NHS
Health Research Authority

Boosting research that improves health and grows the economy

Our strategy
2025-28

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Foreword

Matt Westmore, Chief Executive
Neelam Patel, Chair

We are at a pivotal moment for health and social care research in the UK. The government has made clear its ambition to make the UK the best place in the world for medical research.

The Prime Minister's recent commitment to 'turbocharge' clinical trials, backed by major investment in digital infrastructure, signals a bold new chapter for our sector. This is part of a broader mission to deliver an NHS fit for the future, economic growth, address inequalities, improve patient care and reshape our public services for the future.

The Health Research Authority (HRA) was created to transform the regulation and governance of the health and social care research in the UK. We do this through the services we run - providing fast, trustworthy approvals and assurances - and by connecting the end-to-end research system so that studies can be planned, set up, delivered, and completed more efficiently and effectively.

Over the next three years, we will turbocharge this work. We will modernise our digital services to support a world-leading research environment, aligned with the government's vision for smarter, more productive public services, as we make it easier for researchers and the NHS to do research. We will continue to set and uphold high standards for research, working with our partners to ensure that research is done well - with and for everyone.

68%

of UK adults would take part in health and social care research if asked

> Although the UK is only a medium-sized country, it has a diverse population, which can be attractive to the global pharmaceutical industry seeking greater diversity in trial participants.
>
> ABPI (2024) The road to recovery for UK industry clinical trials

Trust is the golden thread that runs through all of this. Without trust, the public won't want to take part in research or allow their data to be used. Without trust, patients and clinicians won't want to use the fruits of research. People will not be confident that their charity donations can make a difference. And without trust, companies and researchers won't choose the UK as a place to invest and innovate. Building and maintaining that trust is not optional - it is fundamental.

We know that trust is not yet universal. Some communities - particularly Black people - are significantly less confident about taking part in research than White and Asian people. At the same time, industry stakeholders often view the UK as a challenging place to deliver research, citing inefficiencies and fragmented processes. If we are to lead globally, we must address both trust and system performance head-on.

The UK is well-placed to be the leading life sciences economy in Europe. We have a strong science base, a diverse population and a national health service. With the right systems, standards, and safeguards in place, we can unlock the full potential of data, artificial intelligence (AI), and new technologies to transform care - from hospital to home, analogue to digital, treatment to prevention.

This strategy sets out how the HRA, working with our partners, will contribute to this national mission. It is a call to action - to researchers, to the public, and to our partners across the system. Together, we can create a research environment that is faster, fairer and more impactful. Most importantly, we can change and improve lives through a vibrant UK health and social care research sector.

We are excited by what this strategy represents, and look forward to making this a reality with you.

30% of Black people were worried that they would not be treated well if they took part in a health or social care research study.

This is a significantly higher number than White people (18%) and Asian people (20%).

A survey conducted by YouGov of a representative sample of 5,030 people from across the UK collected through online methods between 27 April 2023 and 16 May 2023.

Public Perceptions of Research Report 2023

"We've got great science, we've got a large and diverse patient population that in terms of medical research and clinical trials has a lot to offer the world."

The Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, 28 February 2025

About us

The Health Research Authority is an independent arm's length body of the Department of Health and Social Care. We were set up in 2011 with a mission to protect NHS patients, your tissue and your data when you are involved in research.

We have up to 300 staff, a community of almost 1,000 people who volunteer their time generously to help us to deliver our services, and members of the public who advise us on our work.

We work in partnership with the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland so that people taking part in research anywhere in the UK have the same experience. Together we work with other public bodies to create a connected regulatory system that is easy for researchers to find out what they need to do and earn approvals that people can trust.

The HRA's Board leads the organisation and makes decisions that affect our work, and the Board has approved this strategy.

To make it easy to do research that people can trust, the HRA:

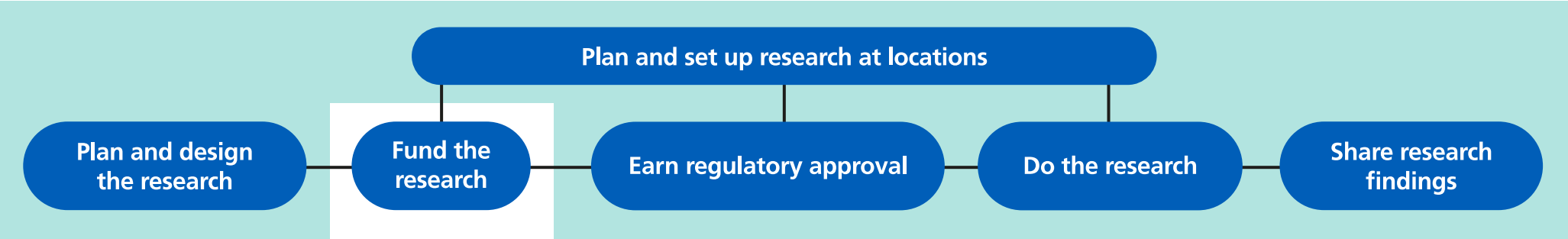
- works with people to understand what you want research to look like and acts on this so that you can trust research
- makes sure that people taking part in research in the UK are treated ethically and fairly, by reviewing and approving health and social care research studies that involve people, their tissue or their data before they can start as part of a UK-wide regulatory service
- champions research transparency, so that you can always see when research is taking place, or the results of that research if it has finished
- works with other organisations across the UK to reduce the burden, cost and time to set up research, meaning that wherever you are, research studies can be set up smoothly and are always subject to the same scrutiny before they start. This includes running digital services and a UK-wide partnership to help plan, approve, set up, manage and complete research in the UK
- is one of the gatekeepers of patient data, making sure that your information is only used in ways that you can trust

How we work in partnership to make it easy to plan, support, manage and complete health and social care research in the UK

We provide and are improving our digital systems to help researchers follow an ideal path to do their research.

We are standardising processes, using our assurances to reduce duplication.

