

NHS

**Kent and Medway
Mental Health**
NHS Trust



**Doing well together:
organisational strategy
(2026 to 2031)**

Who we are

Kent and Medway Mental Health NHS Trust provides specialist secondary mental health, learning disability and autism services for around 1.9 million people across Kent and Medway.

We care for people whose needs require specialist support beyond what can usually be provided by GPs. This includes people experiencing severe or complex mental illness who need support from specialist community teams, crisis services, inpatient care or forensic services.

As we begin this strategy, we are also excited to become an all-age provider, **expanding our services for children and young adults and all-age eating disorders, strengthening support across the whole life course.** Each year, we now expect to care for more than 1,700 people in our hospitals and over 81,000 people through our community and neighbourhood services.

Our **4,700 colleagues** represent more than **76 nationalities**, bringing a wide range of skills, experience and perspectives. Together they show expertise, compassion and dedication, often supporting people at the most difficult moments in their lives.

We are **part of the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System**, working with partners to improve health and care for local people. As the only NHS provider covering all of Kent and Medway, **we play a key role in ensuring the voice of mental health and our communities is heard.** This places us in a unique but strong position for the communities we serve.

Working alongside our partners, we are the lead provider delivering Mental Health Together, a new approach to community mental health care. This programme brings NHS, local authorities and voluntary organisations together so people receive joined-up support in their communities and access help more easily.

We are also **strengthening our partnership with Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust**, recognising the opportunity to better join up mental health and community health services so people can receive more coordinated care closer to home. This aligns with the **NHS Ten Year Health Plan** which centres on an Integrated Neighbourhood Care approach - moving services from hospitals to community settings to provide proactive, personalised care.

Together with our partners, we are determined to improve mental health care across all of Kent and Medway with a relentless focus on safe, high-quality care and better outcomes for the people we serve.



How far we have come

Over the past three years we have made significant progress on our journey to improving services for patients, supporting our staff and strengthening partnerships across Kent and Medway. We have also worked with staff, patients, partners and communities to co-create a new organisational identity and values. This work has helped shape the culture we have started to build and how we will together deliver this strategy. Key achievements from our previous strategy include:

For our people



We co-created a new identity as a **Trust**, together with our people



Our workforce is more **stable** – we have reduced our vacancies and reduced our spend on temporary staff



We are **empowering staff** to make practical changes and build a culture of continuous improvement

For our patients



People waiting for a dementia diagnosis are getting answers quicker – the average waiting time has reduced from **27 to 13 weeks.**



9 out of 10 emergency patients needing mental health support are now seen within 1 hour



Our wards are **safer and kinder** – the number of self-harm incidents on our wards has more than halved

For our partners



We formed **strong partnerships** to deliver Mental Health Together which joins up mental health and community health services



We are continuing to **improve flow of patients** across our services, supporting those that need a bed and those ready for discharge

Regulators and external reviewers have also recognised our:

- growing improvement capability
- strengthening learning culture
- focused leadership delivering results

We are proud of this progress, but we know there is more to do.

The reality for Kent and Medway



Mental health services across the country face rising demand and limited capacity. Kent and Medway is no exception.



Our population is growing and rates of mental illness are rising. Some of our most deprived communities experience far higher levels of severe mental illness, poorer physical health and shorter life expectancy. Many people who need support do not currently access mental health services due to barriers such as stigma, culture, awareness or how services are designed.



Demand for services often exceeds capacity. Compared nationally, we have fewer inpatient beds. Some people must receive care outside of Kent and Medway, while others stay in hospital longer than they need to because support after discharge is not readily available.



This means some people are waiting longer than we would like. During this time, their needs can become more complex and urgent, increasing demand on services across the system, including A&E.



This puts extra pressure on our partners and our own staff. Although vacancy rates have improved, teams continue to manage high levels of clinical risk and complexity. This pressure, alongside making big changes to how services are delivered is affecting resilience and wellbeing.



Quality of care is not always as consistent as it should be. External scrutiny, independent reviews and our own learning have highlighted areas where we must continue to improve – including culture, quality and safety, how we manage risk and how we use information and experience to run our services and make decisions.



Patients, families, carers and partners told us that:

- getting access to help can be confusing
- communication with patients and between services and providers must improve
- they want greater involvement in their care
- prevention and early intervention must be stronger
- all health and care services must work together around the person

The scale of the challenge means we cannot continue with the same approaches. We must work differently with partners to improve outcomes for our communities. And above all, we must maintain a relentless focus on safety and quality so that people receive care they can trust.



