



Strengthening the role of the ambulance sector in reducing health inequalities

**National
consensus
statement and
next steps**

June 2023





Consensus statement partners:

- **Association of Ambulance Chief Executives (AACE)**
- **NHS England (NHSE)**
- **Office for Health Improvement & Disparities (OHID)**
- **College of Paramedics (CoP)**
- **NHSE Workforce, Training and Education (NHSE-WTE)**
formerly Health Education England
- **NHS Providers (NHSP)**
- **NHS Confederation (NHSC)**

With thanks also to those who have provided their valuable expert opinion and lived experience perspective to this work:

- **Ambulance Trust Chairs and Chief Executives**
- **National Ambulance Commissioners Network (NACN)**
- **AACE Director groups**
- **NHS England’s Strategic Coproduction Group**

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1. Overview

Every day, ambulance services take thousands of calls from the public and at the point of contact the priority is undoubtedly the provision of high-quality clinical care. However, we also see first-hand that in our least well-off neighbourhoods, people are dying years earlier than they should.

This is because in many of our communities there are people living in these neighbourhoods who struggle to access health services. When they do, their experience of these services and the outcomes of the care that they receive are poorer than those of people who live in more affluent neighbourhoods.

In addition, some of the key building blocks for good mental and physical health, such as quality housing, decent and fair income are harder to access or missing.

When people have insecure or irregular work, for example, it is harder to afford decent housing. Living in cold, damp homes can result in respiratory problems and other health issues and constant worrying can also lead to chronic stress, anxiety and depression. Ambulance services are often

the first to respond to these health issues, but we also have a real opportunity to make a difference to their causes.

The Association of Ambulance Chief Executives (AACE), working on behalf of the UK's NHS ambulance services, has highlighted an opportunity to consider the role of everyone working in the sector to reduce inequalities and contribute to increasing the number of years that people in our communities are living in good health.

This is not something we can do on our own but with our system partners we can support improvements across communities and identify collective opportunities for targeted intervention and service provision for specific groups that are particularly vulnerable.

AACE has worked with partners to set out a shared commitment to strengthening the role that everyone working in the ambulance sector can play in reducing the inequalities that exist for people to access the building blocks of good health.

Our collective aim is to enable ambulance services to; contribute to improving population outcomes, positively impact on the social determinants of health, reduce demands placed on the sector and support equitable healthcare access, excellent experience and optimal outcomes for all. We will ensure that this is sustainable by developing collaborative partnerships and identifying the resources needed to support trusts to work collaboratively with their Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) and other key partners.