We reduce the burden, time, and cost to do research.



We support researchers to plan and design their research well. This includes involving the people the research is for and about to make sure they can take part.

We help researchers to find out what they need to do to do their research ethically and earn approvals and assurances so that their research can go ahead.

We provide these approvals and assurances.

These assurances are then used by the places where research will take place to set up and start the research.

We review any changes to the research so that people can still trust it.

We provide the Over-Volunteering Prevention System (TOPS).

We encourage and support researchers to register their research.

We encourage and support researchers to publicly report their results and feed back to the people that took part.

- HRA activity with health and care research partners UK-wide
- Scope of the HRA's digital services
- HRA activity

Working in partnership

We can only achieve our objectives by working with people.

At the centre of this are our staff and our community of volunteers and public contributors who together help us provide assurances and approvals, and work to make this process easier to navigate and responsive to what matters to people in research.

We do this with partners in the UK nations - Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, who we work with to provide a single UK approval - and other public bodies including:

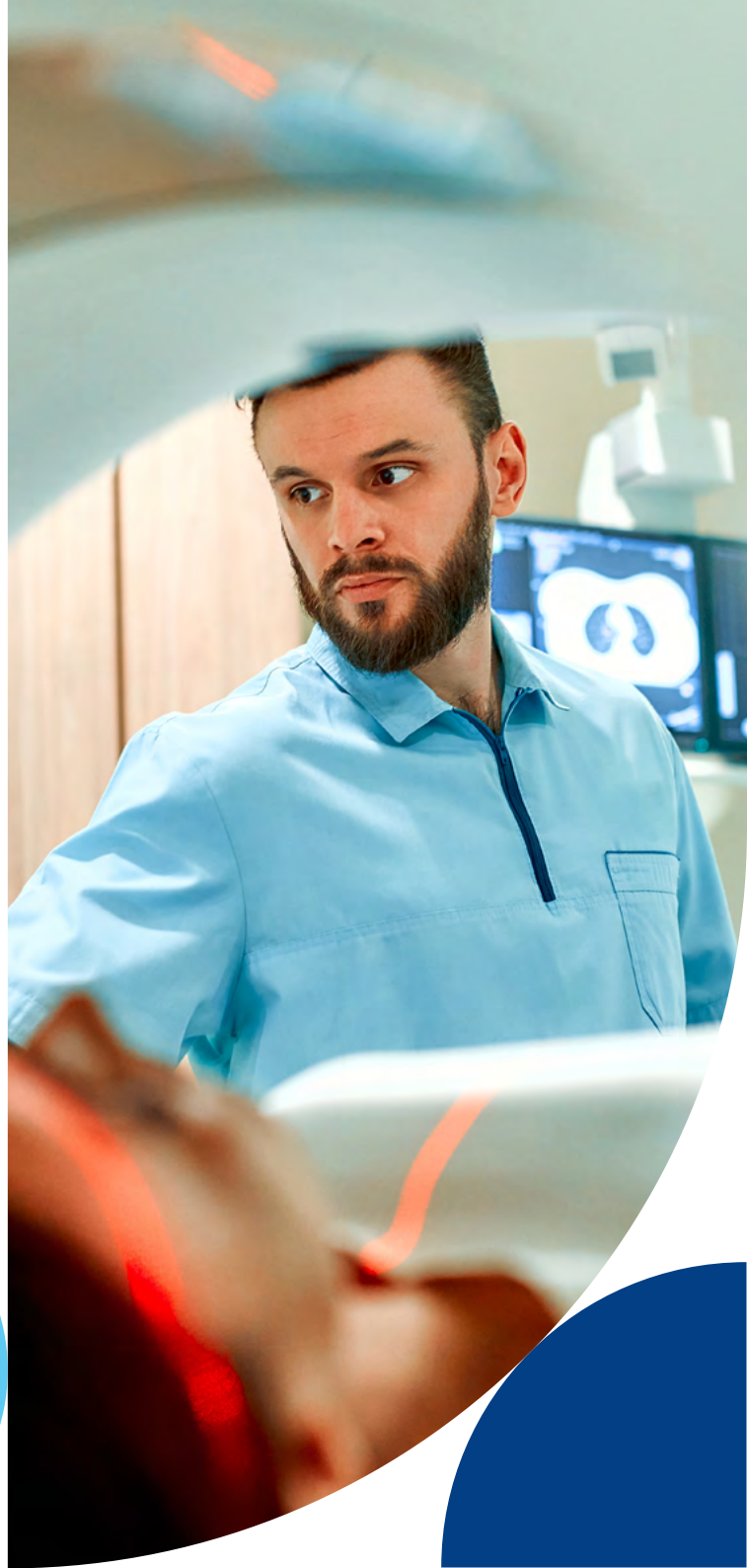
- Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)
- Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA)
- Human Tissue Authority (HTA)
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)
- National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)
- Ministry of Defence (MOD)
- HM Prison and Probation Service
- Administration of Radioactive Substances Advisory Committee (ARSAC)

We work in partnership to provide a joined-up regulatory system that people can trust.

All of our work is informed by close working with the Department of Health and Social Care and our stakeholders, from policymakers, research funders, researchers, research and development managers, to academics, patients and the wider public.

To work together well, we need to be a good partner. One that is open and transparent, listens and is clear about what we will do and where we cannot do something, giving the reason why.

We look forward to working with you to make this strategy a reality.



