

Our involvement strategy

2026–2031

CANCER
RESEARCH
UK

Together we are
beating cancer

Contents



Foreword 3

Definitions 4

Our vision 5

Our principles for involvement 6

Why involvement matters 7

Our involvement strategy 8

- Focus area 1: Impact 10
- Focus area 2: Experience 12
- Focus area 3: Inclusion 13
- Focus area 4: Cancer and health inequalities 14

Our path to progress 16

Shaping the future together 17

Thank you 18

Acknowledgements 19

Contact us 20

Foreword



We exist to beat cancer. To do this, we've committed to putting people affected by cancer at the heart of what we do and involving them in shaping our work as partners.

In 2025, we marked ten years of involvement at Cancer Research UK. Over that decade, we've built a thriving network of people affected by cancer, and in 2025 alone we supported more than 230 involvement activities. From consultation to co-creation, people affected by cancer have helped guide many aspects of our work.

Building on this strong foundation, our refreshed involvement strategy sets out a five-year ambition focused on delivering meaningful impact. Our approach will drive efforts to increase high-influence opportunities where people's lived experience of cancer can make the greatest difference. We'll also enhance the experience of working with us through more personalised and accessible involvement journeys that enable people to engage in ways that work for them. This will help us build a more diverse and active community.

To better represent the UK population, we will strengthen relationships with underrepresented groups and make sure lived experience informs key priorities across our cancer and health inequalities work.

Beating cancer means beating it for everyone, so we'll work in partnership with communities to deepen our understanding of inequalities and make sure no one is left behind.

Our vision is a world where everybody lives longer, better lives, free from the fear of cancer. This strategy reflects our commitment to involving people affected by cancer in ways that help make this vision a reality.

Thank you to everyone who's contributed to our work over the past decade, and to every person who will continue to inform and strengthen it by sharing their lived experience.



Dr Ian Walker
Executive Director of Policy, Information and Communications

Definitions

We engage with people in many different ways. Here are some definitions to make it clear what we mean when we use certain words.*

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 they're not involvement and therefore aren't mentioned in this strategy.

*These are Cancer Research UK's definitions. Other organisations may define these terms differently.



Involvement

People with direct and indirect experiences of cancer, as well as the wider public, shaping what we do and how we do it.

Insight

Finding out the views of our supporters and the public to understand their needs, motivations and behaviours. We use this information to make decisions about our strategy and our work.

Participation

People taking part in opportunities we've created to help us achieve our aims – for example, by helping at an event, taking part in a marathon or sending a letter to their MP.

Engagement

The process of communicating and sharing information about our work with people affected by cancer, our supporters and members of the public to build trust and understanding.

Our vision

At Cancer Research UK, our vision is 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 **organisational strategy** outlines the following commitment for involvement:

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

Our involvement strategy, co-created with people affected by cancer, sets out our plan for achieving this over the next five years and where we will focus our efforts.



Our principles for involvement

To support our staff to know what we expect and confidently deliver involvement opportunities, we've worked with people affected by cancer to create a set of principles for involvement at Cancer Research UK.

> "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 Elliot
a member of our Involvement Strategy Advisory group

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

They reflect our commitment to the **UK Standards for Public Involvement** and the **Shared Commitment to Public Involvement** in health and social care research, which we signed up to in 2022.

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.

Why involvement matters

From the people who help shape it



"Involvement matters because it means 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 McGuire, a member of our Involvement Strategy Advisory Group



"Involvement matters as it makes sure the voices of people like me are included. It's really important to me that the views of everyone affected by cancer are heard, listened to and acted on – especially marginalised voices."

Bettina Wallace, a member of our Involvement Strategy Advisory Group



"Involvement and this strategy are vitally important in making sure our research is truly centred on people affected by cancer. Involvement leads to higher quality, more relevant research."

Anne Croudass
Lead Research Nurse Cancer Research UK



"Involvement and 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

Our involvement strategy

We've identified **four focus areas** to strengthen our approach to involvement over the next five years.

