recruited eleven new members with a diverse range of cancer experiences, including people from ethnic minority backgrounds, people from the devolved nations and disabled people.



Focus area 1
Provide evidence-driven and impactful involvement

Understanding our impact

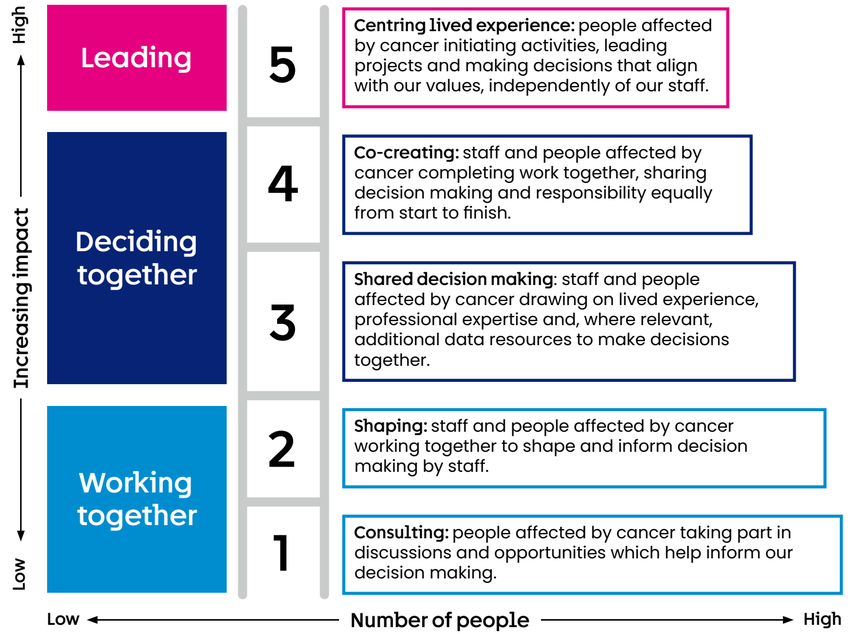
To help us map out and measure the impact of our involvement activities, we've created two resources: our involvement ladder and our comparison grid. These tools will help our teams to understand both the breadth and depth of the different involvement opportunities we offer.

Our involvement ladder
Our involvement ladder shows the relationship between the number of people different kinds of activities typically reach and the impact they typically have.

For example, level 1 and 2 activities tend to reach more people but are less influential in shaping the outcomes of our work and the lives of people affected by cancer. On the other hand, level 5 activities involve fewer people in more in-depth ways, leading to greater impact.

We will use this ladder to assess the reach and impact of individual involvement opportunities based on the category they fall into.

Involvement ladder

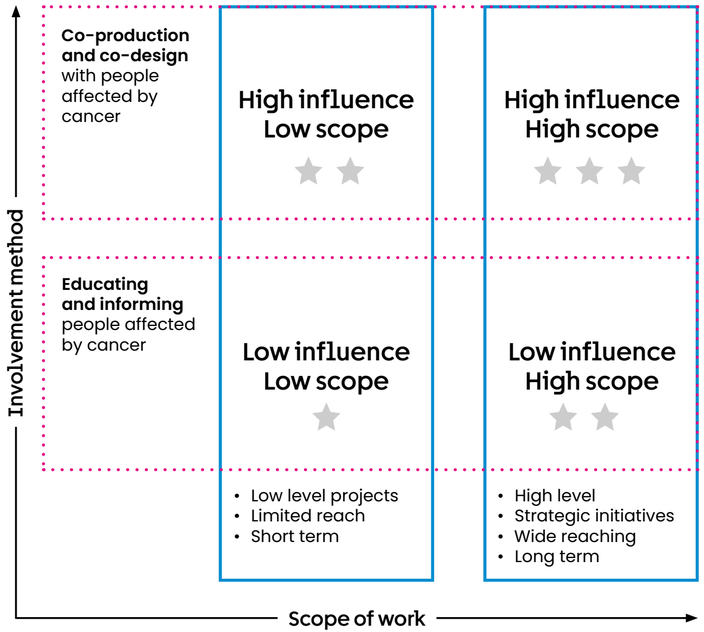


Focus area 1
Provide evidence-driven and impactful involvement

Our comparison grid
Our comparison grid will help us to map out what involvement looks like across our charity and expose any gaps in the opportunities we offer. The diagram gives our teams a shared way to understand and plan their approach, making sure involvement is intentional and proportionate.

