

The Royal Society of Medicine

TACKLING

HEALTH

INEQUALITIES

This chronology provides a historical overview of selected reports, policies, legislation and implementation applicable to tackling health inequalities in England from the first statutory intervention in health in 1848 to Lord Darzi's independent report on the state of the NHS in England published on 12 September 2024.

All URL links are current to 20 December 2024.

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1842

Edwin Chadwick establishes a link between poor living standards and the spread of infectious diseases in his '[Report on the sanitary condition of the labouring population of Great Britain](#)'.



1946

6 November - Aneurin Bevan publishes the [National Health Service Act 1946](#). The Act provides for the establishment of a comprehensive health service for England and Wales, that is free at the point of use and universally available to all, financed by general taxation.



1848

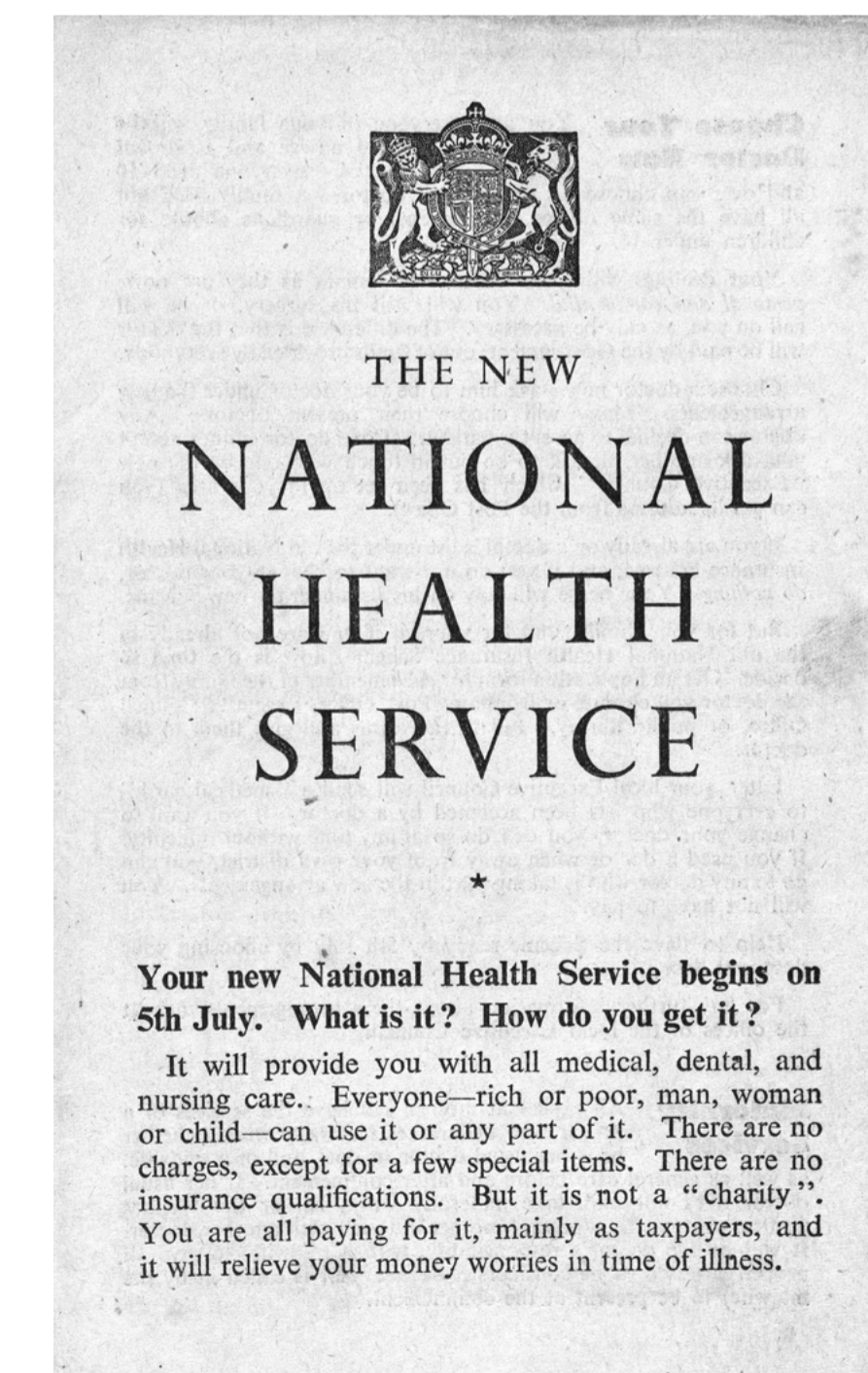
31 August - Parliament passes the [Public Health Act 1848](#) encompassing many of Chadwick's concerns and includes a requirement for regional reporting of infections and deaths to the newly established General Board of Health.

