NHS Ayrshire & Arran
Quality Strategy 2027–2032

Kindness at our heart. Quality in everything we do.

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Foreword

Every day, across Ayrshire and Arran, our staff and partners make a difference to people's lives. They provide care, treatment, support and reassurance, often at times when people are at their most vulnerable.

We know that high-quality care is about more than clinical outcomes. It is about how people are treated, whether they feel listened to and respected, whether they receive the right care when they need it, and whether they can trust the services on which they depend.

At the heart of quality are people: the individuals and communities we serve, our staff, volunteers and partners. Our ambition is to create a culture where kindness is evident in every interaction, where people feel valued and supported, and where improving quality is everyone's responsibility.

We are proud of our history of quality improvement in NHS Ayrshire & Arran. Our previous strategy, Excellence for Ayrshire, established important foundations in quality management, improvement capability and person-centred care. This strategy builds on those foundations while responding to the changing needs and expectations of our communities.

We recognise the challenges facing health and care services. Changing population needs, increasing complexity, workforce pressures and finite resources require us to think differently about how we organise and deliver care.

We believe that improving quality and creating sustainable services are inseparable ambitions. By reducing avoidable harm, improving access, eliminating unnecessary variation and making better use of our collective resources, we can improve experiences and outcomes while creating services that are sustainable for future generations.

We will embrace innovation, digital technology and new ways of working, ensuring that these developments strengthen relationships, support our workforce and improve the care people receive.

Above all, we will listen, learn and act.

This strategy is our shared commitment to the people of Ayrshire and Arran, and to everyone who contributes to their care.

Kindness will be our foundation. Quality will be our commitment. Continuous improvement will be how we deliver.

We are proud to introduce a Quality Strategy shaped by staff, people who use our services, communities and partners. Their message was clear: kindness, safe and effective care, timely access and services that listen and learn matter every day.
Our values, Safe, Caring and Respectful are not simply words. They should be visible in every experience of care and in how we support one another. We believe every person matters, every experience counts and every improvement makes a difference.

Delivering Caring for Ayrshire offers an opportunity to transform pathways around people; strengthening prevention and community services, integrating care, making better use of digital technology and ensuring access to specialist support when needed. This strategy provides the quality lens for that transformation, ensuring changes improve safety, experience, equity and outcomes while making responsible use of resources.

We will be ambitious about quality, innovation and sustainability. We will listen openly, learn continuously and use evidence to demonstrate the difference our work makes. We particularly acknowledge the leadership of Geraldine Jordan in developing this strategy and thank everyone who contributed to its co-design.

Jennifer Wilson, Executive Nurse Director
Geraldine Jordan, Director of Clinical and Care Governance

Our vision for quality
Kindness at our heart. Quality in everything we do.

Our promise
Every person matters. Every experience counts. Every improvement makes a difference.

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1. Our vision for quality

Everyone in Ayrshire and Arran experiences safe, caring and respectful services that improve health, deliver better outcomes and make a positive difference to people's lives.

We want quality to be experienced consistently, regardless of where people live, their circumstances or which part of our health and care system they access.

Our commitment extends beyond responding to illness. We will work with communities and partners to improve health and wellbeing, prevent avoidable illness and reduce inequalities.
We recognise that the quality of care people receive is closely connected to the experiences of those providing it. Supporting our people, strengthening leadership and creating positive working environments are therefore fundamental to achieving our ambitions.

1.1 Our values and corporate objectives

Our values are Safe, Caring and Respectful. We will demonstrate Safe through reliable evidence-based care and learning; Caring through kindness, compassion and support; and Respectful through dignity, inclusion, listening and shared decisions.

The Quality Strategy contributes directly to NHS Ayrshire & Arran's four corporate objectives:

Better Health
Prevention, reducing inequalities, improving population health and working with communities.

Better Care
Safe, effective, timely, equitable and compassionate care shaped around what matters to people.

Better Workplace
Kind, inclusive leadership, supported staff, psychological safety and improvement capability.

Better Value
Better outcomes and experiences through innovation, reduced waste and duplication, and sustainable use of resources.

1.2 Delivering Caring for Ayrshire

Delivering Caring for Ayrshire is NHS Ayrshire & Arran's long-term transformation programme focused on shifting care closer to home, strengthening community services, and ensuring safe, high-quality, financially sustainable healthcare across Ayrshire.