Our strategy at a glance

Our vision:

High-quality health and social care research today, which improves everyone's health and wellbeing tomorrow

Our mission:

We make it easier to do research that people can trust

Our strategic aim:

A health and social care system that stays fit for the future and helps our economy grow

Our strategic objectives:

- The UK is the easiest place in the world to do excellent health and social care research that people can trust, helping grow the contribution of life sciences to our economy
- Health and social care research is done with and for everyone, meaning that we can all benefit from research findings, helping reduce health inequalities
- The health and social care research system is streamlined, efficient and encourages and supports success, increasing the impact of investment

These support government objectives:

- Turbocharge medical research
- Millions to take part in clinical trials
- Cut administrative costs for business by 25% by the end of the Parliament

We need to be:

Simple

For researchers to find out how to do research with and for everyone and access support to do this well

Fast

To plan, approve, set up, manage and complete research in the UK

Trusted

By everyone who needs us

Effective

Taking action to improve the research system and support our people well

Continued on next page

Key outcomes that you will see:

Simple

- it is easier to do research across different settings in the UK, broadening access to research
- research is more transparent
- more research meaningfully involves the public to inform the way it is done
- there is greater representation in, and access to, research so that people from all backgrounds across the UK can take part in research relevant to them
- researchers can do research in new ways and using new technologies such as AI to improve care in a way that people can trust

Fast

- it is faster and easier to use our new digital services to plan, approve, set up, manage and complete research in the UK
- setting up research is more efficient with simple steps and no duplication
- we provide approvals in time to support the set up of clinical trials in 150 days

Trusted

- people can understand, value and trust us and the way that we work
- our assurances are understood, valued and trusted, not unnecessarily repeated to set up research
- our digital services are secure
- people know when and how to raise questions and concerns with us and we are clear how we will act on them

Effective

- we are playing our part in reducing government running costs
- we are using AI well
- we have safe, scalable and secure digital infrastructure
- our staff have a high level of engagement
- our community of volunteers and public contributors have a good experience with us and can see the difference they make

How we do this:

We give approvals and assurances, working in partnership UK-wide to provide a world-class regulatory system

We are part of modern, digital government

Anyone can understand what we do and why it matters to them and be confident in our decisions

We set shared expectations for how to do research and encourage compliance with these

Our people can be their best

We are efficient and take action to increase productivity

How this strategy helps us achieve our vision and mission

The Health Research Authority is part of the health and social care research sector that is focused on improving everyone's health and wellbeing.

Our vision
is for high-quality health and social care research today, which improves everyone's health and wellbeing tomorrow.

Our mission
in support of this vision is to make it easier to do research that people can trust.

This is important because research findings can improve everybody's care faster if more health and social care research is taking place that a wider diversity of people are confident and able to take part in. Getting this right will improve the health and wellbeing of everybody in the UK and contribute to economic growth.

Our last strategy set ambitious objectives to accelerate the process of doing research and change the way that research is done so that it includes everyone.

This strategy builds on that work, taking the opportunity to align it with government-wide missions to make change happen faster.

The UK government has set out five missions as part of its plan for change. Our work directly supports the missions for health and growth.

At the heart of our work are people. People who could benefit from research findings improving their care, helping them to have a better quality of life and play a more active role in society.

The **UK government's health mission** sets out to address the main underlying drivers of ill-health and tackle persistent inequalities in health to put the NHS on a sustainable footing for the future. Research will be key to doing this well. Research that has been done with and for everyone so that the whole population can benefit from its findings will do this best. That is why our work to ensure that research is done in a way that people can trust and includes everyone, is important to build a health service fit for the future.

The UK is a great place to do high quality health and social care research - with a diverse population, strong science base and a national health service. Attracting more research to happen here will benefit both people in the UK and help grow our economy.

That is why our work to make it easier to do research is important to the **UK government's growth mission** to kickstart the UK's economic growth.

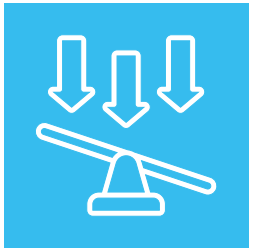
Our strategic aim for the next three years is to support these two missions, working towards a health and social care system that stays fit for the future and helps our economy grow.

Our objectives

We have identified three strategic objectives that our work is focused on helping to achieve over the next three years to support this aim:

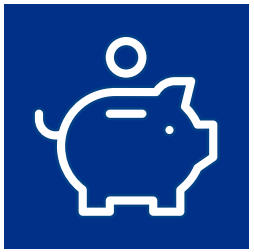
Supporting UK growth in life sciences

The UK is the easiest place in the world to do excellent health and social care research that people can trust, helping grow the contribution of life sciences to our economy.



Helping reduce health inequalities

Health and social care research is done with and for everyone, meaning that we can all benefit from research findings, helping reduce health inequalities.



Increasing the impact of money invested

The health and social care research system is streamlined, efficient and encourages and supports success, increasing the impact of investment.

> We will be a world leader in clinical trials and patient involvement in research. The UK will have a streamlined regulatory environment, fit to support entrepreneurs and scientists.

UK Government (July 2025) Fit for the Future:
10 Year Health Plan for England

Our aim and strategic objectives support UK government objectives

Our aim:

A health and social care system that stays fit for the future and helps our economy grow

Our strategic objectives:

The UK is the easiest place in the world to do excellent health and social care research that people can trust, helping grow the contribution of life sciences to our economy

Health and social care research is done with and for everyone, meaning that we can all benefit from research findings, helping reduce health inequalities

The health and social care research system is streamlined, efficient and encourages and supports success, increasing the impact of investment

These support government objectives:

Turbocharge medical research

- the time it takes to get a clinical trial set up in the UK will be cut to 150 days by March 2026
- create a faster, more efficient, more accessible and more innovative clinical research delivery system – making the UK a world leader in clinical trials (The **UK Clinical Research Delivery mission**)

Millions to take part in clinical trials

- increase in people registered with **Be Part of Research** supporting the government's ambition for **millions to take part in clinical trials under 10 Year Health Plan**
- more people are confident to take part in health and social care research and the **benefits of clinical trials are brought to everyone**
- support public confidence in the **Health Data Research Service**

Cut administrative costs for business by 25% by the end of the Parliament

- meet commitment for government departments to reduce their administrative budgets by 15% by the end of the decade as set out in the **Spring statement 2025**
- support a thriving domestic AI ecosystem, with serious players at multiple layers of the 'AI stack' and widespread use of AI products and services across the economy in line with the **AI opportunities plan**
- be a digital service to be proud of, in line with the vision set out in **A blueprint for modern digital government**

Achieving our objectives

To do this, we know that we need to be a trusted and effective organisation that makes it simple and fast to do research well.