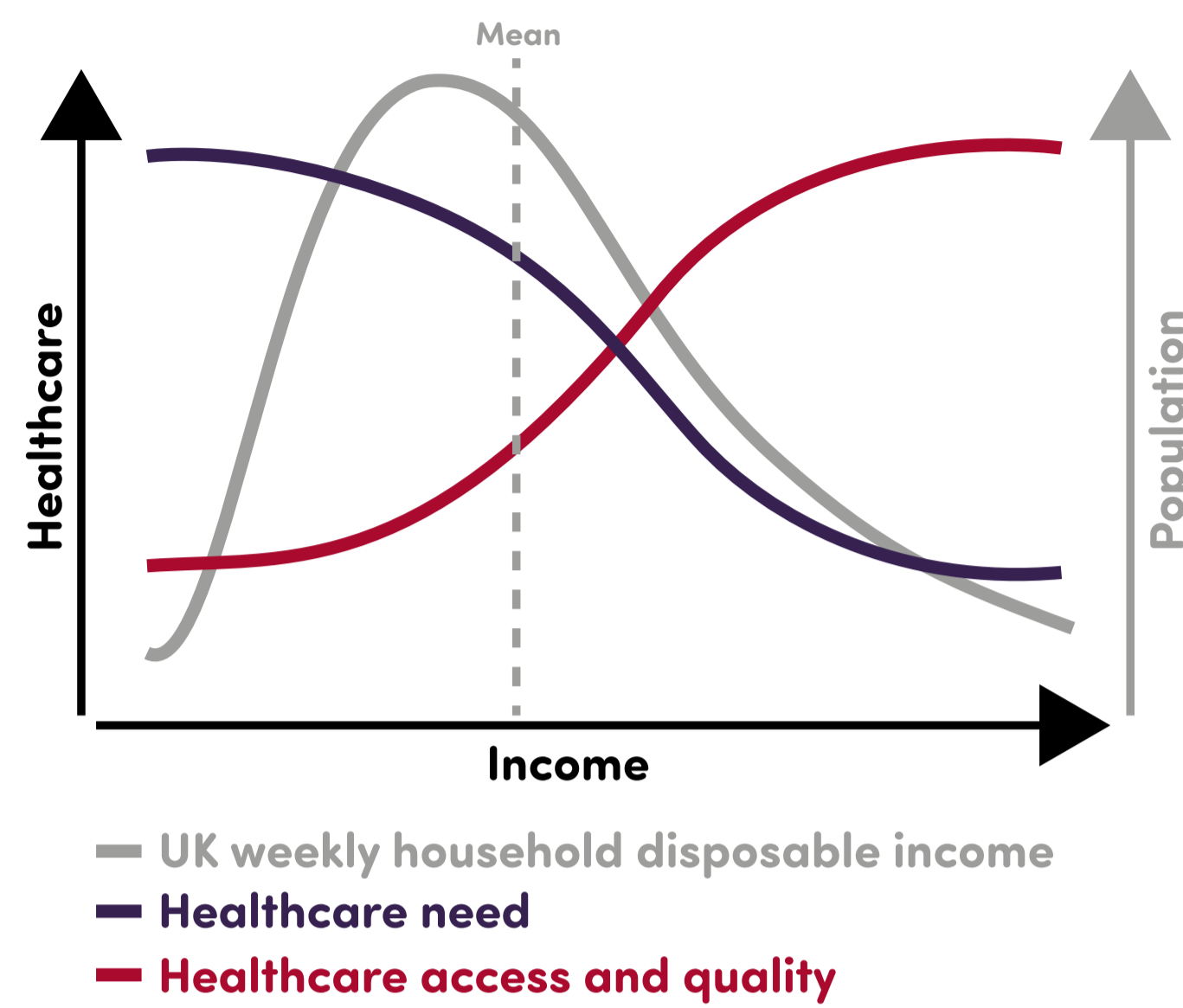


Image Credit: [Sitting of General Board of Health, Whitehall, 1846. Wellcome Collection. Public Domain Mark](#)