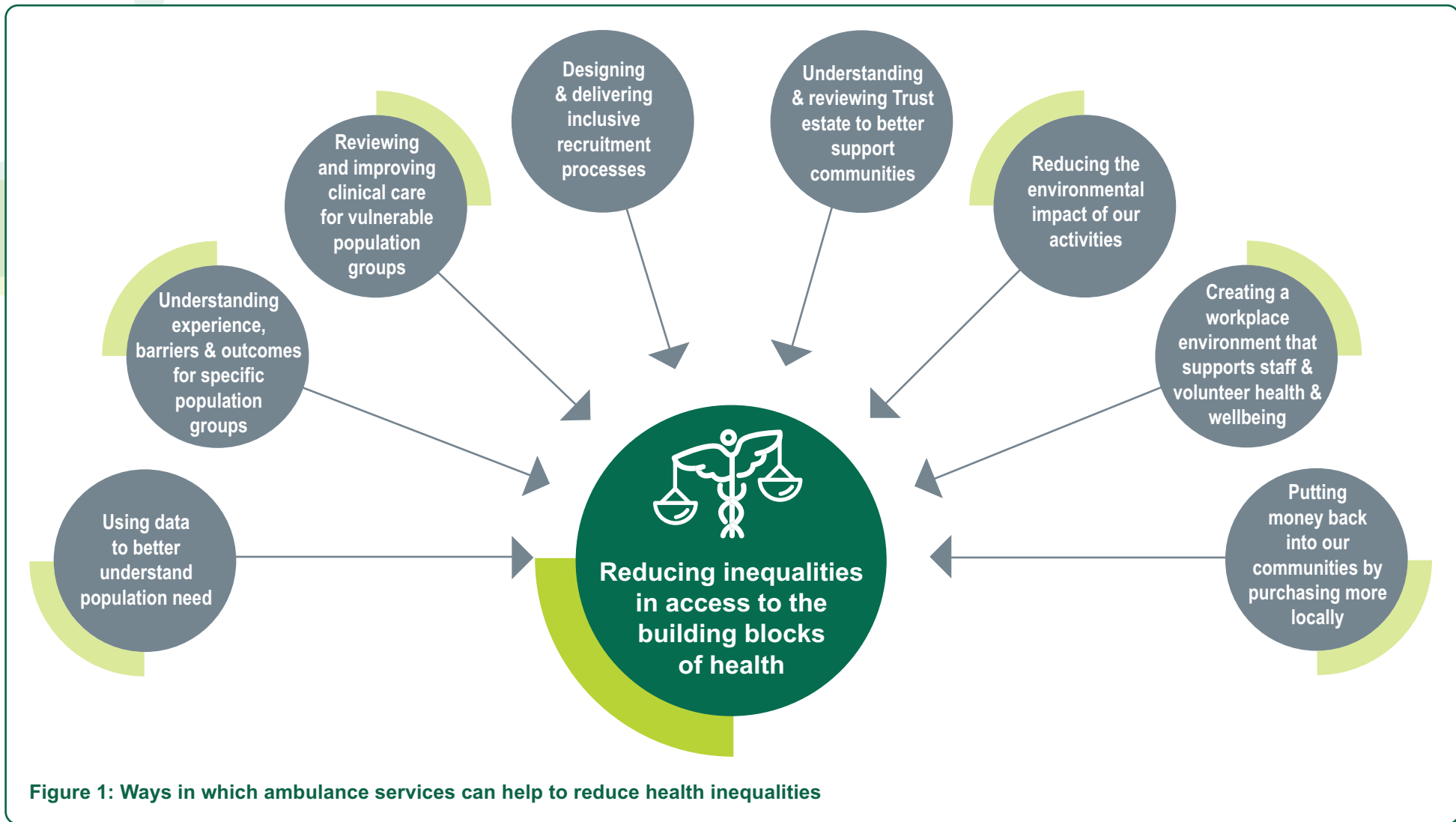


Figure 1: Ways in which ambulance services can help to reduce health inequalities

2. The need for a collaborative approach

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and exacerbated existing inequalities both in health and wider society and identified the need for urgent action at every level. As such, the Health and Care Act 2022 requires NHS organisations to consider the effects of their decision making in relation not only to population health and wellbeing but the quality of health services for all individuals as well as the sustainable use of NHS resources. This is known as the ‘triple aim duty’ and includes specific reference to the impact of decision making on inequalities.

The purpose of developing this national consensus is to build upon what is already known about the role of the ambulance sector in reducing healthcare inequalities and:

- Determine the actions that ambulance trusts have direct responsibility for in reducing healthcare inequalities
- Articulate the role of other partners and the broader collaborative working needed to support effective action within ambulance trusts for impact at a place, ICS and regional level. This will include the ambulance sector role as a key partner in Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs) supporting local priorities and targeting specific work with different population groups including those populations prioritised within the Core20PLUS5 approaches for adults and children and young people
- Strengthen the ability of ambulance trusts to act as anchor organisations and support the health and wellbeing of their communities by intentionally and positively contributing to the social, economic and environmental conditions that shape good health
- Address barriers to implementing public health approaches within the sector
- Agree the actions needed to move the agenda forward ensuring that these are aligned to emerging urgent and emergency care (UEC) priorities, [NHS England's UEC Recovery Plan](#) as well as priorities set out by the NHS Race and Health Observatory to identify and tackle ethnic inequalities in health and social care

ICB commissioning

The new [Integrated Care Board \(ICB\) commissioning guidance](#) for English ambulance services highlights the need for a clear understanding of how services can support ICSs to deliver on their core purposes as specified in the Health and Care Act 2022. These include improving outcomes in population health and healthcare, reducing inequalities in outcomes, experience and access and supporting social and economic development. Priorities for addressing healthcare inequalities are set out in [NHS England's Operating Planning Guidance 2023/24](#), and the importance of shifting investment upstream to support preventative services and reduce health inequalities is highlighted in the recent [Hewitt Review](#).

Whilst the national policy drivers and commissioning structures referenced throughout this document relate specifically to English ambulance services, the principles will remain the same for devolved nations and support the implementation of the [Scottish Government's National Performance Framework](#), the priorities set out in [Public Health Wales' Long Term Strategy](#) and [Northern Ireland's Strategic Framework for Public Health](#).