Delivering Caring for Ayrshire is a key route through which our quality ambitions will be realised.

For each significant service re-design we will ask: Will this improve safety and outcomes? Will people experience timely, kind and coordinated care? Will it reduce or widen inequalities? How will staff be supported? What evidence demonstrates value and sustainability? These questions will inform planning, implementation and evaluation.

1.3 What quality means to us

Quality is the consistent delivery of safe, effective, timely and compassionate care that is centred on what matters to people. It is achieved through partnership, inclusivity and continuous learning, where every voice is valued, every experience informs improvement and every interaction contributes to better outcomes for individuals, communities and staff.

We believe there is a direct relationship between staff experience, patient experience and organisational performance. When our people feel engaged, respected, supported and able to contribute, quality improves. By investing in our workforce and creating positive workplace cultures, we strengthen our ability to deliver safe, effective and sustainable care.

We will use this shared understanding to guide decisions, shape services and evaluate whether we are making a meaningful difference.

2. A strategy shaped by people

Our strategy has been informed by the voices of people across Ayrshire and Arran. During our accelerated design event in October 2025, more than 80 participants came together to explore what quality means, what needs to change and what our future health and care services could look like.

The associated survey received responses from staff, people with lived experience and other contributors. Several consistent messages emerged.

- Receiving the right care and support at the right time.
- Being treated with kindness, dignity and compassion.
- Being listened to and involved in decisions.
- Receiving safe, effective and reliable care.
- Having services that communicate and work together.
- Being cared for by staff who feel valued and supported.
- Having fair access to services regardless of individual circumstances.
- Seeing services learn, innovate and continually improve.

People also challenged us to reduce bureaucracy, improve digital connectivity, support innovation and make better use of the skills and experience of our workforce. These messages have directly informed our strategic ambitions.

We recognise that our initial engagement is a starting point, not the end of the conversation. We will continue to work with communities, staff, partners and people with lived experience to shape and evaluate our approach.

3. Our five strategic ambitions

3.1 Ambition 1 — Safe, effective and reliable care

We will provide consistently safe, effective and evidence-based care, reducing avoidable harm and unwarranted variation.

Safety and clinical effectiveness are fundamental to quality. We will strengthen our approach to identifying and managing risks, learning from incidents and experiences, and ensuring that evidence informs the care we provide. We will focus on preventing avoidable harm, improving the reliability of essential care processes and strengthening the quality of transitions between services.

- A proactive and learning-focused approach to patient safety.
- Strong clinical and care governance.
- Learning from complaints, adverse events, excellence and patient experience.
- Reducing unwarranted variation and improving clinical outcomes.
- Using digital information and innovation to support safer care.
- Supporting staff to raise concerns and learn within a fair and psychologically safe culture.

What will be different? People will experience safer, more reliable care, with fewer avoidable complications, clearer communication and greater confidence that concerns lead to meaningful learning.

3.2 Ambition 2 — Kind, person-centred, timely and equitable care that respects diversity

We will provide care that is compassionate, accessible and responsive to what matters most to people.

Kindness is not an optional addition to high-quality care. It is fundamental to how we treat people, how we communicate and how we respond to their needs. We will place people at the centre of decisions about their care and ensure that their experiences influence how services are designed and improved. Timely access is also a critical dimension of quality. Delays in assessment, diagnosis, treatment and support can affect people’s outcomes, wellbeing and confidence in our services.

- Embed kindness, dignity and respect in every interaction.

- Improve timely access to assessment, treatment and support.
- Strengthen shared decision-making and personalised care.
- Improve communication, particularly when people are waiting for care.
- Reduce inequalities in access, experience and outcomes.
- Involve patients, families, carers and communities in improvement.
- Ensure that digital developments remain accessible and inclusive.

What will be different? People will feel heard, respected and involved. They will experience more timely care, clearer communication and services that respond to their individual needs.

3.3 Ambition 3 — People and cultures that enable quality

We will create conditions where our people feel valued, supported and empowered to deliver and improve high-quality care.

Our workforce is our greatest strength. The experiences of staff and the experiences of people receiving care are closely connected. Compassionate leadership, supportive teams and positive working environments are essential to sustaining quality.

Through our commitment that People, Safety and Culture Matter, we will foster cultures characterised by kindness, inclusion, belonging, curiosity, learning and accountability. We will actively support wellbeing, equality, psychological safety and speaking up, ensuring colleagues feel respected and able to contribute their ideas.