1948

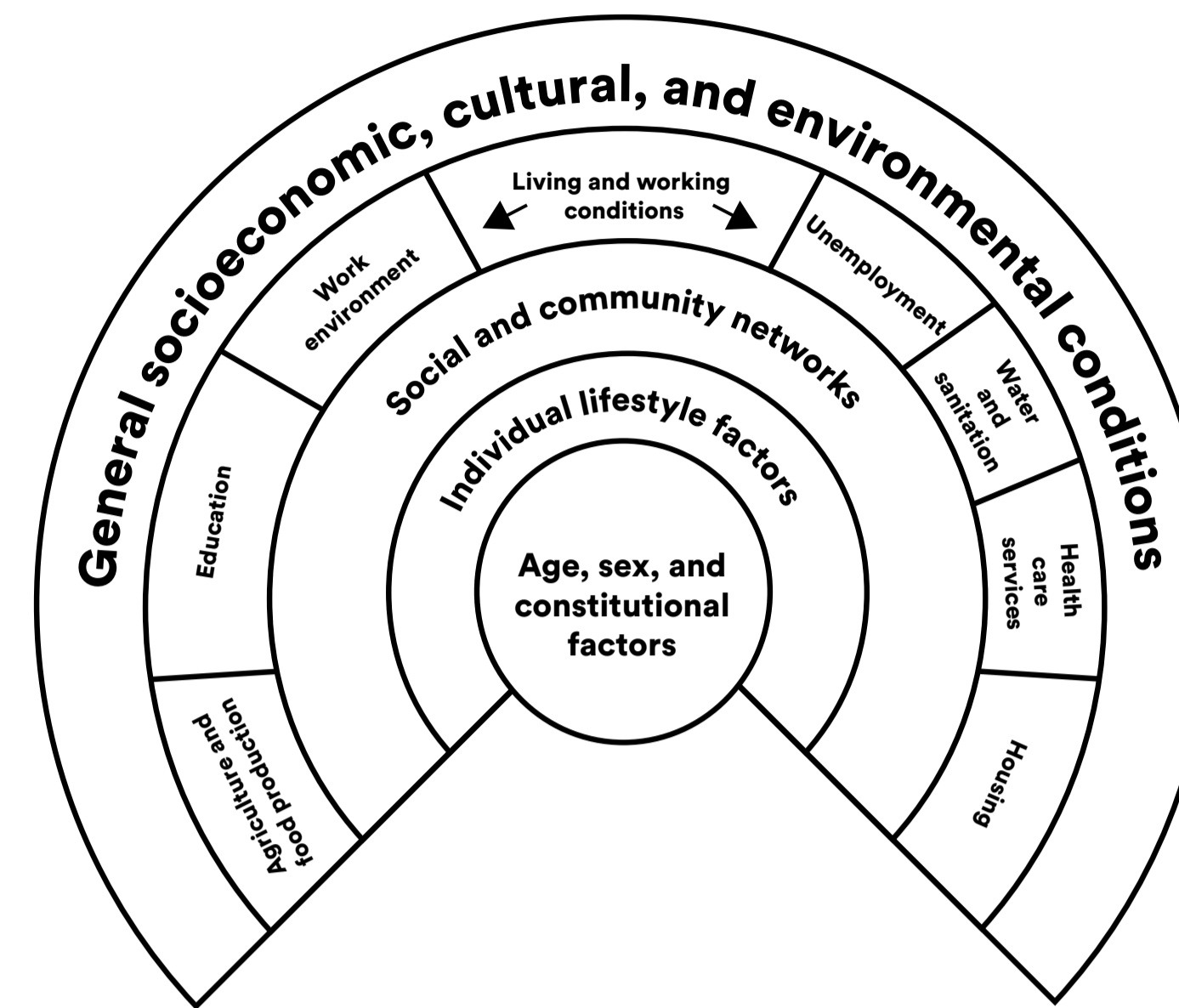
5 July - The [National Health Service \(NHS\)](#) is established, when the [National Health Service Act 1946](#) comes into force.





1971

27 February - In a seminal Lancet article, Julian Tudor Hart publishes [‘The Inverse care law’](#), in which he claims that the use of and need for healthcare are inversely related, implying that the relatively poor are facing disproportionate barriers to NHS access.



1991

January - The [‘layers of influence’ model for determinants of health](#) is proposed in a discussion paper by Göran Dahlgren and Margaret Whitehead and will be examined in the [Acheson Report](#) 7 years later.

1980



30 August - The [‘Inequalities in health’ \(Black Report\)](#) is published, the first major independent review of health inequalities in Britain. It was commissioned by the Labour Government in 1977, following concerns that socioeconomic

differentials in health had widened since the introduction of the NHS. The report’s recommendations are not implemented by the new Conservative government due to the proposed scale of public expenditure.