3. Our framework and aims

A number of strategic cross-sector aims and commitments have been agreed through the development of this consensus statement that will strengthen the role of the ambulance sector in reducing health inequalities. The following framework sets out how these have been developed.

The strategic aims are mapped to the key enablers that are needed within ambulance trusts to support the development of an approach to reducing health inequalities. These enablers can be seen in the framework below and were

identified through the review of what we already know about the role of the ambulance sector in this area.

To support the delivery of the aims, a series of commitments have been made collectively by all the partners that have signed up to this collaborative approach. In order to deliver these commitments, next steps have been set out in the form of practical actions.

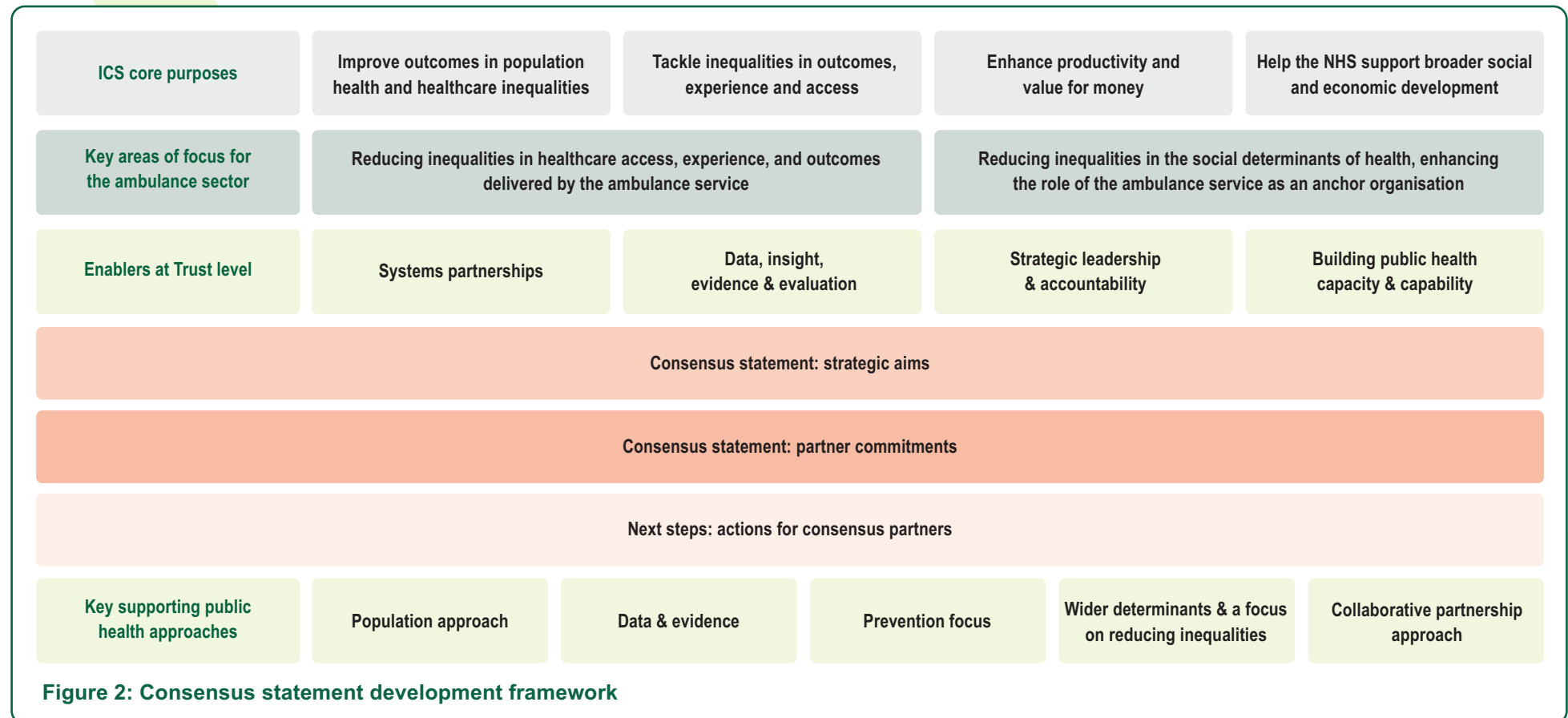


Figure 2: Consensus statement development framework

4. Consensus statement

Figure 3 shows the strategic aims of this consensus statement together with their associated commitments, mapped to the key enablers at Trust level.