Education, training and development will enable our people both to deliver excellent care in their roles and to improve the services in which they work.

Developing our people to deliver and improve quality. We will invest in education, training and development so that our people have the knowledge, skills, confidence and support to deliver safe, effective and person-centred care. This includes role-specific competencies, induction, continuing professional development, clinical supervision, reflective practice and lifelong learning. As pathways, roles and technologies evolve through Delivering Caring for Ayrshire, we will anticipate the skills required and support staff to practice safely and confidently.

We will encourage every member of our workforce to see themselves as a contributor to quality, whatever their role or where they work. Alongside professional competence, we will strengthen the capability of our workforce to improve care. Building on the Ayrshire and Arran Improvement Foundation Skills course and national quality improvement education programmes, we will enable staff at different levels to access appropriate learning, coaching and opportunities to apply improvement methods to everyday practice. We will value both the development of skills and evidence that learning leads to better outcomes and experiences.

- Promote compassionate, visible and inclusive leadership.
- Strengthen psychological safety and a fair learning culture.

- Listen to staff and demonstrate how their feedback influences decisions.
- Support staff wellbeing, role-specific education, professional development, clinical supervision and ongoing competence.
- Build improvement skills through our local Improvement Foundation Skills course, national programmes, coaching and practical application.
- Reduce unnecessary administrative work and inefficient processes.
- Recognise, celebrate and spread improvement and innovation.
- Promote cultures of belonging, inclusion and equality.

What will be different? Staff will feel supported, listened to and equipped with the competencies to deliver safe, effective care in their roles. Teams will have the confidence, time and support to improve care and experience leadership that consistently demonstrates our values.

3.4 Ambition 4 — Better health through partnership, prevention and innovation

We will work together to improve health and wellbeing, reduce inequalities and develop more connected, innovative and sustainable models of care.

The quality of health and care cannot be improved by individual services or organisations acting alone. We will strengthen collaboration across NHS Ayrshire & Arran, our Health and Social Care Partnerships, communities and other partners. We will increasingly focus on prevention, early intervention, supported self-management and providing care closer to home where appropriate. Innovation and digital transformation will be central to achieving this ambition.

- Work with communities to understand and respond to population health needs.
- Strengthen integrated and coordinated pathways.
- Support prevention, early intervention and self-management.
- Improve the sharing and use of information across services.
- Embrace digital innovation that improves access, safety and experience.
- Explore new models of care and support evidence-based innovation.
- Involve staff and people using services in designing and evaluating change.

What will be different? People will experience more joined-up care, earlier support and services that are easier to navigate. Innovation will improve care rather than introduce unnecessary complexity.

3.5 Ambition 5 — Improving quality, value and sustainability

We will embed a culture of continuous improvement that delivers better outcomes, better experiences and the best possible value from our collective resources.

Delivering high-quality care and maintaining sustainable services go hand in hand; each strengthens and depends upon the other. We will build on our established commitment to quality improvement, strengthening how we plan, measure, assure and improve quality across the organisation. We will focus on eliminating waste, reducing duplication,

addressing unwarranted variation and redesigning services around what matters most to people.

- Embed quality improvement in everyday practice.
- Use data and evidence to understand, improve and sustain performance.
- Support teams to test, evaluate and spread effective improvements.
- Measure what matters by integrating quality, experience, workforce and resource outcomes.
- Promote sustainable, high-value care by reducing harm and low-value activity.

What will be different? Our services will become more reliable, productive and sustainable, with evidence that improvement is delivering meaningful benefits for people and communities.

We will ensure that the pursuit of efficiency never compromises our commitment to safe, effective and compassionate care.

4. The foundations that will enable our ambitions

Compassionate leadership and culture
We will establish clear expectations for leadership at every level, creating an environment where kindness, openness, accountability and continuous learning are evident in how we work.

Digital transformation and innovation
We will use digital technology, data and innovation to improve safety, access, experience and productivity. Our focus will be on solving problems that matter to people, supporting staff and releasing time for care. Digital innovation will be evaluated for its impact on outcomes, accessibility, equity and value.

Quality management and improvement
We will strengthen an integrated quality management approach that brings together quality planning, quality control and quality improvement. Clinical governance and quality assurance will provide oversight and confidence in how these functions operate, from frontline teams through to Board-level scrutiny.