1998

26 November - The seminal [‘Independent inquiry into inequalities in health’ \(Acheson Report\)](#) is published, the second major independent review of health inequalities in England and one of the first actions commissioned by the new Labour Government in 1997. The report informs

development of the government’s public health strategy, and its three crucial recommendations are cited in several official policy documents, including the [‘Saving lives: our healthier nation’ white paper](#) (July 1999) and [‘Reducing health inequalities: an action report’](#) (July 1999).

Image Credit: [History of Modern Biomedicine Research Group](#) licenced under [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International](#).

2000

1 July - [The NHS Plan](#) is published as a 10-year modernisation programme of investment and reform of the NHS, emphasising the importance of tackling health inequalities.

2001

February - For the first time in the UK, the government announces [national targets to reduce inequalities](#) in infant mortality and life expectancy at birth by 10% by 2010.

11 May - The [Health and Social Care Act 2001](#) formalises [The NHS Plan](#).



2009

May - '[Tackling health inequalities: 10 years on](#)' is published, taking stock of developments in health inequalities in England from the publication of the [Acheson inquiry report](#) in November 1998 to November 2008 when the post-2010 strategic review was announced.



Image Credit: Health Inequalities Unit
Department of Health

2003

The WHO Regional Office for Europe publishes a summary of evidence on the [social determinants of health](#) to provide a deeper understanding of health disparities in a global perspective.

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2 July - '[Tackling health inequalities: a programme for action](#)' sets out the delivery of the national health inequalities 2010 target and supports a long-term sustainable reduction in health inequalities. This cross-government strategy will end with the change in government in 2010.

2010

February - The influential '[Fair society, healthy lives](#)' ([Marmot Review](#)) is published, the third major independent review of health inequalities in England. It was commissioned by the Labour Government in 2008 to contribute to the development of a post-2010 health inequalities strategy.

30 November - The Coalition government's response to the [Marmot Review](#) is embodied in their first public health white paper, '[Healthy lives, healthy people](#)'. The main structural change for public health is the transfer of health improvement functions from primary care trusts to local authorities, the creation of Public Health England and a new public health outcomes framework.





2011

The [UCL Institute of Health Equity](#) is established, led by Professor Sir Michael Marmot. It leads and collaborates on research to address the social determinants of health and improve health equity.

2013

1 April - Following the [Health and Social Care Act 2012](#), a new NHS, public health and adult social care structure comes into effect.

20 November - The first meeting of the [NHS Equality and Diversity Council](#). Its purpose is to help improve the healthcare access, experiences and health outcomes for all patients and communities, and to support the NHS to become a more inclusive employer.