By plotting pieces of work on the diagram in relation to both their impact (how closely they involve people affected by cancer) and their scope (how many people they involve and for how long), teams can see where their activities sit. This will make it easier to form and communicate expectations for each project and assess its likely impact, as well as to spot opportunities for projects that consist of either deeper involvement or wider reach, depending on where we see gaps.

Comparison grid



Impact:
Low ★
Medium ★ ★
High ★ ★ ★

Focus area 2

Improve the experiences of the people we involve

We want everyone to have a positive experience of joining our Involvement Network and engaging with our work.

This is vital to encourage people to continue giving their time, expertise and skills. By using the data our Involvement Network members share with us in new ways, we will personalise their experience – from the emails they receive to the opportunities and support we offer.

▸ Objectives

- Strengthen our data and digital systems to create an engaged community by linking up experiences and widening participation opportunities
- Work with our Involvement Network members to develop more flexible ways for people to engage with us impact



"I've always had a positive, supportive experience in the Involvement Network – feeling valued, learning from others and contributing to Cancer Research UK's work to improve outcomes for people affected by cancer."

Patrick, a member of our Involvement Strategy Advisory Group

▸ Improving experiences to increase involvement

Our Cancer Insights Panels are made up of people affected by cancer who bring their lived experience to help shape and influence our work. Panel members represent people from all over the UK, including people who've had or are currently living with cancer, carers and loved ones.

Over the past year, we've worked closely with panel members to help shape our strategy and improve how we collaborate. Their feedback has directly informed the creation of clearer processes, more accessible materials and more flexible ways for people to contribute.

We've taken steps to increase the diversity and range of backgrounds represented on the panels and now offer members more choice in selecting the panel that best suits their needs. We've also extended members' tenure on the panels from two to three years to foster continuity and deeper involvement.

To create a more personal experience, we've strengthened relationships between panel members and our involvement officers. Meetings are now scheduled 6–12 months in advance and are shorter and more discussion-focused. There are also ways for members to feed into the meetings via email.

We've also improved accessibility by writing in concise plain English and sending both written and video updates to communicate how the panel's insights are shaping our work. On top of this, we're expanding our training opportunities for panel members, covering topics such as public speaking, facilitation and mentoring.

Focus area 3

Build diversity and inclusion in our involvement work

Diversity and inclusion are fundamental principles of involvement. Increasing diversity makes sure our work is shaped by a broader range of experiences, helping us to deliver more relevant, equitable and impactful outcomes for people affected by cancer.

Over the past few years, we've worked closely with members of our Involvement Network and made changes to our ways of working to reach a wider range of people. But we still have work to do to make sure all our involvement opportunities are accessible and inclusive for people who want to take part and that a diverse range of people choose to get involved.

Our work in this area will build on our success so far in upskilling our staff and people affected by cancer to collaborate and create together.

Objectives

- Work with people from underrepresented groups to develop tailored routes into involvement at Cancer Research UK
- Work with our staff and a diverse range of people affected by cancer to co-create training and resources that deliver inclusive involvement opportunities



"Cancer Research UK can't beat cancer if they're only beating it for some people. Having a diverse group of people affected by cancer involved in their work will help its outcomes be more equitable."

Faaria, a member of one of our Cancer Insights Panels

Breaking down barriers

Over the past year, we've taken steps to increase the diversity of people on our Children & Young People Insights Panel. These actions have led to a clear increase in the diversity of panel applicants and members.

The most significant improvement has been moving from mass recruitment two times a year to an 'always on' model, which accepts new intakes every four months. This means people can apply when they first see an opportunity, rather than waiting for set recruitment windows, making involvement more accessible to people with different personal circumstances. Smaller, more frequent cycles also reduce competition and improve applicants' likelihood of success, giving encouragement to people who may feel less confident with formal processes.

We've also strengthened our efforts to reduce bias in the selection process. Shortlisting is now anonymous and carried out by a mixed group consisting of one staff member and two panel members of different ages and ethnic backgrounds. We no longer prioritise long or highly polished written answers, recognising that concise responses can be just as valuable and that this makes the process more inclusive for people with less developed English language skills.