In our strategy we have set out how you will see us work in this way, with measurable outcomes that we will achieve over the next three years.

Outcomes that you will see:

Simple

It is easier to do research across different settings in the UK, broadening access to research:

- there is a 10% increase in the percentage of people who tell us that it is easy to set up studies in the UK, including across NHS and non-NHS settings
- researchers have a positive experience finding out what they need to do and earning the approvals that they need with at least 75% of applicants rating our overall service highly

Research is more transparent with 100% of clinical trials registered and an increase in clinical trials uploading summary of results on a registry.

More research meaningfully involves the public to inform the way it is done shown by an increase in rates of public involvement in applications for review by a Research Ethics Committee.

There is greater representation in, and access to, research so that people from all backgrounds across the UK can take part in research relevant to them. This is shown by an increase in the proportion of researchers who use an Inclusion and Diversity Plan and are more confident to include a diverse group of people in their research.

Researchers can do research in new ways and using new technologies such as AI to improve care in a way that people can trust. We are clear how we support researchers to use new technologies and data to plan and do research, and to research the use of new approaches and technologies in care, in line with the AI opportunities plan.

Outcomes that you will see:

Fast

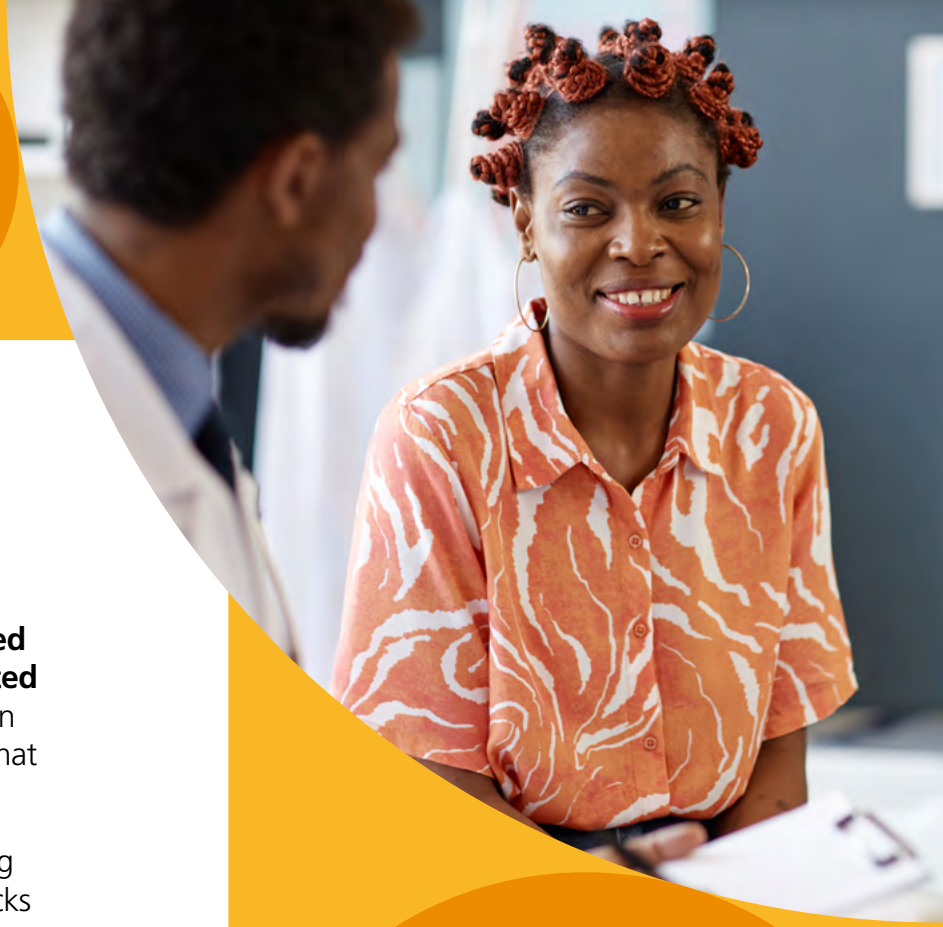
It is faster and easier to use our new digital services to plan, approve, set up, manage and complete research in the UK. We have reduced the burden on users by improving end-to-end flow and replacing manual processes. We will deliver three core platform services by 2027.

Setting up research is more efficient with simple steps and no duplication. The burden, time and cost to do research has been reduced by standardising processes and reducing duplication in the set up of research studies, with a 20% increase in the percentage of people who tell us that the process of study set up is efficient.

We provide approvals in time to support the set up of clinical trials in 150 days:

- 100% of approvals of clinical trials are completed within a maximum of 60 days, with a median timeline below 40 days. This will support the ambitious target for clinical trial set up in the UK to be cut to 150 days and further in the longer term. We will continue to deliver faster timelines where appropriate
- you can get a decision on support for the use of confidential patient information without consent in England and Wales from the Confidentiality Advisory Group within 60 days or where a precedent has been supported within 30 days
- all research applications will receive an HRA and HCRW Approval decision in less than 60 days

Outcomes that you will see:



Trusted

People can understand, value and trust us and the way that we work:

- sentiment analysis shows an increase in awareness and trust in the HRA across all stakeholders that need us
- we meaningfully involve people in the HRA's work with at least 80% telling us that they feel that they had shaped and informed the work they had been involved in
- an increasing diversity of perspectives inform our work. We have set objectives for where we want to increase representation in our work and are working to achieve this

Our assurances are understood, valued and trusted, not unnecessarily repeated to set up research with a 20% reduction in the percentage of people who tell us that there is duplication in study set up.

