

**2025–30 strategy**  
Disrupting inequity in mental healthcare



**HEADS  
ON**

# Foreword

**People with severe mental illness or learning disabilities die 15 – 20 years before the rest of the population. It is a stark and unacceptable truth and one that has not shifted in the last decade.**

**If we are to reduce this mortality gap, especially in times of increasing financial pressure, and growing need for NHS mental health services, it is imperative that we look to implement radical, significant change.**

As an NHS charity, Heads On's focus for the next 5 years will be to do everything we can to disrupt this inequity in health care, as we strive to achieve our vision of a world in which people with severe mental illness and/or a learning disability are optimistic about the future and confident in their ability to manage their health.

For everyone supported by Heads On, we will increase their confidence in managing their mental health, improve their quality of life or increase their social connections. All three of these outcomes have an important and evidenced role to play in reducing the mortality gap.

We believe that our three objectives of Equity through Innovation, Building Blocks of social and economic determinants of mental health and Creative Recovery have the greatest impact

to achieve our outcomes, underpinned by our fundraising and grantmaking, research and profile. These objectives were developed through consultation with our colleagues in Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SPFT), with service users and carers and through feedback from our Voluntary Sector partners.

Central to our approach is our partnership with SPFT; our corporate trustee. Our shared strategic ambitions to delivery high quality care consistently, be a good partner and improve everyday will guide us.

Heads On has invested over £2.3m since 2020 in programmes that support positive health in Sussex and beyond. From outreach into communities at high risk of suicide, to support for the families of young people on waiting lists, we are proud of the impact we have had through our 2020-25 strategy; a strategy that saw us navigate the challenges of Covid-19 and radically change our work and reach through focusing on those most impacted by the pandemic.

Now it is time for us to be single minded in our approach. Everything we do for the next five years must contribute towards reducing the mortality gap faced by people with severe mental illness and/or learning disabilities. SPFT has recently published the Trust's 5-year strategy and it is critical that Heads On's strategy aligns to this to ensure that we have the greatest collective impact.



None of this will be possible without the support of those who join us on our journey, who share our commitment to disrupting health inequity that has persisted for generations and who are excited about challenging this. Thank you, we simply can't do it without you.

## **Sean Duggan, OBE**

Chair of Sussex Partnership  
NHS Foundation Trust & Heads On

## **Dr Jane Padmore**

Chief Executive Officer of Sussex Partnership  
NHS Foundation Trust

## **Rachael Duke**

Charity Director, Heads On

# Our work

**As Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust's official NHS charity partner, our mission is to drive innovative and evidence-based solutions that promote recovery, increase health equity and facilitate inclusive access to NHS mental healthcare.**

## Programmes

We deliver programmes that get the right support to people who face the biggest barriers to mental health recovery, so that their mental health becomes a part of their life and not their whole life. Our programmes are delivered by subject matter experts and in partnership with voluntary sector, academia, arts and sport.

## Grants

Our grants fund work both within and outside Sussex Partnership that improve people's access to and experience of mental healthcare. We fund participatory work, capital projects, research and innovation that has the potential to transform mental healthcare. At the same time, we have a continued commitment to fund work that makes day to day life in Sussex Partnership services better.

## Fundraising

All our work is made possible through fundraising and we are grateful to all our donors for their generosity. Our fundraising includes grant applications, community and event fundraising, individual support and legacies and we are committed to increasing our unrestricted income year on year.

**£2.3m**

**invested in  
mental health  
since 2020**

**1,000**

**fundraisers  
since 2020**

**6,000**

**people reached  
by community  
grants**

**38**

**voluntary  
sector partners  
funded**

# Our relationship with Sussex Partnership

**Heads On is the trusted charity partner of Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, working together to ensure that people have the best possible experience of mental health services in Sussex.**

As an NHS charity in the corporate trustee model, we share the ambitions of our parent NHS Trust and so the development of our strategy has followed the development of Sussex Partnership's 2025-30 strategy. Sussex Partnership's strategy engagement programme saw it reach into communities across Sussex to hear their views, challenges and hopes for the future from mental health services. This, alongside robust data analysis, culminated in the launch of **Delivering Great Care and Improving Outcomes Together**.

Rather than starting with a blank piece of paper, we have taken Sussex Partnership's strategy as our starting point, working together with our key stakeholders to identify the areas where Heads On is a natural partner and building our strategy from there.