Focus area 4

Strengthen involvement to drive progress on our cancer and health inequalities strategy

Health inequalities are unfair and avoidable differences in health outcomes across the population. In cancer, we see inequalities across the pathway, from the risk of developing the disease to differences in outcomes.

Our **cancer and health inequalities strategy (2025–2030)** provides a clear and actionable plan to tackle these inequalities. Our involvement work in this area supports commitments in the strategy to building much-needed partnerships with people and communities who are less likely to be heard.

Objectives

- Support our cancer and health inequalities strategy to help reduce disparities in cancer outcomes through targeted involvement efforts
- Partner with underrepresented groups to make sure their experiences inform our involvement work and efforts to tackle cancer and health inequalities

Listening and learning

During the early development of our cancer and health inequalities strategy, we ran a focus group with people from our Involvement Network whose voices are often less heard. Participants included people on low incomes, disabled people and people with long-term health conditions, people from LGBTQI+ communities, ethnic minority groups and other people who felt their life circumstances had affected their health or experience of cancer.

These conversations helped us better understand the specific barriers people face to living healthy lives and accessing good cancer care. They strengthened our evidence base and highlighted the role we can play in reducing these inequalities, which helped lay the foundations of our new strategy.

We also held a separate discussion with people affected by cancer who are on low incomes, organised by our Health Community Engagement team. This session focused on how we talk about cancer inequalities with the public, making sure our communications are clear, accessible and resonate with people who have lived experience of cancer.



“By forming genuine, trust-building partnerships with people and communities facing health inequalities, Cancer Research UK can use these perspectives and ideas to improve their understanding of barriers and **shape more inclusive communication, treatments and support for everyone**."

Branwen, a member of our Involvement Strategy Advisory Group



Our path to progress

To achieve the objectives in each of our focus areas, we've planned the following activities over the next 3–5 years. We've separated these into short-term, medium-term and long-term goals to help us plot our path to progress.

Focus areas	1 Provide evidence-driven and impactful involvement	2 Improve the experiences of the people we involve	3 Build diversity and inclusion in our involvement work	4 Strengthen involvement to drive progress on our cancer and health inequalities strategy
Long term Year 3-5	Use data to help us prioritise our most impactful activities	View all involvement in one platform that shows activity, participation and impact	Increase the diversity and membership of our Involvement Network	
Medium term Year 1-3	Roll out and refine the framework	Migrate existing data into our new system	Upskill staff to deliver inclusive involvement opportunities	Partner with 2-3 underrepresented groups to build mutually beneficial relationships
Short term Now	Develop and pilot an impact framework	Implement a new system to record and track involvement activity	Develop a plan to increase the diversity and membership of our Involvement Network	

Acknowledgements

Everyone's honesty, insight, ambition and viewpoints have helped to challenge us and shape the direction of a strategy that's not only grounded in lived experience but sets a bold plan for the next five years.



"It's been truly invaluable to work side by side with people affected by cancer and colleagues across Cancer Research UK to co-create this strategy."

I'm incredibly proud of what we've built together and excited about the opportunities ahead as we focus on delivering high-impact involvement that drives meaningful change across our charity.

This strategy marks a progression in how we work with people affected by cancer and together, we will make sure their voices shape our decisions, strengthen our work and help us move closer to a world where everybody lives longer, better lives, free from the fear of cancer.

Suki Westmore
Head of Involvement

With thanks to...

Note to Laura/Suki: Names of people involved here if you'd like them.
Alternatively a photo and or quote.

Feedback

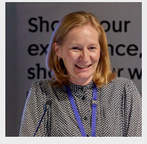
"This strategy shows Cancer Research UK's continued commitment to involvement. I was keen to share my experiences in its development, which will help to strengthen involvement within the charity and their research."

Andrew, a member of our Involvemen Strategy Advisory Group



"Getting involved changes how you manage living with cancer for the better. You feel empowered, valued and part of something that strives to make life better for yourself and other people with cancer."

Branwen, a member of our Involvement Strategy Advisory Group



"Quote pending"

Jo Harby, Director of Information and Involvement

"Quote pending"

Catherine Elliot, Director of Research & Partnerships

Contact

Note to Laura/Suki: Please provide contact info.