Enablers at Trust level	Systems partnerships	Data, insight, evidence & evaluation	Strategic leadership & accountability	Building public health capacity & capability
<p>Strategic aims</p>	<p>Increase awareness & understanding across ICSs and systems of the role of the ambulance sector in reducing inequalities in collaboration with wider systems</p>	<p>Support ambulance trusts to engage within their ICSs to facilitate whole-systems, intelligence-led approaches to understanding and addressing population health need and health inequalities</p>	<p>Promote an organisational culture that champions reducing health inequalities and preventative healthcare as core business</p>	
<p>Consensus Statement together we commit to:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support and influence the commissioning of ambulance services through the application of ICB commissioning guidance and an understanding of population health need ● Articulate the breadth of opportunity for ambulance services to support ICSs with improving outcomes in population health and healthcare and addressing inequalities in experience and access. This will facilitate conversations between ambulance trusts and their systems to identify where ambulance services can contribute to joint forward plans and help to address priorities within both the Operational Planning Guidance and Core20PLUS5 approach ● Using the Core20PLUS5 approach, identify key areas of focus and pathways of care through which ambulance services could have most impact on health inequalities by working in their integrated care partnerships with local systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work to improve the evidence-base that supports and informs the role of the ambulance sector in reducing physical & mental health inequalities ● Improve the ability of both trusts and systems to use ambulance data across all service lines (999, 111 and Patient Transport Services, where applicable) to better understand population health and health inequalities across our staff & volunteers, our communities and our patients ● Support ambulance trusts to work in collaboration with their local systems and communities using engagement, insight and patient experience to better understand their needs alongside service use and experience through a health inequalities lens, particularly for vulnerable population groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support the organisational development of ambulance trusts in relation to their role in reducing health inequalities including Board and senior-level leadership ● Support ambulance services to articulate their role as anchor organisations and work in collaboration to intentionally support broader social and economic development, including through the development of inclusive recruitment processes and reducing environmental impact ● Improve the ability of ambulance trusts to access public health expertise and resources and develop these within their workforce to increase capacity to engage in partnership working at system level ● Empower and support staff and volunteers at every level to proactively reduce health inequalities through innovation and quality improvement ● Explore opportunities to broaden the provision of health inequalities training, education & support for all staff & volunteers 	

Figure 3: Consensus statement



5. Next steps

Figure 4 sets out the actions that have been agreed by consensus partners. These have been colour coded to show how they align to the strategic aims and commitments made as seen in figure 3. Partners to the consensus statement will use their skills and influence to contribute to these actions and a lead

organisation will be identified for each of them as the ongoing Implementation group develop their action plans. This will facilitate in bringing relevant partner organisations together to develop the key actions, accountability and timescales for delivery.