Our wider strategic environment

This strategy is in line with national ambitions set out in the NHS 10 Year Health Plan, including commitments to:

- create new neighbourhood health services, shifting care from hospitals to communities and investing more in crisis support in the community.
- focus on prevention not just treatment. For mental health that means working together to help people live well with mental illness, and expanding mental health support teams in schools and colleges.

We also work within the NHS England Oversight Framework, which measures performance across access, quality, outcomes, productivity and financial sustainability.

The Kent and Medway Integrated Care System faces significant challenges in terms of clinical outcomes and financial pressure, meaning we must transform the way our clinical services are delivered, work more closely together across organisations, and better join up patient pathways.

Mental health services in Kent and Medway have historically received less investment than other areas across the country. We are determined to change this by investing in community services, working with our partners to ensure our patients receive the care they deserve and that mental health plays a central role in local planning and transformation.

Our ambition

We have started to build the foundations for improvement, but we know this is not yet consistent across all of our services. Over the next five years, we will focus relentlessly on delivering consistency across everything we do, including safety and quality.

We worked with colleagues, patients and partners to co-create a new identity, vision, mission and values. In response to feedback, we also changed our name from Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust to Kent and Medway Mental Health NHS Trust, to better reflect who we are and what we do.

Our purpose is why we exist:

We exist to make mental health care easier to access, use and trust in our communities.

Our vision describes the future we want to shape:

Helping communities stay well and live well with their mental health.

Our mission sets out how we will shape our future vision:

A proactive, united mental health service for our communities across Kent and Medway.

Our values and principles guide how we behave and the choices we make every day:

Values:

Caring

Inclusive

Curious

Confident

Principles

- Quality and safety always come first
- We co-create solutions from the start
- Our values drive every decision
- We deliver measurable impact that lasts
- Our leaders are visible and accountable
- We act as one system, in genuine partnership
- We communicate openly and clearly
- We advocate for our communities and mental health

Together, these define not only what we will achieve, but how it feels to work here, receive care and partner with us - and shape how we deliver this strategy



Our True Norths

To deliver our vision, we will focus on five strategic ambitions - our True Norths.

Timely access - Help when you need it

People can get the right mental health support at the right time, close to home wherever they live.



Why this matters

Demand for mental health support is growing. People with severe mental illness in Kent and Medway die 15 to 20 years earlier, often from preventable physical conditions. People living in the most deprived communities are twice as likely to experience anxiety and depression.

Too many people are waiting longer than they should, and access can vary depending on where people live and which community they belong to. GPs told us that access to mental health support needs to be more straightforward and the easiest, although not the best option was sometimes to refer people to A&E.

Patients and carers told us that waiting for care can feel frightening, confusing and at times unsafe. Many feel left in the dark without updates. Staff say they feel overwhelmed and constrained by processes that make it harder to give timely support.

People want quicker access, clearer communication and support while they wait.

What will be different - we will:

- help people get the care they need more quickly
- make it easier for people and GPs to access care
- improve our data so we can spot where people are accessing services and address barriers when they're not
- provide regular updates to patients and their loved ones while they wait

How we will measure success

- 85% of patients referred to Mental Health Together are treated within 18 weeks of referral

If we know what's happening and someone is checking in, we can cope with the wait. When there's silence, it feels unsafe.

Safe care - Keeping people safe in our care

People are safe when they receive care from us, whether in our wards or communities.



Why this matters

People often come to us at their most vulnerable moments in their lives. The care we provide can be life-changing and, at times, lifesaving.

Safety is not only about preventing physical harm. It also means protecting people's psychological safety and dignity.

Patients told us they want to feel believed, respected and understood. Staff emphasised the importance of consistent practice, the right skills and training, and a culture that listens and learns.

Providing high-quality, safe care supports faster recovery and builds lifelong trust in our services.

What will be different - we will:

- improve safety by being open, learning from our mistakes and reducing patient harms on our wards and in our communities
- ensure high-quality care is delivered consistently across all our services, by setting clear standards and expectations and learning quickly when things may go wrong
- use data to better understand and improve outcomes for different groups of people
- listen more to patients, families and carers and involve them in shaping care or our learning
- ensure children and young people transition safely to our care and with seamless continuity into adult services
- develop a clinical plan that sets out how we will organise our services around pathways of care, and do more to actively support people to improve their wellbeing and prevent chronic illnesses
- further train and support our staff so they can better care for patients with neurodiversity, complex needs and trauma

How we will measure success

- Improved management of patient harm, with a focus on wards and community home treatment teams.
- Patient outcomes are consistent across protected characteristics.
- More clinical services are accredited for meeting high-quality standards.