Our focus areas

1. Impact

Focusing on involvement opportunities that make a difference

- Develop a tool to help us measure the difference involvement makes
- Update our ways of working to make sure we have the capacity to support the projects that will make the most difference

2. Experience

Improving the experiences of the people we involve

- Develop better data and digital systems to engage more people and open up more opportunities
- Work with our Involvement Network members to develop more flexible ways to get involved

3. Inclusion

Building diversity and inclusion in our involvement work

- Co-create resources that support inclusive involvement opportunities
- Build the overall diversity of our Involvement Network

4. Cancer and health inequalities

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

- Build relationships with people and communities who are more likely to experience poorer cancer outcomes
- Work in partnership with people and communities in ways that suit them, helping to make sure their experiences shape our work



Focus area 1

Impact

Focusing on involvement opportunities that make a difference

Understanding the difference involvement makes is vital for people affected by cancer and our staff. We want to measure this more consistently so we can focus our efforts on projects that create the most meaningful improvements to people's lives.

Objectives

- Develop a tool to help us measure the difference involvement makes
- Update our ways of working to make sure we have the capacity to support the projects that will make the most difference

Our journey so far:

Understanding and communicating our impact

To help us understand the difference involvement makes, we ask people affected by cancer for feedback at the start, middle and end of their involvement. Through surveys, conversations and feedback sessions, we ask about their experience, expectations, if they feel they've made a difference and whether they'd take part again.

Our staff also give feedback through surveys and debriefs, sharing how involvement has affected their motivation, understanding of people's lived experiences and future plans to involve people affected by cancer in their work.

We always share the outcomes of our work with people who were involved so they can see how their input made a difference. We do this by sending written and video updates, as well as newsletters.

Our staff receive updates through internal communications, reports and team meetings that help everyone understand how involvement shapes our work.



Our involvement ladder

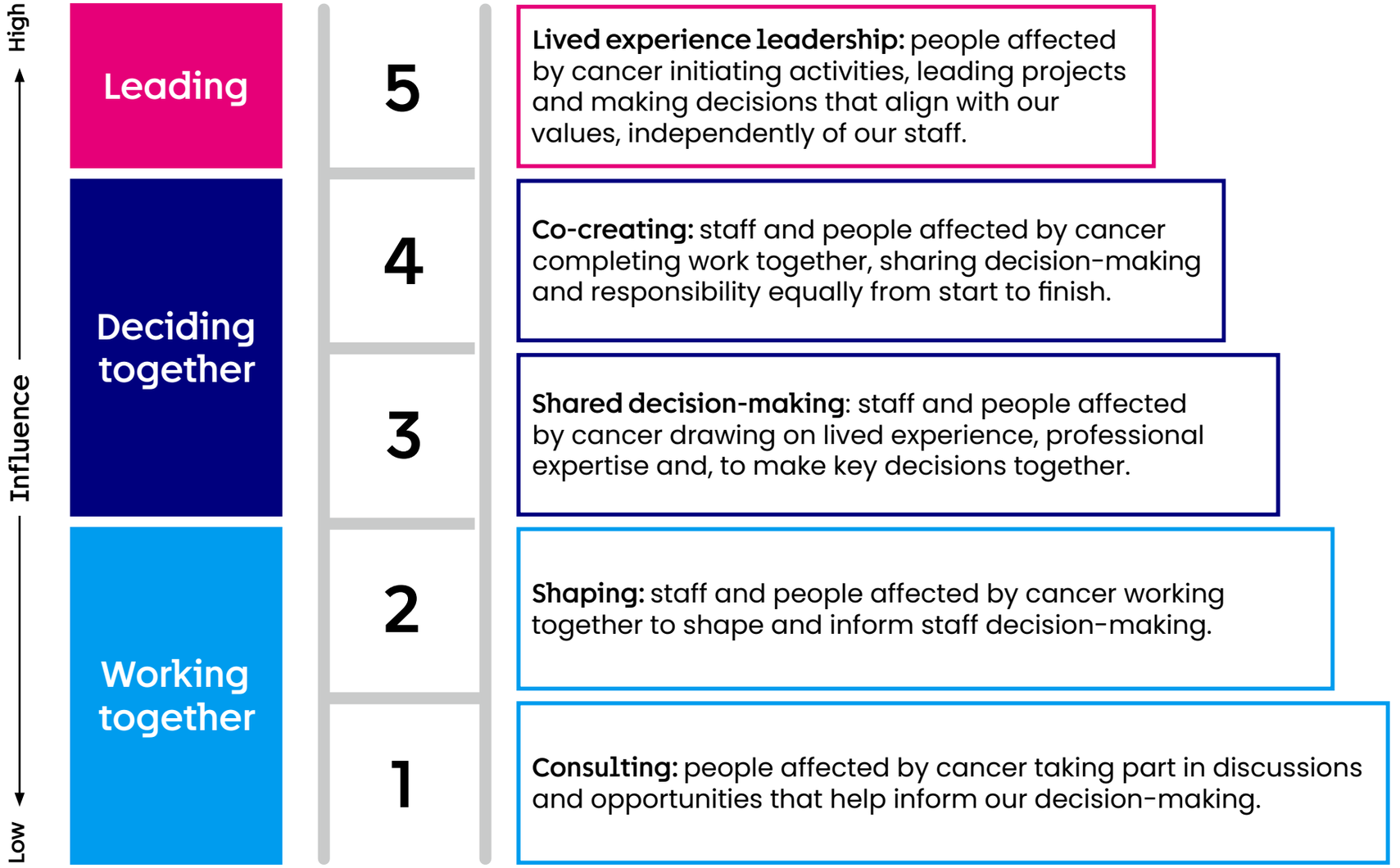
All levels and methods of involvement are important, so we aim to give people affected by cancer a wide variety of flexible opportunities to get involved. We also want to support our staff to deliver high-quality, meaningful involvement.