Our digital services are secure, keeping them available and resilient to cyber attacks and meeting government assurance standards.

People know when and how to raise questions and concerns with us and we are clear how we will act on them, with 100% of complaints completed in 25 days and no more than 5% resulting in a subsequent appeal to the Chief Executive.

Outcomes that you will see:

Effective

We are playing our part in reducing government running costs:

- we play our part in meeting the commitment for government departments to reduce their administrative budgets by 15% by the end of the decade
- we measure and report on the impact of our work on the productivity and efficiency of the health and social care research system
- we partner and collaborate and share services where this will help us deliver our mission and reduce costs

We are using AI well. We are using AI and digital technologies well and finding ways to use them more to improve the way we work and our services in a way that people can trust.

We have safe, scalable and secure digital infrastructure and the internal capability to expand, innovate and support future regulatory change.

Our staff have a high level of engagement. We maintain and grow our high level of staff engagement to 80% and maintain our strive measure at 85%.

Our community of volunteers and public contributors have a good experience with us and can see the difference they make, maintaining satisfaction at or above 80%.

The scale of change that we will make

You will see us transform, change and maintain and continuously improve services across all the areas that are set out in our strategy.

There are four areas where you will see the biggest change. These are where we can make impactful change fastest to support government objectives. These are:

1. **we are part of modern, digital government.** We will build our digital foundations as part of the vision for modern, digital government
2. **we are efficient and take action to increase productivity.** We will embed productivity into everything we do, guiding our decision-making
3. **we give approvals and assurances, working in partnership UK-wide to provide a world-class regulatory system.** We are focused on reducing the burden, time and cost to do research with and for everyone
4. **anyone can understand what we do and why it matters to them and be confident in our decisions.** We will build the profile that we need to achieve our objectives well

The scale of change that we plan to make, including where we plan to change or maintain the way that we work, is indicated by the outcomes that we have set.

We work in partnership as part of the health and social care research system. This means that we will lead some change, but in other areas our activities and the changes that we make will support or align with work that is being led elsewhere.

Our level of focus and ambition is determined by where we can best support our strategic objectives, which align with government objectives, not where we lead, support or align with the wider system.

Over the next three pages we show the areas where we will transform, change or maintain and continuously improve our activities and services. In these areas we show what outcomes you can expect to see.

We have also identified where we will take the lead, support our stakeholders or align with other work already underway.

Transform

the four areas where we will lead and make bold, system-wide change

We will rethink how we work, how we use our expertise and how we organise ourselves to deliver at scale and pace.

You will see us shaping a simpler, faster, more effective and trusted research system.

Lead

- building our digital foundations to be part of modern, digital government
- ensuring that anyone can understand what we do and why it matters to them and be confident in our decisions

Support

- reducing the burden, time and cost to do research with and for everyone to support the government target for the time it takes to get a clinical trial set up in the UK to be cut to 150 days by March 2026
- embedding efficiency and productivity into everything we do, guiding our decision-making

Change

the five areas where you will see us make meaningful and significant improvements

We will redesign processes, update policies and introduce better tools and ways of working.

You will see us working with partners to embed more consistent, effective and user-centred approaches to regulate and approve research and show you the difference we are making.

Lead

- taking a proportionate approach to regulation without reducing standards
- encouraging and facilitating greater research transparency
- making decisions in a way that people can have confidence in

Support

- encouraging greater representation in, and access to, research
- encouraging and facilitating the use of AI and data in research and research into their use in care in a way that people can trust

Maintain and continuously improve

the nine areas where you will see us sustain our activities and services, building and embedding a culture of ongoing, incremental improvement

We will refine existing systems, processes and practices to improve reliability, efficiency and user experience.

You will see us making steady improvements and helping others improve without disrupting essential activities and services or cutting corners.

Lead

- ensuring that our people can be their best
- giving approvals and assurances and helping co-ordinate a UK-wide regulatory system

Support

- encouraging and facilitating researchers to meaningfully involve the people their research is for and about
- encouraging and facilitating new ways to do research with public trust

Align

- encouraging and facilitating public health research
- encouraging and facilitating adult social care research
- encouraging and facilitating sustainability in research
- encouraging and facilitating international collaboration
- demonstrating the attractiveness of the UK as a destination for clinical research

How you will experience the change

Our work over the next three years will make some immediate contributions to the UK's health and growth missions.

We will also make changes that will realise greater contributions in the future. For example, we are building digital foundations that will turbocharge our ability to make it easier to do research that people can trust as they come online. They will help us to standardise the ways that we measure and collect data, meaning that we can better understand the impact that our work is having and use these insights to inform decisions to make the greatest difference going forward.

Making change well is hard and progress will not be constant, so we expect outcomes to fluctuate up and down over the next three years. We will work within defined tolerances, aiming to achieve the outcomes that we have set in three years.

However, the world around us is always changing and what is needed to make it easier to do research that people can trust may change too.

Our focus on outcomes means that we can change the way that we work to achieve them, informed by what works and responding to external changes. This also gives us the freedom and flexibility to take opportunities presented by new technology such as AI, in line with the UK Government's AI Opportunities Plan.

Over the next pages we give more detail on what changes you will see in each of the priority areas we have identified.

We give approvals and assurances, working in partnership UK-wide to provide a world-class regulatory system

To earn people's trust, research projects involving people, their tissue or their data need a number of approvals before they can go ahead. These approvals and assurances are important to set up research at the locations where it will take place and to ensure that the people the research is for and about can be confident to choose to take part.

The HRA manages 64 Research Ethics Committees in England and co-ordinates a UK-wide service that reviews more than 4,000 research projects a year. Working with Health and Care Research Wales we combine this ethics review with a governance and legal review to provide one HRA and HCRW Approval for each research project taking place in England and Wales. This stops legal and governance checks needing to be repeated at each location the research takes place, reducing duplication, speeding up study set up and enabling study locations to focus on the research. We also provide technical assurances on radiation and pharmacy for research studies that need them. Alongside this work we run the Confidentiality Advisory Group and service, which provides advice on the use of confidential patient information without consent where this may be needed for research and non-research purposes. We work hard to ensure that these approvals are fast, predictable and consistent, which we know is important for everyone involved.

