



Social action for health and well-being: building co-operative communities

Department of Health strategic
vision for volunteering

Executive Summary



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We want to build a society where autonomy, responsibility and reciprocity are the norm. A society where individuals have greater choice and control and where services and support are patient-led, personalised and responsive to the needs of local people. We are committed to placing more power in the hands of citizens and front-line staff and empowering them to take greater action. Volunteering and wider social action have a vital part to play in realising these ambitions.

Volunteers already make an enormous contribution to health and well-being in this country. They are involved in every sphere of health, public health and social care. We want to ensure that, in the process of system and service reform, this enormous wealth of activity is recognised, celebrated and strengthened. Volunteering increases the quality and diversity of services and support available in our communities. It has multiple health and well-being benefits, not just for those who receive support, but also for volunteers themselves, communities and society as a whole. This is not about replacing paid employees but finding new solutions to enable people to contribute to their community and the services that matter to them. We believe that there is untapped potential within our communities that we cannot afford to ignore. In response to the opportunities and challenges of demographic change alone, it is essential that we nurture and release the capability, capacity and assets that exist within our communities.

It is for all these reasons that the Department of Health (DH) is setting out this vision for volunteering in health and care.

Our vision is of a society in which social action and reciprocity are the norm and where volunteering is encouraged, promoted and

supported because it has the power to enhance quality, reduce inequality or improve outcomes in health, public health and social care.

This document is aimed at leaders and decision-makers, including service planners, commissioners and providers, in health, public health and social care, local authorities, the NHS, the voluntary sector and the community. It is also aimed at other partners at local level with an interest in volunteering and its outcomes, including Jobcentre Plus, educational establishments and local Volunteer Centres. We are looking for people who will pick up and champion this agenda in their own locality, interpreting the vision for their local context and taking action to achieve positive change.

The document covers four strategic themes that fundamentally shape the environment in which volunteering takes place and the willingness and ability of people to contribute. The themes are:

- Leadership – building activity and service provision around people's strengths;
- Partnership – working together to build community capacity;
- Commissioning – for better outcomes and increased social value; and
- Volunteer support – creating good volunteering experiences that are open to all.

Government's role in promoting social action is a facilitative one. We will work with a range of partners nationally and locally to create an enabling health and care environment that encourages, promotes and supports volunteering and wider social action to:

- raise awareness of the potential for volunteering and its added value;

- improve the evidence base for investment in new approaches that work; and
- increase access to best practice examples and opportunities for shared learning.

To achieve this we will:

1. Work with partners to **develop the evidence base** relating to the value of volunteer involvement in health, public health and social care and explore ways in which this might be strengthened in the longer term.
2. Develop **targeted resources for health, public health and social care audiences**, which will build on the key messages in this vision and use evidence and good practice examples to illustrate ways in which volunteering is being effectively promoted and supported locally and having an impact on priority outcomes in each field.
3. Work with partners to **facilitate more in-depth discussion on key issues** that have been identified by stakeholders, including those relating to diversification of service provision and workforce relations and development across the public, voluntary and private sectors.
4. Facilitate **improved access to information and good practice** in relation to volunteering that is relevant and accessible to health, public health and social care audiences.
5. Provide resources and support to stimulate rewarding volunteering initiatives through our **Health and Social Care Volunteering Fund**.
6. Continue to develop our own Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) scheme and **promote the benefits of ESV** elsewhere in the health and care system.

7. Support the work of **Project CareBank**, a locality-wide test of a reciprocal time credit scheme focused on social care in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.
8. Develop **opportunities for volunteers as part of HealthWatch**, which will be in place from October 2012.
9. **Promote wider social action** through increased voluntary public engagement in the co-production of key health and care campaigns including Change4Life and the Dignity in Care campaign.
10. Work across government and with partner agencies to continue to actively promote **the European Year of Volunteering 2011** including health- and care-focused activities.

This is a starting point. Our vision is a long-term one that needs to be integrated into approaches to system and cultural change. This will, by its nature, take time.

We are looking for leaders who are inspirational, collaborative and committed to the change required to foster a contribution culture where social action and reciprocity are the norm. We are particularly looking to leaders at the local level to pick up this cause and champion volunteering and wider social action locally, for all the health and well-being benefits it can bring and the savings that can accrue from better tailored services and more resilient and connected communities. We urge you to join with us in pursuit of this vision in your local context.

We have included questions at the end of each section to prompt and inspire your thinking. If you would like to get more involved in our work in this area or share your learning, please get in touch at volunteeringvision@dh.gsi.gov.uk and join our volunteering network.