// **Feeling safe comes from knowing who is responsible, being treated with respect, and being believed when we raise concerns.** //

Positive experiences - For patients, families and staff



People feel listened to, involved in decisions and supported by a culture that reflects our values.

Why this matters

Many patients recommend our services. However, people told us they want care that feels more relational. That means: clear communication, continuity of care, involvement in their care planning and updates they can understand.

Many people described the value of having one trusted point of contact and services where staff have the time and support to care properly. People who need urgent mental health support often feel they are directed to A&E which is rarely the most appropriate place for their needs.

Our staff also shared their experiences. They described frustration with digital systems, internal processes and buildings that are not fit for purpose.

Some staff feel that leadership and management support varies, and they do not always feel heard, supported or empowered. Strengthening communication and making sure all voices are heard and listened to is key to doing well together.

Positive patient experiences support recovery and better outcomes. Supporting staff wellbeing is equally important, because supported staff provide more consistent and compassionate care.

What will be different:

For patients, we will:

- ensure patients and families are actively and fairly involved in making decisions and planning their care
- create a more consistent and increasingly digital experience so people can communicate with services more easily, stay informed and live well
- use tools such as DIALOG+ to understand people's experience and outcomes throughout their care journey and identify where improvements are needed
- involve patients and their families in redesigning pathways and improving services

For staff, we will:

- equip them with the processes, technology and estates needed to support relational care rather than transactional care
- strengthen inclusive leadership and meaningful staff involvement in improvement
- improve the ways in how we communicate
- make sure everyone is treated fairly and included, guided by our five-year Equality, Diversity and Inclusion plan and new values
- focus on wellbeing, creating more moments that ensure staff feel happy and proud at work

How we will measure success

- Significantly improved staff experience and engagement, moving closer to the best-performing mental health trusts in the country.
- Continued progress against our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion plan.
- 90% of patients are extremely likely/likely to recommend the trust to their friends and family if they needed similar care or treatment.

Patient:



See me as a person, not a diagnosis - and don't disappear when I leave.



Families:



I know my mum best. I only wish the team would ask me what works for her.



Staff:



We waste time fixing the system instead of helping people.



Smarter working - Using our time and resources well



People benefit when we use our time, skills and resources well so more goes into care.

Why this matters

Staff and patients told us they want simpler processes and better technology. This will free up more time for care, improve patient experiences and help us build a more sustainable system that can meet the needs of our communities.

We are part of a health system facing significant financial pressures where service demand continues to grow across all services, including mental health. As an organisation we are financially sustainable, but we know our system spends less on mental health than others across the country and we need to work with our local commissioners to change this in the coming years. We also recognise that we spend more than we would like in some areas and need to be more efficient, particularly where we rely on temporary staffing or out-of-area placements.

Long-term sustainability means more than financial balance. We have a responsibility to reduce our environmental impact, strengthen our communities and deliver lasting value through how we operate and invest.

With demand continuing to grow, we will need to work differently, making the best use of our time, money and effort on what makes the greatest difference to patient care and clinical outcomes.

What will be different - we will:

- reduce waste and focus spend on what makes the biggest difference to patient care and outcomes
- invest in new technology that saves time for our workforce, allowing more time to be redirected to patient care
- continue our commitment to protecting the environment, supporting our communities and acting with integrity in everything we do

How we will measure success

- Continue to be financially sustainable, with efficient services
- Spend more of our time and resources on patient care
- Significant progress towards achieving net zero by 2040, giving back to our communities and working with socially responsible suppliers



We spend more time on systems and doing admin than caring for people



Staying well - Preventing crisis and supporting long-term health



People with mental illness are supported to recover, stay well and live well in their communities.

Why this matters

More people are struggling with their mental health and come to us when they are already in crisis. High demand for beds, and delays in discharging people who are ready to leave hospital, reduce our ability to care for people when they need it. This creates avoidable pressure across the whole system. As a result, people who need inpatient care cannot access a hospital bed when they need it and this adds more pressure and longer waits for community care.

Mental health is shaped by many factors beyond healthcare, including physical health, housing, employment, family life and community support. Clinical treatment alone cannot meet these needs. As an organisation that spans the whole of Kent and Medway, we recognise our responsibility to work more closely and influence our partners to focus on prevention.