Developed with people affected by cancer, our involvement ladder is a tool that helps measure and understand how influential our involvement activities are and supports our staff use the right involvement methods at the right time. We will use it to help us achieve the objectives of focus area 1, helping to make sure our involvement activities have a real influence on our work and research.

"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 Grayson
a member of our Involvement Strategy Advisory Group



Focus area 2

Experience

Improving the experiences of the people we involve

We want everyone who joins our Involvement Network and takes part in our work to have a positive experience. By using the data our network members share, we aim to personalise people's experience, from the emails they receive to the opportunities and support we offer.

Objectives

- Develop better data and digital systems to engage more people and open up more opportunities
- Work with our Involvement Network members to develop more flexible ways to get involved



"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 McGuire
a member of our Involvement Network and Involvement Strategy Advisory Group

Our journey so far:

Continuous improvement in involvement

We bring together people affected by cancer from across the UK to shape and improve our work. Over the past year, their feedback has helped us create clearer processes, more accessible materials and more flexible ways for people to get involved.

We've increased the diversity in our network and extended the length of time people take part from two years to three, improving continuity.

To make the experience more personal, we've strengthened relationships between staff and panel members, planned meetings further in advance and made sessions shorter and more discussion-focused, with the option to contribute by email.

We've also improved accessibility through plain English communications and video updates, while expanding training in areas such as public speaking, facilitation and mentoring for the people we involve.

Focus area 3

Inclusion

Building diversity and inclusion in our involvement work

Good involvement includes a wide range of perspectives and voices. When we do this, our work is shaped by real experiences and better reflects the needs of everyone affected by cancer.

Working closely with our Involvement Network, we've made significant progress to make sure more people can get involved in our work in ways that work for them.

We know there's more to do to make all our involvement opportunities truly accessible and inclusive to a diverse range of people. So, we'll build on what's working well and continue to support both our staff and people affected by cancer to grow their skills and work together confidently and creatively.

Objectives

- Co-create resources that support inclusive involvement opportunities
- Build the overall diversity of our Involvement Network

Our journey so far:

Breaking down barriers

Over the past year, we've taken steps to increase diversity on our Children & Young People Insights Panel. We moved from twice yearly recruitment to an 'apply anytime' approach, bringing in new members every four months. This allows people to apply when it suits them, makes the process more accessible and reduces competition, which can help people who feel less confident with formal applications.