Clinical trials of new medicines (clinical trials of investigational medicinal products also known as CTIMPs) need approval from the HRA and Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) before they can go ahead. We work together, in parallel to provide a Combined Review. This helps to reduce the time it takes for a clinical trial to be set up in the UK.

A thorough and robust approvals process is crucial to do research in a way that people can trust, but this needs to be proportionate so that it does not stop valuable research that can improve people's lives from going ahead. We offer an accelerated Proportionate Review where research raises no material ethical issues. We are always working to better understand how we can make the regulatory process more proportionate and agile, without cutting corners, so that we can make it easier to do research that people can trust.

We are focused on continuously reducing the average and maximum time it takes for researchers to earn the approvals that they need for their research to go ahead.

Once research has been approved, it is set up at the locations where it will take place. This can be at anything from 2 to over 300 locations in NHS and wider care settings such as a care home, community hub, prison or people's homes, taking research to where people are. This can take time and reducing the time that this takes is a major focus for the next three years. We are standardising processes, using our trusted assurances to reduce duplication and improving digital systems to help researchers find out what they need to do and follow an ideal path to set up their research study. This will reduce the burden, time and cost to do research, making it easier to do research in a way that means the people it is for and about can take part - and help ensure that research findings can improve care faster.

Our work to provide approvals fast and make it simple to set up research well directly supports the government's ambition to turbocharge medical research.

99%

of applications reviewed by the Confidentiality Advisory Group were given a final outcome within the 60 day target in 2024

3,869

studies were given a final opinion by a UK Research Ethics Committee in 2024 - that's more than **10 studies reviewed every day**

Over the next three years we will:

Make it easier to do research across different settings in the UK, broadening access to research. We will:

- achieve a 10% increase in the percentage of people who tell us that it is easy to set up studies in the UK, including across NHS and non-NHS settings
- ensure that researchers have a positive experience when finding out what they need to do and earning the approvals that they need with at least 75% of applicants rating our overall service highly

Provide approvals in time to support the set up of clinical trials in 150 days. We will:

- provide 100% of approvals of clinical trials within a maximum of 60 days, with a median timeline below 40 days. This will support the ambitious target for clinical trial set up in the UK to be cut to 150 days and further in the longer term. We will continue to deliver faster timelines where appropriate
- ensure that you get a decision on support for the use of confidential patient information without consent in England and Wales from the Confidentiality Advisory Group within 60 days or where a precedent has been supported within 30 days
- ensure that all research applications will receive a HRA and HCRW Approval decision in less than 60 days

Make setting up research more efficient, with simple steps and no duplication. We will:

- reduce the burden, time and cost to do research by standardising processes and reducing duplication in the set up of research studies, with a 20% increase in the percentage of people who tell us that the process of study set up is efficient

Implement new clinical trials legislation and continue to take action to make it more proportionate for researchers to navigate the regulatory process without reducing rigour.

Ensure our processes are aligned with wider work to help public health researchers find out what they need to do and earn these approvals.

Work with others so that social care researchers can find out what they need to do to and access support available to them to earn approvals.

Ensure that our policies and practices support international collaboration with UK researchers, and enable the UK to be a global partner in promoting safe and ethical research.

This supports the government's ambitions to:

- create a faster, more efficient, more accessible and more innovative clinical research delivery system – making the UK a world leader in clinical trials
- reduce the time it takes to get a clinical trial set up in the UK to 150 days by March 2026
- bring the benefits of clinical trials to everyone

We are part of modern, digital government

People need to be able to access information about the HRA, work with us and use our services with confidence in how we operate digitally.

We work with our UK-wide partners to provide digital services that support all researchers to plan approve, set up, manage and complete research in the UK. Our research summaries database gives everybody access to information about research studies reviewed by a Research Ethics Committee in the UK. Improving these services will help achieve the government vision for a modern digital government; supporting easier lives, faster growth, firmer foundations, smarter organisations, and higher productivity and efficiency.

Building the foundations of our new digital services is the priority and focus of our next three years. We are developing new services that will digitise the end-to-end research journey, connecting all of the processes for health and social care research in the UK. The new services will be user-centred, making it faster and easier to start research by streamlining research approvals, reducing inconsistencies and duplication in study set up and delivery, and lowering the burden on NHS research and development departments. They will also improve research transparency by making better research information public.

We will also grow our digital maturity so that we can build our new digital services and operate effectively as a secure digital organisation. This will include changing our ways of working so that we can use new technology, including artificial intelligence (AI), well.

Improving our digital services will enhance the UK's competitiveness in the global life sciences market

The new system will contribute to decreasing study set up times from 250 to 150 days and consistently meet statutory 60 day approval limits. This investment is projected to return £1.40 to the economy for every £1 spent, contributing to an additional £3 billion, creating 26,000 new jobs (including 5,000 in the NHS), and reducing sick days by 1.1 million annually through improved patient outcomes.

Our partners

We are working together with partners to make it easier for researchers to find out what they need to do and follow an ideal path to develop, plan, support, manage and complete their health and social care research.

- Administration of Radioactive Substances Advisory Committee (ARSAC)
- Chief Scientist Office (Scotland)
- Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)
- Health and Care Research Wales
- HM Prison and Probation Service
- Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)
- Ministry of Defence
- National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)
- Public Health Agency (Northern Ireland)

Over the next three years we will:

Make it faster and easier to use our new digital services to plan, approve, set up, manage and complete research in the UK. We will reduce the burden on users by improving end-to-end flow and replacing manual processes. We will deliver three core platform services by 2027.

Ensure that our digital services are secure. We will maintain and increase the security of our digital services, keeping them available and resilient to cyber attacks and meeting government assurance standards.