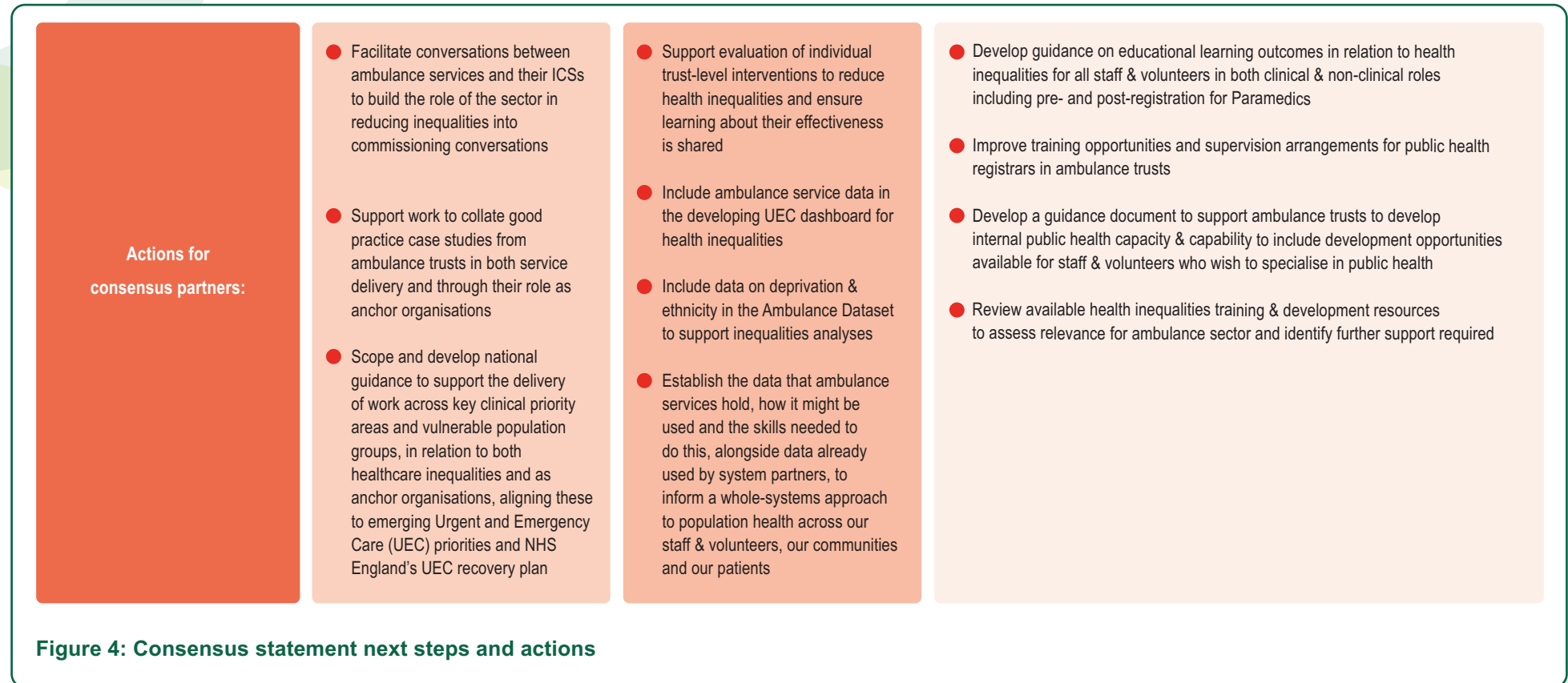


Figure 4: Consensus statement next steps and actions

6. Delivery objectives

The following overarching objectives have also been agreed in relation to coordinating the delivery of the consensus statement. These will be overseen by a national implementation oversight group.

A review of this consensus statement will be conducted after a two year period to ensure that the correct actions remain in place to deliver the commitments made.

- **Development of national strategic work plan with SMART objectives to set out the actions, accountability and timescales for delivery**
- **Setup of national Reducing Health Inequalities Network within the AACE director group structure, to provide ambulance services with peer support and to recognise, share & implement good practice**
- **Development of trust-level practical toolkit to support with local implementation and delivery of approaches to reducing health inequalities**
- **Encouragement of all ambulance services to undertake a baseline review and develop action plan against the maturity matrix tool within the forthcoming trust-level implementation toolkit**

Figure 5: Consensus statement delivery objective



7. Acknowledgements

Lead author:

Ruth Crabtree,
National Lead for Public Health, AACE

Contributors:

Andy Sharman, Paramedic Workforce
Programme Lead, NHSE-WTE, South East

Bola Owolabi, Director - Health Inequalities,
NHSE

Caitlin Wilson, Senior Research Fellow, YAS

Cathryn James, Clinical Consultant, and
support to NASMED, AACE

Charlotte Hill, Senior Programme Manager
Urgent and Emergency Care, NHSE

Chris Grant (Co-chair of Consensus Development
Group), Executive Medical Director, NWAS

Christine Camacho, Public Health Registrar,
OHID

Hashum Mahmood, Senior Policy Adviser -
Population Health, NHSC

Fiona Bell, Head of Research, YAS

Fiona Claridge, Assistant Director,
London and the East, NHSE

Helen Vine, Strategic Volunteering Lead, AACE

Hilary Pillin, UEC Strategy Advisor, AACE

Jason Evans, Chair - NACN

Jonathon Holmes, Policy Advisor (Ambulance
and Operational Performance) NHSP

Larry Baker, National Paramedic Workforce
Transformation Programme Manager, NHSE

Leonora Volpe, Senior Policy Manager,
NHSP

Linda Hindle (Co-chair of Consensus
Development Group), Deputy Chief AHP
Officer for England and National Engagement
Lead for Police, Fire and Ambulance Services,
Office for Health Improvement & Disparities

Sammer Tang, Public Health Lead, CoP

Sandra James, Consultant in Public Health,
OHID

Sara Bordoley, Equalities and Healthcare
Inequalities Lead, NHSE

Victoria Binks, Assistant Director, North East
and Yorkshire, NHSC





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It is not about the pieces but how they work together.