

Using evidence in healthcare systems

Conditions and implications that support change and innovation.

The Innovative Healthcare Delivery Programme (IHDP) brings leadership and focus to realise the vision of harnessing the power of informatics to link NHS Scotland's rich data assets and deliver value rapidly to patients, healthcare professionals, and the wider NHS. Using evidence in healthcare systems isn't a straightforward process. We reviewed the literature to find out more. This is a summary of the findings.

Healthcare settings are complex adaptive systems. In these systems:

- Evidence to action is not a linear process in a complex system - it's more multifaceted than "bench to bed"
- Thinking and models of working need to be suited to complex systems, rather than borrowed from simpler change processes

What helps change in complex healthcare systems?

- Diffusion of innovation is more likely where it chimes with existing values, people have the ability and permission to experiment and adapt new ideas, and they can see clearly how the innovation will help them
- Organisations need to be ready for change, with motivated people, good knowledge of the issues being addressed and adequate resources
- It's important to take time to understand the problems being tackled, create and synthesise relevant knowledge, and organise change through cycles of implementation and evaluation

People are at the heart of change

- Processes of knowledge sharing and innovation are as important as the innovations themselves
- Knowledge is diverse and needs to be recognised as coming from formal data and evidence, but also people's experience - beneficiaries, staff and other people in the system
- Co-creation of knowledge and partnership working are essential
- Roles such as facilitator, boundary spanner or knowledge mobiliser help the processes of relationship building, co-production, knowledge use and sharing
- Change leaders are needed at all levels in the system

What can be done to support evidence-informed change and innovation in complex healthcare systems?

- Taking time to understand the context especially the influence of social factors such as relational or individual issues and existing norms and values
- Distributing leadership and empowering people to own the changes needed, build strong relationships and stay focused on the vision for change
- Actively engaging people who will use any knowledge or products from the start of the process to make sure it can work for them
- Creating networks to share and support learning
- Phasing the implementation of innovation into stages rather than expecting instant change