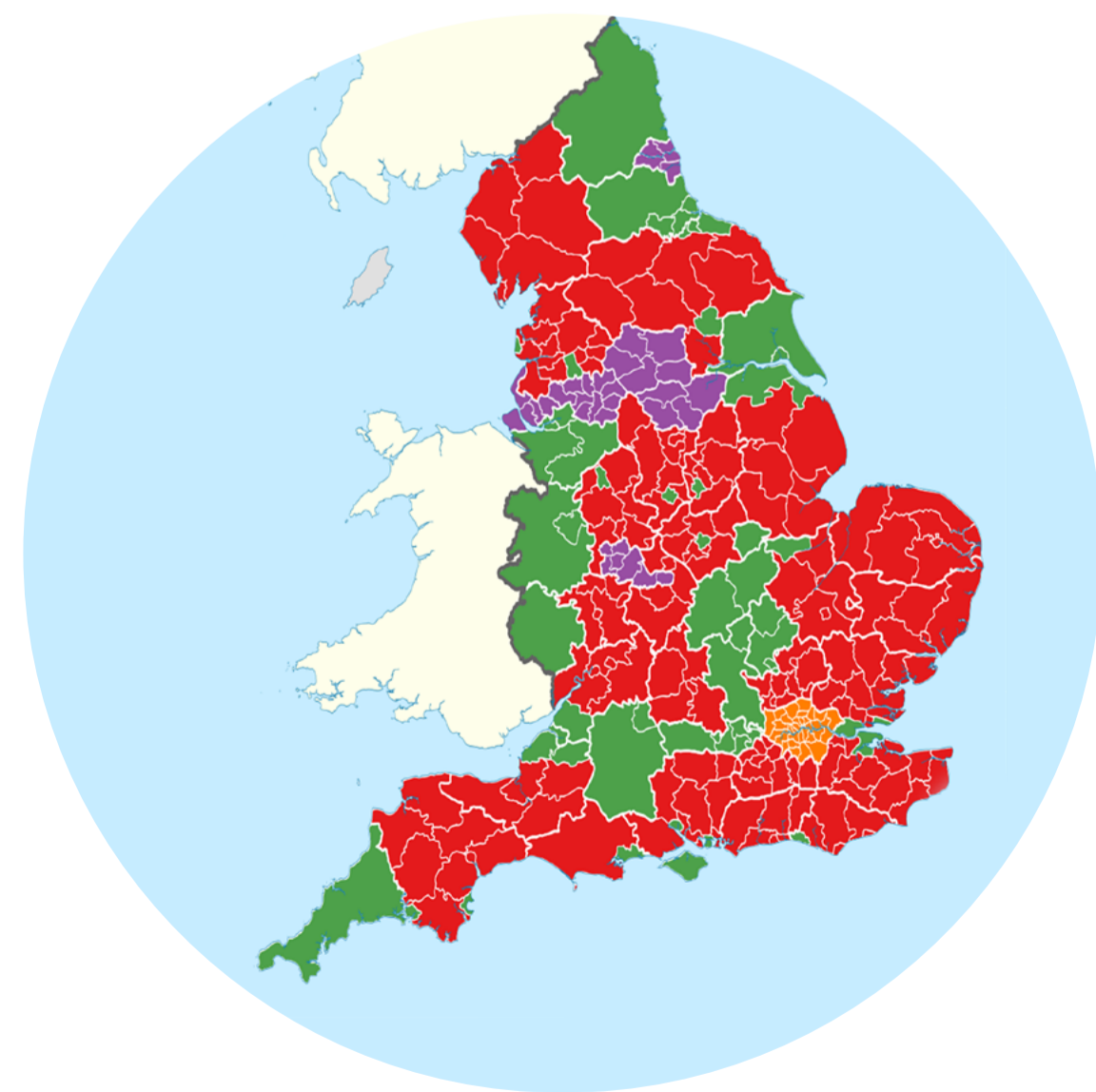


2012

February - The first publication of '[Health indicators for local authorities in England](#)' ([Marmot Indicators](#)) to support monitoring the overall strategy in reducing health inequalities.

27 March - For the first time in England, key national and local NHS decision-making bodies are required by law to address inequalities in access and outcomes under the [Health and Social Care Act 2012](#).

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2019

7 January - NHS England publishes [The NHS Long Term Plan](#) setting the direction of the health service across 10 years to 2028. The plan sets out to establish a 'more concerted and systematic approach to reducing health inequalities' alongside a number of specific inequalities initiatives such as supporting ethnic minorities.



2020

February - The [‘Health equity in England’](#) report is published, commissioned by the Health Foundation to examine progress in addressing health inequalities in England, 10 years on from the landmark [Marmot](#)

[Review](#), and to propose recommendations for future action. It highlights differences in healthy life expectancy of 12 years between the most and least deprived local authorities and confirms an increase in the North/South health gap.

30 May - NHS England and the NHS Confederation launch the [NHS Race and Health Observatory](#), an independent body to investigate and provide practical support to the NHS in eradicating ethnic health inequalities.

2 June - Public Health England publishes a descriptive review on the [‘Disparities in the risk and outcomes from COVID-19’](#) based on surveillance data. It confirms that the impact of COVID-19 has replicated existing health inequalities and, in some cases, has increased them.

7 August - In response to [COVID-19 inequalities data](#), NHS England and NHS Improvement publish [8 urgent actions to address inequalities in NHS provision and health outcomes](#).

December - The [COVID-19 Marmot Review ‘Build back fairer’](#) is published examining inequalities in COVID-19 mortality, effects of the pandemic and the societal response to contain it on health inequalities and setting out recommendations moving forwards.