Developing our people to deliver and improve quality
We will make education and development a core enabler of quality: ensuring staff maintain the professional and role-specific knowledge and competencies needed for safe care, while growing improvement capability across our organisation. Local and national improvement education, including our Ayrshire and Arran Improvement Foundation Skills course, will be complemented by supervision, coaching, supported application and opportunities to share learning. This commitment supports our Better Workplace and Better Care objectives and aligns with the education, training and continuous improvement expectations within Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) Clinical Governance Standards.

Partnership and co-design
We will work with patients, families, communities, staff and partners to design, deliver and evaluate improvements. We will move beyond consultation towards meaningful participation, ensuring that people's experiences influence decisions.

Our Quality Management System

- **Quality planning** — We understand population needs, listen to people and staff, review evidence and identify what good care should look like. We design services and pathways, including those developed through Delivering Caring for Ayrshire, with clear quality aims, standards, measures and safeguards from the outset.
- **Quality control** — We use timely quantitative and qualitative information to understand whether care is consistently meeting agreed standards, recognise variation and emerging risks, and act promptly to maintain or restore reliable quality. Teams closest to care are supported to own their measures and take corrective action.
- **Quality improvement** — We use systematic improvement methods to understand problems, work with people and staff, test and evaluate changes, and implement and sustain approaches that demonstrably improve outcomes, experience, equity and value.

This approach is informed by Healthcare Improvement Scotland's Quality Management System and Clinical Governance Standards. The standards provide a reference point for testing the effectiveness of our arrangements for leadership, clinical safety, effectiveness, staff development, involvement and use of information; they are not a separate set of strategic ambitions. Leadership, culture, relationships and co-design enable the system to work well.

5. How we will know we are making a difference

We will establish a clear and proportionate framework for measuring the impact of this strategy. Our measures will reflect the outcomes that matter to people, not simply the activities undertaken.

Area	We will seek to understand
Safety and effectiveness	Are we reducing avoidable harm and improving clinical outcomes?
Access, experience and equity	Are people receiving timely, compassionate and equitable care?
People and culture	Do staff feel valued, supported, listened to and able to improve care?
Partnership and prevention	Are we improving co-ordination, prevention and population health outcomes?
Value and sustainability	Are we achieving better outcomes and experiences through effective use of resources?

We will develop a balanced set of indicators with clear baselines, agreed improvement trajectories and accountable leaders. We will combine quantitative data with patient and staff experiences, recognising that neither tells the complete story alone.

Our delivery measures will include assurance that staff can access and maintain role-relevant training, supervision and competencies, alongside participation in local and national improvement education. We will evaluate whether development translates into confident practice, improvement activity and demonstrable changes in care—not simply count courses completed.

The Board will receive integrated assurance about quality, performance, risks, learning and improvement. We will also evaluate whether our interventions are producing unintended consequences, including effects on equity, staff wellbeing or patient experience.

6. From strategy to action

This strategy will be supported by a delivery and measurement framework that translates our ambitions into meaningful action. We propose a phased approach.

Establishing our foundations
Confirm our strategic priorities, strengthen our quality management arrangements, agree measures and baselines, review access to role-specific education and supervision, and establish a proportionate approach to developing and applying improvement skills across services.

Embedding and accelerating improvement
Support services and teams to deliver priority improvements, strengthen leadership and improvement capability, and evaluate innovation and digital transformation.

Sustaining and spreading what works
Use evidence and learning to spread successful approaches, address variation and demonstrate sustained improvements in outcomes, experience and value.
Implementation will be aligned with our wider organisational priorities, transformation programmes and partnership arrangements. Each priority will require clear executive accountability, measurable outcomes, realistic delivery plans and appropriate resources.

7. Our shared responsibilities

- Our Board will set direction, oversee performance, scrutinise risk and ensure that quality remains central to strategic and resource decisions.
- Our executive leaders will create the conditions for improvement, align priorities and ensure that decisions consider quality, experience, workforce and sustainability together.

- Our managers and clinical leaders will support teams, promote compassionate leadership and use evidence to improve care.
- Our staff and volunteers will contribute their expertise, ideas and experiences to improving quality.
- Our patients, families, communities and partners will help shape services, identify priorities and evaluate whether change is making a difference.

8. What will be different because of this strategy?

Our success will not be judged by the publication of a strategy or the number of improvement projects undertaken. It will be judged by what people experience.