Develop safe, scalable and secure digital infrastructure. We will build safe, scalable and secure digital infrastructure and the internal capability to expand, innovate and support future regulatory change.

Use AI well. We will use AI and digital technologies well and find ways to use them more to improve the way we work and our services in a way that people can trust.

This supports the government's ambitions to:

- deliver its blueprint for modern, digital government
- create a faster, more efficient, more accessible and more innovative clinical research delivery system – making the UK a world leader in clinical trials
- reduce the time it takes to get a clinical trial set up in the UK to 150 days by March 2026
- bring the benefits of clinical trials to everyone
- cut administrative costs for business by 25% by the end of the Parliament
- meet the commitment for government departments to reduce their administrative budgets by 15% by the end of the decade
- support a thriving domestic AI ecosystem, in line with the UK Government's **AI Opportunities Plan**

Anyone can understand what we do and why it matters to them and be confident in our decisions

To be effective, the HRA must ensure that the people that need us can find us, understand and trust us, and get the information that they need when they need it.

The people that may need us include those that use our assurances, such as people deciding whether to take part in a research study, sites that are setting up research and those with questions when things go wrong. It also includes those that use our services to earn these assurances, such as researchers who need to find out what to do and earn the approvals that they need for their study to go ahead. And it includes decision-makers who want to know that the system is working well or where improvements can be made. They may use our data and insights to inform their decisions or support their engagement with others, for example showing the attractiveness of the UK to do health and social care research.

HRA Community Committee

Our Community Committee increases the diversity of perspectives that inform our Board's decision-making. It is made up of volunteers who sit on our Research Ethics Committees and the Confidentiality Advisory Group and members of the public. The committee is a formal part of our governance, advising the HRA Board as we take forward our strategy.

We know that not everybody has trust and confidence in research and feels able to participate. We also know that most people would feel more confident to take part in research once they know about Research Ethics Committees, so we have a role to play in making more people confident to take part in research. We also know that there is unnecessary duplication in the set up of research studies in the UK, with checks repeated when the study has the necessary approvals and assurances to go ahead – increasing awareness and trust in these approvals and assurances can help address this.

Our focus over the next three years will be to build and strengthen the profile that we need to achieve our objectives well. Getting this right will make it easier for researchers to find out what they need to do and earn approvals. It will reduce duplication because our approvals and assurances will be recognised and trusted. It will also support efforts to increase people's confidence to take part in research because they will be able to find out about the checks and balances in place to act on the issues that matter to them in research.

This will include building on work that we are already doing to better understand who needs us, what they need from us and why they need it. We are using these insights to talk about what we do and why it matters in a way that is accessible and meaningful to those that need us.

We also need to earn and maintain trust in us and the decisions that we make. We are working to ensure that we, our committees and the people and perspectives that inform our work, are as diverse as possible, so that people can be confident that the issues that matter to them have been considered.

Over the next three years we will:

Ensure that people can understand, value and trust us and the way that we work. We will:

- better understand who needs us, what they need from us and why they need it to inform how we work so that sentiment analysis will show an increase in awareness and trust in the HRA across all stakeholders that need us
- meaningfully involve people in the HRA's work with at least 80% telling us that they feel that they had shaped and informed the work they had been involved in
- make sure that an increasing diversity of perspectives inform our work. We will set objectives for where we want to increase representation in our work and work to achieve this

Ensure that our assurances are understood, valued and trusted, not unnecessarily repeated to set up research with a 20% reduction in the percentage of people who tell us that there is duplication in study set up.

Ensure that people know when and how to raise questions and concerns with us and we are clear how we will act on them, with 100% of complaints completed in 25 days and no more than 5% resulting in a subsequent appeal to the Chief Executive.

Provide information and resources to support wider work to demonstrate the attractiveness of the UK.

After being informed about Research Ethics Committees, most of the UK public would feel **more confident about taking part in a health and social care research study (69%)** and **more confident about the research findings (68%)**

A survey conducted by YouGov of a representative sample of 5,030 people from across the UK collected through online methods between 27 April 2023 and 16 May 2023.

Public Perceptions of Research Report 2023

This supports the government's ambitions to:

- create a faster, more efficient, more accessible and more innovative clinical research delivery system - making the UK a world leader in clinical trials
- reduce the time it takes to get a clinical trial set up in the UK to 150 days by March 2026
- bring the benefits of clinical trials to everyone
- support public confidence in the **Health Data Research Service**
- increase in people registered with **Be Part of Research** supporting the government's ambition for **millions to take part in clinical trials under 10 Year Health Plan**

We set shared expectations for how to do research and encourage compliance with these

At the heart of our work are people. People who could benefit from research findings improving their care, helping them to have a better quality of life and play a more active role in society.

The government's health mission sets out to address the main underlying drivers of ill-health and tackle persistent inequalities in health to put the NHS on a sustainable footing for the future. Research will be key to doing this well. Research that has been done with and for everyone so that the whole population can benefit from its findings will do this best.

We work with people to understand the issues that matter to them in research so that it can take place with and for everyone. Given the right opportunities, many people would choose to take part in research. We know that there are three things important to them in doing so:

- **trust** – people trust the research and the research team
- **purpose** – people feel the purpose is worthwhile
- **possibility** – people are able and confident to take part

We are working with people and the wider research system to set shared expectations for how to design and conduct research in a way that meets these three characteristics – in a people-centred way that puts people first. We support researchers to find out what these expectations are and how to meet them. And we support Research Ethics Committees to assess how well research applications meet these expectations.

New approaches to research, using new technologies such as AI to do research and researching the use of new approaches and technologies in care, can raise new questions and issues about how to do research safely and ethically. They can also raise existing issues in new ways. We work with people, Research Ethics Committees and the wider research system to better understand how to do new types of research here in the UK in a way that people can trust.