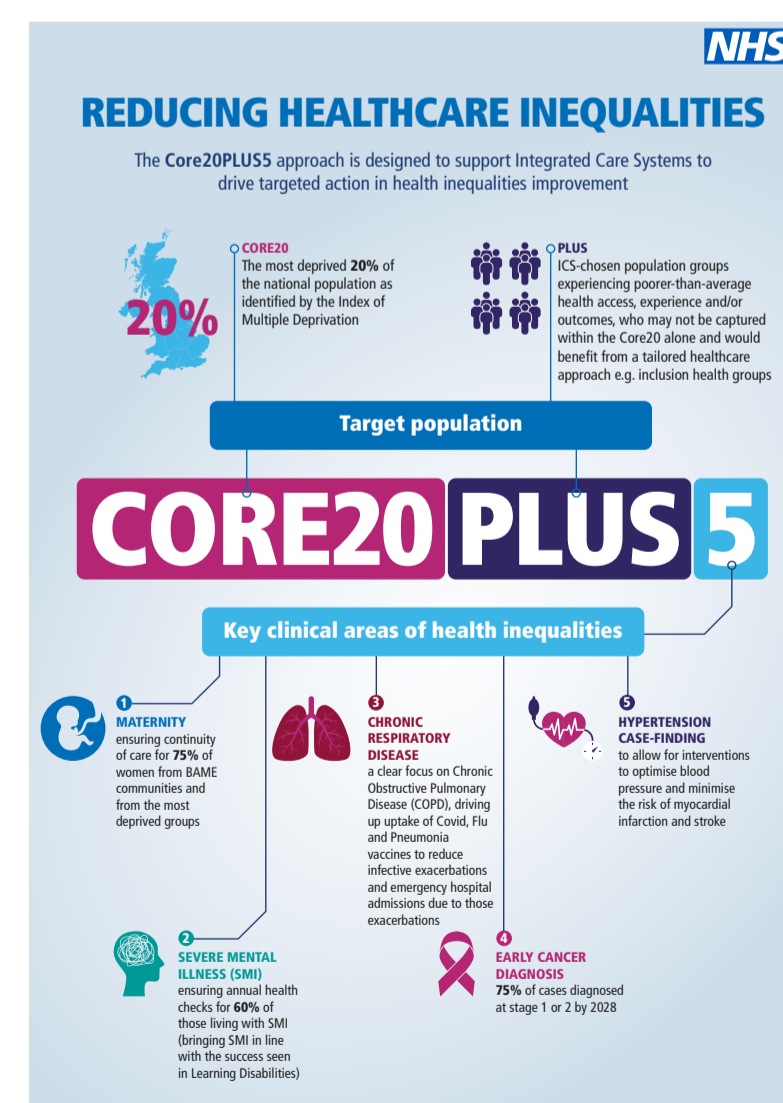
Dr Bola Owolabi is appointed in the new role of [Director, Health Inequalities](#) at NHS England and NHS Improvement.



2021

1 October - Following the decision to [dismantle Public Health England](#) (March 2021), the [Office for Health Improvement and Disparities](#) is launched responsible for public health functions along with NHS England and to tackle health disparities across the UK.

1 November - NHS England and NHS Improvement’s new [Core20PLUS5](#) approach to support the reduction of health inequalities at both national and system level goes live. It aims to deliver [The NHS Long Term Plan](#) commitments to reducing healthcare inequalities in England.



25 November - A national [Health Inequalities Improvement Dashboard](#) is made widely available as a central tool for measuring, monitoring and informing action on health disparities based on ethnicity and deprivation.

3 December - The cross-government [‘Final report on progress to address COVID-19 health inequalities’](#) is published.



Image Credit: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

2022

2 February - The government publishes the ['Levelling up' white paper](#) which explicitly refers to addressing significant regional inequalities including health.

17 March - The government launches their landmark ['Inclusive Britain'](#) strategy setting out 70 practical actions including addressing longer-term health inequalities in ethnic minorities, in response to the 24 recommendations included in the independent ['Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities'](#) (March 2021).

28 April - The [Health and Care Bill 2022](#) receives Royal Assent to establish a legislative framework for new integrated care system structures including measures to tackle health disparities.



8 March - The Royal Society of Medicine announces the launch of a new multi-year education programme ['Tackling inequalities'](#) in partnership with NHS England and NHS Improvement, to begin with an [inaugural conference](#) on 11 January 2023 focussing on [Core20PLUS5](#).



24 May - Secretary of State Sajid Javid states in [his speech at the Onward Social Fabric Summit](#) that a new white paper on tackling health disparities will be published later in 2022. It will focus on prevention and disparities by ethnicity, socioeconomic background and geography with an opportunity to set out more detailed plans.

12 July - A coalition of 47 organisations and charities issue a [Health Disparities White Paper Consensus Statement](#) urging the Government to take immediate action in implementing policies to tackle health inequalities.

30 September - The Inequalities in Health Alliance (IHA), a coalition of over 155 health organisations sign a [letter](#) urging the Health and Social Care Secretary to commit to publishing the Health Disparities White Paper by the end of 2022, following media reports suggesting its withdrawal.

11 October - The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities publishes guidance on ['Health disparities and health inequalities: applying All Our Health'](#).



21 July - NHS England publishes ['Tackling inequalities in healthcare access, experience, and outcomes: actionable insights'](#) to support NHS services in reducing healthcare inequalities and compliments the [Healthcare Inequalities Improvement Dashboard](#).



3 November - NHS England issues their ['Health and injustice framework for integration 2022-2025: Improving lives - reducing inequality'](#).