We want people across Ayrshire and Arran to tell us:

"I am treated with kindness and respect."
"I receive safe, effective care when I need it."
"I am listened to and involved in decisions about my care."
"Services work together and understand what matters to me."

We want our staff to tell us:

"I feel valued, supported and able to speak up."
"I have the opportunity to improve the care we provide."
"Our leaders demonstrate kindness and act on what matters."

And we want our communities and partners to see an organisation that learns, innovates, improves outcomes and uses its resources responsibly.

Our commitment
Quality is a continuing commitment to the people and communities we serve and to those who dedicate their working lives to caring for them.

We will be ambitious about the improvements we seek, compassionate in how we lead, open about where we need to do better and determined to create sustainable services for the future.

Kindness at our heart. Quality in everything we do.

Together, we will make quality everyone's responsibility and improvement part of everything we do.

9. Governance

Our quality management approach will align with the principles of the Scottish Government's Blueprint for Good Governance (second edition). The Board will seek

integrated assurance about clinical outcomes, safety, access, experience, workforce, inequalities, productivity and financial value.

The implementation plan will identify a small number of measurable priorities, baseline data, accountable sponsors and review points. Decisions about digital technology and innovation will be evaluated for accessibility, staff burden, safety, benefit realisation and long-term affordability.

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Appendix 1: National policy alignment and implications

This appendix makes explicit how the Quality Strategy supports the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2026–2031 and the three connected reform products. It is a strategic alignment, not a claim that national commitments are locally funded, implemented or achieved.

The national vision

The national health and social care vision is for a Scotland where people live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives. It has four interdependent dimensions: prevention, access, quality and person-led care. Our strategy will use these as a cross-cutting test of every ambition, alongside kindness, equity and sustainability.

Programme for Government 2026–2031

The Programme for Government places emphasis on high-quality, sustainable public services; reducing waiting times; easier access to primary care; more care in communities and homes; integrated pathways and improved hospital flow; prevention; digital services; and efficient public services. For NHS Ayrshire & Arran, this means that timely access and transitions, coordinated community-first pathways, staff-enabled digital innovation and demonstrated value must be central quality outcomes. The Programme also proposes significant structural NHS reform; the strategy should remain adaptable and avoid assumptions about future organisational boundaries.

NHS Scotland Operational Improvement Plan (2025)

The Operational Improvement Plan identifies four priorities: improving access to treatment; shifting the balance of care; improving access through digital and technological innovation; and prevention. The Quality Strategy will make these tangible through pathway-level access and experience measures, reducing unnecessary hospital dependence, assessing digital inclusion, and measuring prevention and early intervention where the Board can influence outcomes.

Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework (2025)

The Service Renewal Framework establishes five principles: prevention across the continuum of care; care designed around people; more care in communities; planning for populations rather than organisational boundaries; and digital transformation. These principles should be applied to service redesign, investment decisions, partnership arrangements and quality impact assessment. We will test proposed changes against quality, access, equity, workforce experience, value and sustainability, including unintended consequences.

Scotland's Population Health Framework 2025–2035

The Population Health Framework sets out four overlapping drivers: social and economic factors; places and communities; enabling healthy living; and equitable health and care, supported by a fifth, overarching prevention-focused system driver. Our Quality Strategy will connect quality to population need and health inequalities, prioritise prevention and early intervention, and use community partnership and equity-focused measures. It will recognise that health outcomes depend on wider determinants beyond the NHS's direct control.

Alignment of the five quality ambitions

Quality Amibition	National Alignment	Local Delivery and Assurance Implication
1. Safe, effective and reliable care	PfG: high-quality public *services; SRF: quality and people-led care*	Safety, clinical outcomes, unwarranted variation, learning and reliable care transitions.
2. Kind, person-centred, timely and equitable care	OIP: access; SRF: people principle; PfG: waits and access	Waiting times, communication during waits, person-reported experience, equity and transitions.
3. People and cultures that enable quality	PfG: workforce shaping renewal; SRF: supported system leadership	Compassionate leadership, staff voice, psychological safety and time released for care.
4. Better health through partnership, prevention and innovation	PHF: four drivers and prevention-focused system; SRF: community, population and digital; OIP: prevention	Population health priorities, joined-up pathways, digital inclusion and co-designed community services.
5. Improving quality, value and sustainability	PfG: sustainable public services; SRF: efficiency and sustainability; OIP: service improvement	Integrated quality-and-value scorecard; productivity and waste reduction with safety and equity safeguards.