Sussex Partnership

## Vision

Delivering great care and improving outcomes together

Sussex Partnership

## Ambitions

Deliver high quality care consistently  
Be a good partner  
Improve everyday  
Be sustainable  
Be an employer of choice

Sussex Partnership

## Strategic measures

Zero suicide  
Improved outcomes  
Shorter waiting times  
Improved experience

Sussex Partnership

## Purpose

### Provide

We provide care for people with learning disabilities, mental health and neurodevelopmental difficulties, in Sussex, in collaboration with patients, carers, and families. As a specialist provider we focus our resources on directly providing safe, effective care and treatment which leads to a positive experience for patients, carers and families.

### Collaborate

We collaborate with partners to join-up services and meet the needs of the local communities we serve.

### Lead

We use our expertise and experience in learning disabilities, mental health and neurodevelopmental difficulties to provide leadership, advice, support and training to the wider health and care system.

# Shared ambitions with Sussex Partnership

**Sussex Partnership's 2025–30 strategy identifies five key ambitions to guide the Trust's work over the next five years. As Sussex Partnership's official NHS charity partner, by prioritising the three ambitions we believe we can make the greatest contribution towards, we will support Sussex Partnership to make these a reality. The ambitions we selected were prioritised for their alignment with our skills, expertise, resources and potential for charitable funding. Here we set out what they mean for Heads On.**

## Deliver high quality care consistently

People deserve the best possible experience of mental health care in Sussex. Over the next 5 years we will continue to put patients at the heart of everything we do, seeking out opportunities to develop and deliver programmes that enhance NHS clinical care by promoting recovery, increasing health equity and facilitating inclusive access to NHS mental healthcare.

## Be a good partner

We are a trusted charity partner to Sussex Partnership, working flexibly across the NHS, voluntary sector and wider healthcare system in Sussex to meet the needs of our local communities in ways that feel right to them.

## Improve everyday

Learning, improvement and innovation are at the heart of everything we do. By driving forward pioneering research and investing in innovation we will help to accelerate improvements in mental healthcare that build optimism for the future and enable people to feel confident in their abilities to live well with severe mental illness and learning disabilities.

# Our 2025–30 strategy

## An overview

### Our vision

**A world where people with severe mental illness are optimistic about the future and confident in their ability to manage their health**

### Our shared strategic ambitions with Sussex Partnership

**Deliver high quality care consistently**

**Be a good partner**

**Improve everyday**

### Our objectives

#### Equity through innovation

Driving solutions that disrupt health inequalities, reducing the mortality gap for people with severe mental illness and learning disabilities.

#### Building blocks

Tackling the unequal social and economic determinants of mental health in housing, finances and access to work.

#### Creative recovery

Building confidence, quality of life and social connection through the arts, nature, sport and food & nutrition.

### Our enablers

Underpinning our work to achieve our impact objectives

#### Income generation

**Grant making & programme delivery**

#### Research

**Enhancing our reputation and celebrating impact**

# Our objectives

## What we will do

### Equity through innovation

**Mental health is the leading cause of disability in the UK. People with either severe mental illness or learning disabilities die 15 to 20 years before the rest of the population.**

### Building blocks

**We are proud of everything we have achieved in our first decade, yet in that time the mortality gap for people with severe mental illness or learning disabilities has not changed.**

### Creative recovery

**Over the next 5 years we will focus our efforts on delivering our three objectives, which we believe have the greatest potential to achieve real change for people living with severe mental illness or learning disabilities.**

# Equity through innovation

**Driving solutions that disrupt health inequalities, reducing the mortality gap for people with severe mental illness and learning disabilities.**

**To reduce the mortality gap for people with severe mental illness and learning disabilities we must start by doing things differently.**

**Over the next 5 years we will:**



**Develop a research programme** that sees us invest in and/or leverage funding for applied research studies that will target the mortality gap.



**Grow the Heads On futures fund**, funding innovation across Sussex Partnership that enables clinicians and service users to generate ideas, provide proof of concept and test and adopt new ways of working and new technologies.



**Launch the Heads On disruption challenge**, awarding small pots of seed funding to Sussex Partnership staff to develop transformative ideas with Heads On that we can develop for major grant applications.

# Building blocks

**Tackling the unequal social and economic determinants of mental health in housing, finances and access to work.**

**Over the next 5 years we will:**

**Living in poverty always makes mental health problems worse; it's a vicious circle. Before people can focus on recovery, their basic needs must be met first: a safe place to call home; money for food, utilities and essentials; access to work or volunteering when the time is right.**



## **Extend our money & benefits advice programme**

to all Neighbourhood Community Mental Health Teams across Sussex, working alongside our housing colleagues to secure people the building blocks of good mental health.