December - Seven [accelerator sites](#) across England's integrated care systems are selected to target quality improvement and reduce health inequalities in key clinical areas and population groups using the [Core20PLUS5](#) approach. Moving forward into 2023/24, other initiatives include [Core20PLUS ambassadors](#) and [Core20PLUS Community Connectors](#).





24 January - The Institute of Health Equity teams up with Legal & General to launch the UK's first [Health Equity Network \(HEN\)](#) for organisations and communities across the country to collaborate and encourage interdisciplinary problem solving on health equity.

August - Commissioned by NHS England, the Institute of Health Equity delivers [a report on practical proposals to improve accountability for health inequalities across integrated care systems](#), stating that existing NHS tools and approaches are only likely to increase actions on healthcare inequalities and not accountabilities.

28 September - NHS England's ['Inclusive digital healthcare: a framework for NHS action on digital inclusion'](#) recognises that reducing health inequalities and improving digital inclusion should focus on wider inclusive user design and delivery for digital products and services.



2023



27 January - £200 million allocated to tackle health inequalities was distributed to integrated care boards in 2022/23 and 2023/24. From 2023/24, [this funding is included in the NHS baseline budget](#), increasing with inflation but no longer ringfenced.

14 August - The Department for Health and Social Care's interim report on the forthcoming [Major Conditions Strategy for England](#) sets out the Government's approach to tackling 6 groups of health conditions

including promising to reduce inequalities in health outcomes. It follows an earlier announcement that the [Health Disparities White Paper](#) (which had been expected in 2022) will not be published.

9 October - NHS England publishes ['A national framework for NHS - action on inclusion health'](#) to support integrated care systems in planning, developing, and improving health services for socially excluded population groups.

27 November - NHS England publishes its first [Statement on Information on Health Inequalities](#) to help relevant NHS bodies understand their duties and powers in collecting, analysing, and publishing information, and how these should be exercised.