We've also implemented an inclusive recruitment process. This includes anonymous shortlisting by a mixed group of people of different ages and ethnic backgrounds, made up of one staff member and two panel members. To make the process more inclusive, we encourage clear, simple answers rather than long or highly polished ones.



"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 Mohammed
person affected by cancer involved in our work

Focus area 4

Cancer and health inequalities

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

Health inequalities are unfair and avoidable differences in health outcomes across the population. We see inequalities in all aspects of cancer care, from the risk of developing the disease to differences in access to services and treatment that ultimately impact survival.

Our cancer and health inequalities strategy (2025–2030) provides a clear plan to tackle these inequalities. It contains a commitment to build partnerships and work with people and communities who are more likely to experience cancer and health inequalities. Our involvement work in this area supports this commitment, as we know we can't address these problems on our own.

Objectives

- Build relationships with people and communities who are more likely to experience poorer cancer outcomes
- Work in partnership with people and communities in ways that suit them, helping to make sure their experiences shape our work



Our journey so far:

Listening and learning

When we started developing our cancer and health inequalities strategy, we held a focus group with Involvement Network members whose voices are often less heard.

The group included people on low incomes, disabled people, people with long-term health conditions, people identifying as LGBTQI+, people from ethnic minority groups and others who felt their life situation had affected their health or experience of cancer.

We also held a discussion with people affected by cancer who identified as being from a low-income background. This session looked at how we talk about cancer inequalities, helping us make our communications clearer, easier to understand and more relevant to people with lived experience of the disease.

Together, these conversations helped us understand the barriers people face to staying healthy and getting good cancer care. They also gave us ideas for how we can help reduce these inequalities.

“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 Hywel
a member of our Involvement Strategy Advisory Group

Our path to progress

To achieve the objectives in our four focus areas, we'll develop a roadmap defining the steps we'll take in the short, medium and long term. We're also developing an action plan and will track our progress across the next five years.

Here are some examples of what we'll be working on:

Short term

Now

- Develop and pilot an impact measurement tool
- Define and deliver a model for partnering with communities

Medium term

Year 1–3

- Use digital tools to help us engage with people affected by cancer in a more personalised way
- Create an involvement toolkit

Long term

Year 3–5

- Create new learning opportunities for people affected by cancer and our staff
- Co-create more flexible ways for people to get involved



Shaping the future together

"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 Sayer
a member of our Involvement Strategy Advisory Group

"I'm involved in several Cancer Research UK workstreams and believe strongly that their work should be done with patients, not just for them. This strategy provides a clear plan for embedding meaningful involvement across the charity, leading to real action and making sure the perspectives of people affected by cancer stay central."



Steve Clark
a member of our Involvement Strategy Advisory Group

"I'm proud of how involvement has grown at Cancer Research UK over the past ten years – thank you to everyone who's helped make it happen. This strategy helps us focus our attention on where we can make the most difference. I'm excited to put it into action as we continue to learn and grow together to strengthen our work."



Jo Harby
Director of Information and Involvement

Thank you



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 also sets a bold plan for the next five years.

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 progress in how we work with people affected by cancer.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

"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."

Acknowledgements

With thanks to...

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Our Cancer Insight panels

Our Patient Involvement team:

Suki Westmore, Ali Carey, Alison Reeve, Anne-Sophie Kleczewski, Claire Britton, Katie Nania, Gabriele Osella, El Mawer, Jozie Waldon, Jonathan Copestake

Additional Cancer Research UK staff:

Matt Howard-Murray, Jo Harby, Laura Sharp, Karis Betts, Anne Croudass and more.

*We would like to acknowledge Lisa Crane, a valued member of the Strategic Advisory Group, who sadly passed away before seeing this strategy come to fruition. We are grateful for her contribution and extend our thanks to her family for kindly allowing us to include her photograph on page 5.



Contact us

Learn more

Explore our **involvement page**

Find out more about our **Involvement Network** and join to receive regular updates, news and opportunities.

Take part

View our current **involvement opportunities**

Get in touch

If you have any questions or would like to talk to the team, email **involvement@cancer.org.uk** or call **0203 469 8777**

We'd be very happy to hear from you.