## **Develop our skills based volunteering programme,**

taking our learning from Good Space to support people with creative and innovative volunteering opportunities that develop the confidence and skills for employment.



## **Target our grant funding and programme delivery**

into the 5 most deprived areas of Sussex, directing our support to those who need it most.

# Creative recovery

**Building confidence, quality of life and social connection through the arts, nature, sport and food & nutrition.**

**Relationships are one of the most important aspects of our lives. People who are more socially connected to family, friends, or their community are happier, physically healthier, and live longer, with fewer mental health problems than people who are less well connected.**

Yet connections can be hard to come by when we're feeling unwell. Sometimes the effort to reach out is more than we can manage. So we need to reach in, giving people the space to find themselves again, in activities that make their heart sing, and that can and should go hand in hand with clinical care to bring hope for the future that life will get better.

**Over the next 5 years we will:**



**Develop creative recovery programmes in all Sussex Partnership neighbourhood community mental health teams**, with in-reach into adult inpatient hospitals,

supporting people to participate in activities in hospital that can sustain them on discharge and helping people to stay well in the community, starting with our pilot programme at the new Combe Valley Hospital in East Sussex.



**Develop a new creative recovery programme at Chalkhill**, Sussex Partnership's

inpatient hospital for children and young people, building on our rich history of supporting activity programmes for the unit.

# Our enablers

**Underpinning our work to achieve our objectives.**

## Income generation



We will implement a new fundraising model to support our planned activities, growing our voluntary income year on year with a particular commitment to increasing unrestricted income. We will maximise our chances of successful fundraising for major transformation programmes by investing in the seed funding of new ideas. Our Impact Framework will enable us to clearly articulate the difference we make, building a compelling case for support.

## Grant making & programme delivery



We will take a fresh approach to grant making, targeting our funding at ideas and areas where we can have the greatest impact. This will include working with grant making partners to make our funds go further and reach those who need us most. We will continue to develop and deliver all our programmes in partnership with VCSE, arts, sports and academic partners, extending our reach into the wider health care system. All our work will be co-produced by people with lived experience, who know best how we can help.

## Research



We will develop a research programme for the first time, cementing our commitment to driving innovative and evidence based solutions. Capitalising both on our own investments and the greater potential to leverage funding, we will support applied research that targets the mortality gap for people with severe mental illness and learning disabilities. We are committed to fostering research across all clinical disciplines and particularly within a user led space.

## Enhancing our reputation and celebrating impact



We will only be able to grow if we develop our public profile. Our work is dependent on our ability to raise funds, develop partnerships and connect with our communities. We will develop a new impact led communications partnership with Sussex Partnership that builds Heads On's public reputation, telling a compelling story of our impact and inspiring supporters to act.

# Impact evaluation framework

## Measuring what matters.

We are developing a new Impact Evaluation Framework and Theory of Change for Heads On to support both the delivery of our strategy and the future direction of the charity. With limited resources we must prioritise our work and being impact led enables us to focus our efforts where we can have the greatest difference. We have identified 3 outcomes that we hope to achieve for anyone supported by Heads On and we will be measuring to what extent we have been successful against these intended outcomes for all our programmes, large or small.

**Greater confidence in managing mental health**

**Improved quality of life**

**Increased social connections**

Throughout March – May 2025 we will be piloting our measurement tools to test the framework before rolling it out across the charity. We are working with Sussex Partnership to develop a framework for how we measure the impact of our work on NHS services and service use in 2025.

# Theory of change

## Need

Mental health is the leading cause of disability in the UK. People with either severe mental illness or learning disabilities die 15 to 20 years before the rest of the population.

## Vision

A world where people with severe mental illness are optimistic about the future and confident in their ability to manage their health.

## Purpose

We drive innovative and evidence-based solutions that promote recovery, increase health equity, and facilitate inclusive access to NHS mental healthcare.

## Inputs

- Staff
- Partners
- Capital
- Evidentiary techniques
- Tech
- Data
- Comms
- Ownership & buy-in from SPFT
- Time
- Meeting space

## Activities

- Grants programmes
- Research
- In-person events/workshops
- Participation in community fundraising
- Innovation and improvements
- Kit, equipment & capital works
- Programme delivery
- Creative recovery interventions

## Outputs

- Number of programmes created
- Number of people reached
- Number of projects scaled up

## Outcomes

- Greater confidence in managing mental health
- Improved quality of life
- Increased social connections

## Impact

- Improved life expectancy for people with severe mental illness or learning disabilities



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## Contact

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