Integrated leadership and prevention mean stepping in earlier, joining up support around the person, and building a system in Kent and Medway that helps people live well in the community, not just treats them when they are unwell.

What will be different - we will:

- use our inpatient capacity purposefully, with clear clinical criteria for admission and timely discharge planning from day one
- work with our partners to jointly improve flow across the whole patient pathway
- create integrated neighbourhood health centres to offer true, joined up care closer to home
- work more closely with local charities, community organisations, schools, primary care, and local authorities to support people earlier, shifting from reactive care to prevention and early intervention

How we will measure success

- Ward beds are available and people can access one quickly and safely.
- More people get help earlier, with fewer crises and avoidable admissions.
- Fewer people already known to our services needing emergency department care because they are receiving the right support earlier.

 **I would have been dead a long time ago if it wasn't for the support I received in the community. It wasn't the NHS that got me through it was the people who volunteer locally. If we lose them, more lives will be lost.**



The capabilities we must strengthen

We have already begun strengthening some of the foundations that support our services, a renewed focus on quality and safety via our quality plan, strengthening our governance and organisational structures and starting to improve digital systems. However, to successfully deliver this strategy and respond to the growing needs of our communities, we need to build on this progress and further strengthen the following key capabilities across the organisation.

Improving safety and quality measures

We will strengthen how we assure and improve the quality and safety of our services so that our communities are confident in us. This means making sure we have clear oversight of performance, risk and learning across the organisation – from frontline teams through to the Board. We will bring together our strategy delivery, leadership, data and insight and patient experience so that we can identify issues earlier, learn quickly and make consistent daily improvements across our services.

Accelerating digital, data and technology-enabled care

We will invest in digital tools and technology, aligned with national priorities such as the “digital front door,” to make it easier for people to access services. Our focus will be on solutions that reduce duplication and free up staff to spend more time delivering care. The way in which we use our data needs to improve – this will give us a clearer, more joined-up view of how we are performing, helping us to make informed decisions. We will bring this together into a data, digital, and AI strategy that supports new care pathways and better outcomes.

Strengthening our workforce

Over the next five years we will work with staff and partners to develop a workforce strategic plan. This will ensure we have the right people, in the right roles, with the right skills, now and in the future. We have already introduced an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan and we will continue to make progress to address equity and representation, ensuring opportunities are accessible to all groups. We will focus on attracting and keeping talented staff, supporting their development and making the most of their skills and experience so they feel valued and able to do their best work for patients.

Strengthening leadership, improvement and innovation

We will continue to support and develop leaders and managers so they can empower colleagues, champion innovation and drive this strategy forward. We will research and explore new ways of working, test and scale promising initiatives, and encourage staff to try new approaches safely so that patients can benefit more quickly from innovations.

How we will deliver this strategy

Making our estates and infrastructure fit for purpose

We will modernise our buildings and use our spaces more flexibly, bringing health services closer to people's homes. We will ensure we have the right number of sites, in the right locations organised in a way that means we can deliver the highest standard of care to our communities, especially as our footprint has expanded to include children and young people services, and all-age eating disorder services.

Embedding a strong organisational culture

We will build on the foundations created through our co-created identity and values. While there are many examples of excellent practice, we know culture is experienced differently across the organisation. Our focus is to create an open, inclusive and consistent culture where our values shape how we work every day – celebrating great care and teamwork, addressing behaviours that fall short, supporting staff to speak up and be heard and ensuring communication is two-way across all levels.

Accessible patient communication and co-creation

We will provide clear, accessible communications so people understand what support is available and how to access our services. We will align patient experience, engagement and co-creation so we better listen to patients, families and communities, involve people earlier in shaping services and ensure feedback leads to meaningful improvement. We will work more closely with communities who do not currently access our services, helping us understand barriers and co-create support that better meets their needs.

We will deliver this strategy through our **Doing Well Together Improvement Programme**.

This programme turns strategic ambitions and plans into action and ensures improvements happen in practice, not just on paper. Directorates and corporate and support teams will develop aligned annual plans and measurable improvement goals linked to the five True North priorities.

This approach creates clarity, focus and shared accountability across the trust, from Board to frontline teams.

How we will measure progress

We will measure progress through a set of Year 1 breakthrough objectives, focusing on the changes that move us closest to our True North ambitions.

These will be supported by a wider set of measures covering quality, performance, workforce and finance. Progress will be reviewed regularly through our governance structures and reported publicly through the Board, ensuring transparency, accountability and continuous learning.