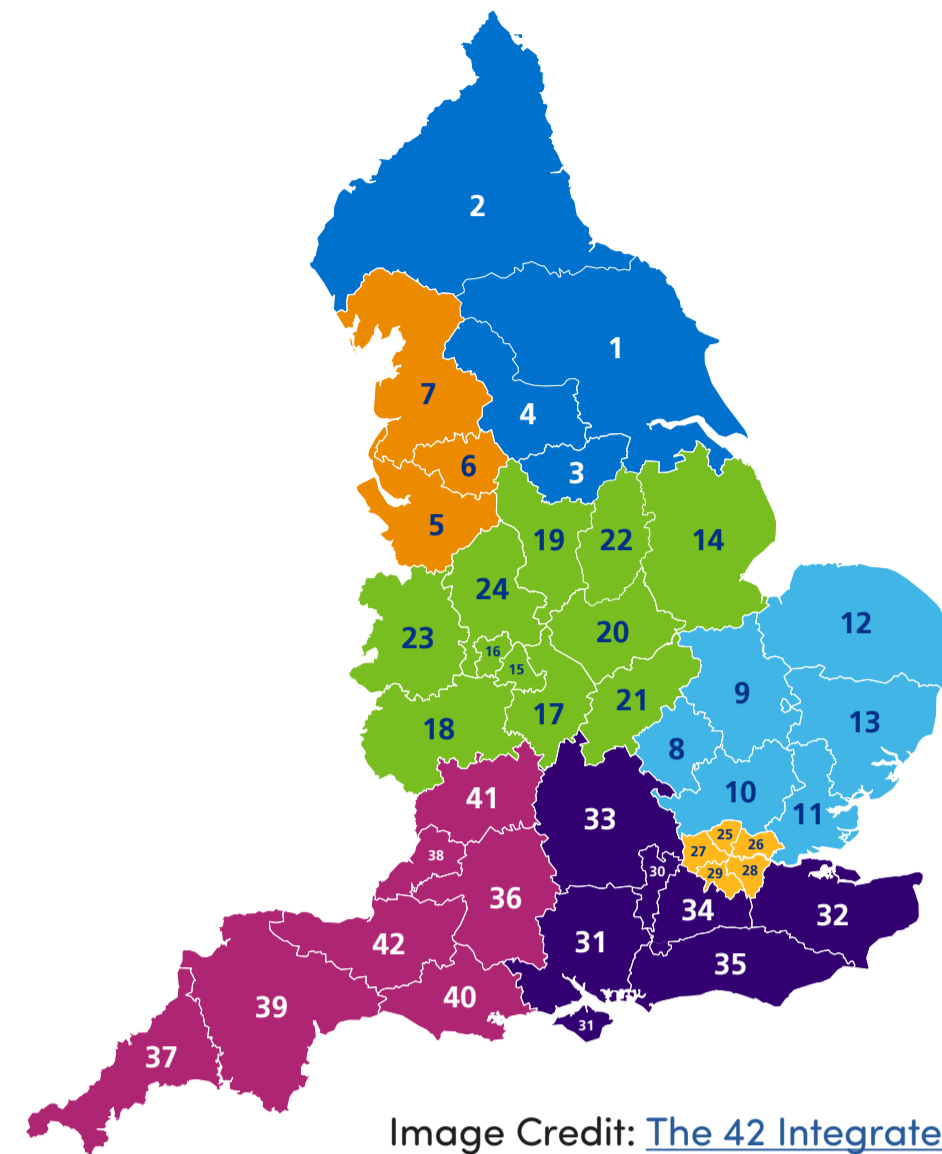


Image Credit: [The 42 Integrated Care Systems in England licenced under the Open Government Licence v3.0](#)

23 March - The NHS Federation issues a [practical toolkit](#) highlighting existing good practice, to inform allocating spending and to support implementing high impact changes within integrated care systems who were set [a core goal in July 2022](#) to address health inequalities.

April - The Institute of Health Equity's '[England's widening health gap: local places falling behind](#)' report highlights an association of an average 34% reduction in local authority spending power with widening life expectancy inequalities between regions and within local authorities in England since 2010.

April - NHS England's [Innovation for Healthcare Inequalities Programme \(InHIP\)](#) comes to [an end](#). £4.2 million was made available nationally to fund eligible projects to improve access to innovative health technologies and medicines run with local communities across England.

2024

8 November - The King's Fund report '[Tackling health inequalities on NHS waiting lists](#)' illustrates how taking an inclusive approach has led to a reduction in elective care backlogs after the COVID-19 pandemic based on learning from local case studies.



8 January - The Institute of Health Equity's '[Health inequalities, lives cut short](#)' report confirms that 'a million people in 90% of areas in England lived shorter lives than they should have between 2011 and the start of the pandemic'. The findings add to the evidence that the cumulative impact of regressive funding cuts is associated with austerity on the population's health.

27 March - NHS England publishes its [operational planning guidance for 2024/25](#), outlining the priority areas and objectives for the service including developing action plans to address health inequalities and implement the [Core20PLUS5](#) approach by the end of June 2024.

17 April - The Health Foundation reports that [3.7 million working-age adults in England will be living with major illness by 2040](#) (up from 3 million in 2019) with 80% of this increase being in the more deprived areas.

16 May - NHS England retains and updates [8 equality objectives](#) for 2023/24 and 2024/25.



9 September - Chaired by Baroness Heather Hallett, the independent UK [Covid-19 Inquiry](#) releases the first [Every Story Matters: Healthcare](#) record of their public hearings (which started in October 2022) focussing on patient and

healthcare professional experiences of the UK healthcare systems during the pandemic. Further hearings examined healthcare-related inequalities (such as in relation to death rates, PPE, and oximeters).

17 September - Chaired by Lord Darzi and Dame Sally Davies, [the final report of the Institute for Public Policy Research's 3-year cross-party Commission on Health and Prosperity](#) in the UK is published, outlining a health creation system which would add 10 years to healthy life expectancy by 2055 and halve regional health inequalities.

28 October - [A joint report from the Centre for Local Economic Strategies \(CLES\) and The King's Fund](#) presents a case to the Government for regional devolution in England being an effective approach towards narrowing health inequalities.

16 December - The Government publishes the [English Devolution White Paper](#) which includes introducing a new bespoke statutory health improvement and health inequalities duty for Strategic Authorities.

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23 August - The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities updates its [Health Equity Assessment Tool \(HEAT\)](#), originally published on 24 September 2020.

12 September - Lord Darzi's [independent investigation into NHS performance in England](#) is published, highlighting the challenges facing the healthcare system and recommending tackling health inequalities as an area of focus. Commissioned in July 2024 by the incoming Labour Government, the findings will form the basis of a [new 10-year health plan](#) (due in Spring 2025).

29 September - Based on their [5-year programme of work on tackling the worst health outcomes](#), The King's Fund delivers [7 priorities for the NHS in tackling health inequalities](#) to be considered by the Government's forthcoming 10-year health plan.

26 November - The Government publishes their [Get Britain Working White Paper](#). It's backed by £240 million of investment including funding to tackle ill health as the biggest driver of economic inactivity, particularly in communities affected by deprivation and inequality.