People are more confident in research findings if the research process and its outcomes are made public, such as by registering the research on a public register before it starts (65%) and making the results publicly available as soon as possible afterwards (65%).

A survey conducted by YouGov of a representative sample of 5,030 people from across the UK collected through online methods between 27 April 2023 and 16 May 2023.

Public Perceptions of Research Report 2023

Over the next three years we will:

Make research more transparent with 100% registration of clinical trials and an increase in clinical trials uploading summary of results on a registry.

Ensure that more research meaningfully involves the public to inform the way it is done shown by an increase in rates of public involvement in applications for review by a Research Ethics Committee.

Support greater representation in, and access to, research so that people from all backgrounds across the UK can take part in research relevant to them. This will be shown by an increase in the proportion of researchers who use an Inclusion and Diversity Plan and are more confident to include a diverse group of people in their research.

Support researchers to do research in new ways and using new technologies such as AI to improve care in a way that people can trust. We will be clear how we support researchers to use new technologies and data to plan and do research, and to research the use of new approaches and technologies in care, in line with the **AI Opportunities Plan.**

Work in partnership to support new ways to do research such as working alongside the Health Data Research Service and make sure that regulation keeps up with research so you can trust our decisions.

Ensure our policy and guidance are aligned with action to promote and support sustainability in research.

The Shared Commitment to Public Involvement in health and social care research

Together with NIHR we established the Shared Commitment, which brings together health and social care research organisations that are committed to involving the public in their work and so increasing meaningful and impactful public involvement in health and social care research. Through this we can better understand the barriers to public involvement and make change happen.

This supports the government's ambitions to:

- create a faster, more efficient, more accessible and more innovative clinical research delivery system – making the UK a world leader in clinical trials
- reduce the time it takes to get a clinical trial set up in the UK to 150 days by March 2026
- bring the benefits of clinical trials to everyone
- support public confidence in the Health Data Research Service
- increase in people registered with Be Part of Research supporting the government's ambition for millions to take part in clinical trials under 10 Year Health Plan

Nearly all adults (88%) believe it's important for health and social care research studies to include a diverse mix of participants, even if it means higher costs (70%) or longer durations (74%).

A survey conducted by YouGov of a representative sample of 5,030 people from across the UK collected through online methods between 27 April 2023 and 16 May 2023.

Public Perceptions of Research Report 2023

Most UK adults are more likely to participate in a study where members of the public ensure that **participant information is easily understood (55%)** and **research findings are accessible (54%).**

A survey conducted by YouGov of a representative sample of 5,030 people from across the UK collected through online methods between 27 April 2023 and 16 May 2023.

Public Perceptions of Research Report 2023

Our people can be their best

The HRA has up to 300 staff and almost 1,000 volunteers and public contributors. They all play an important role in ensuring that the HRA can make it easier to do research that people can trust.

Our people have high levels of satisfaction and engagement, but we cannot be complacent.

We are transforming the way that we work over the next three years, and our people will make this a success. Our focus over the next three years is to support them well though this change so that they can do this.

We want our people to be engaged, treated with fairness and equity so that they can be confident to be themselves, supported to volunteer and work with us well and develop their skills with us. We want them to feel a sense of reward and recognition for what we achieve together and be able to see the difference that they are making.

More than

75,000 hours

of time volunteered by Research Ethics Committee members in England in 2024

Our staff engagement is at

74%

This measures how our staff feel working in the HRA – how proud they are to do so, whether they would recommend working here and their motivation in their role.

HRA annual staff survey 2025

Over the next three years we will:

Ensure that our staff have a high level of engagement, maintaining and growing our high level of staff engagement to 80% and maintain our strive measure at 85%.

Ensure that our community of volunteers and public contributors have a good experience with us and can see the difference they make, maintaining satisfaction at or above 80%.

This supports the government's ambitions to:

- create a faster, more efficient, more accessible and more innovative clinical research delivery system - making the UK a world leader in clinical trials
- reduce the time it takes to get a clinical trial set up in the UK to 150 days by March 2026
- bring the benefits of clinical trials to everyone
- deliver its blueprint for a modern, digital government
- cut administrative costs for business by 25% by the end of the Parliament
- meet commitment for government departments to reduce their administrative budgets by 15% by the end of the decade

We are efficient and take action to increase productivity

We are a public body and work hard to make the best use of public funds. We work closely with other organisations where we can align approaches or share services.

We are often approached to partner or collaborate on wider initiatives and seek to do so where this can help us make it easier to do research that people can trust.

Over the next three years we will develop better ways to measure our own efficiency and productivity. We will also develop ways to measure the impact that our work has on the efficiency and productivity of the wider health and social care research system and public finances.

We will use this information to make better decisions going forward, taking these three perspectives into account when we decide where we direct our limited resources. This might include seeking partnerships, collaborations or aligning and sharing services to deliver our mission.

Every penny invested in research by the public sector, private companies or medical research charities will help to change people's lives. We have a role to play in ensuring that these investments can have the biggest impact possible.

NIHR research returns over **£13** to the UK economy for every **£1** invested by the taxpayer.

National Institute for Health and Care Research

On average, every **£1** of government investment in research and development delivers **£7** of economic benefits in the long term.

Spending Review 2025 **'Evidence on the balance and effectiveness of research and innovation spending'**, written evidence submitted by UK Research and Innovation to the Science and Technology Select Committee, published November 2018. **'The relationship between public and private R&D funding'**, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, March 2020.

Over the next three years we will:

Play our part in reducing government running costs. We will:

- play our part in meeting the commitment for government departments to reduce their administrative budgets by 15% by the end of the decade
- measure and report on the impact of our work on the productivity and efficiency of the health and social care research system
- partner and collaborate and share services where this will help us deliver our mission and reduce costs

This supports the government's ambitions to:

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Get in touch

If you have any questions about our strategy please email **communications@hra.nhs.uk**

Keep updated

You can keep up to date with our latest news and announcements by signing up for our monthly **HRA Latest** newsletter.