




Royal College
of Physicians

Setting higher standards

A photograph of a man and a woman, both wearing NHS lanyards, looking at a device in a clinical setting. The man is on the left, wearing a striped shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a black top. They are both looking down at a device held by the woman. The background shows a clinical setting with blue curtains and a window.

Health and social care in England: a quick guide

A photograph of a hospital corridor. Two nurses are walking towards the camera. The nurse on the left is wearing blue scrubs, and the nurse on the right is wearing white scrubs with a stethoscope. In the background, there are other people and a trolley. The ceiling has recessed lights.

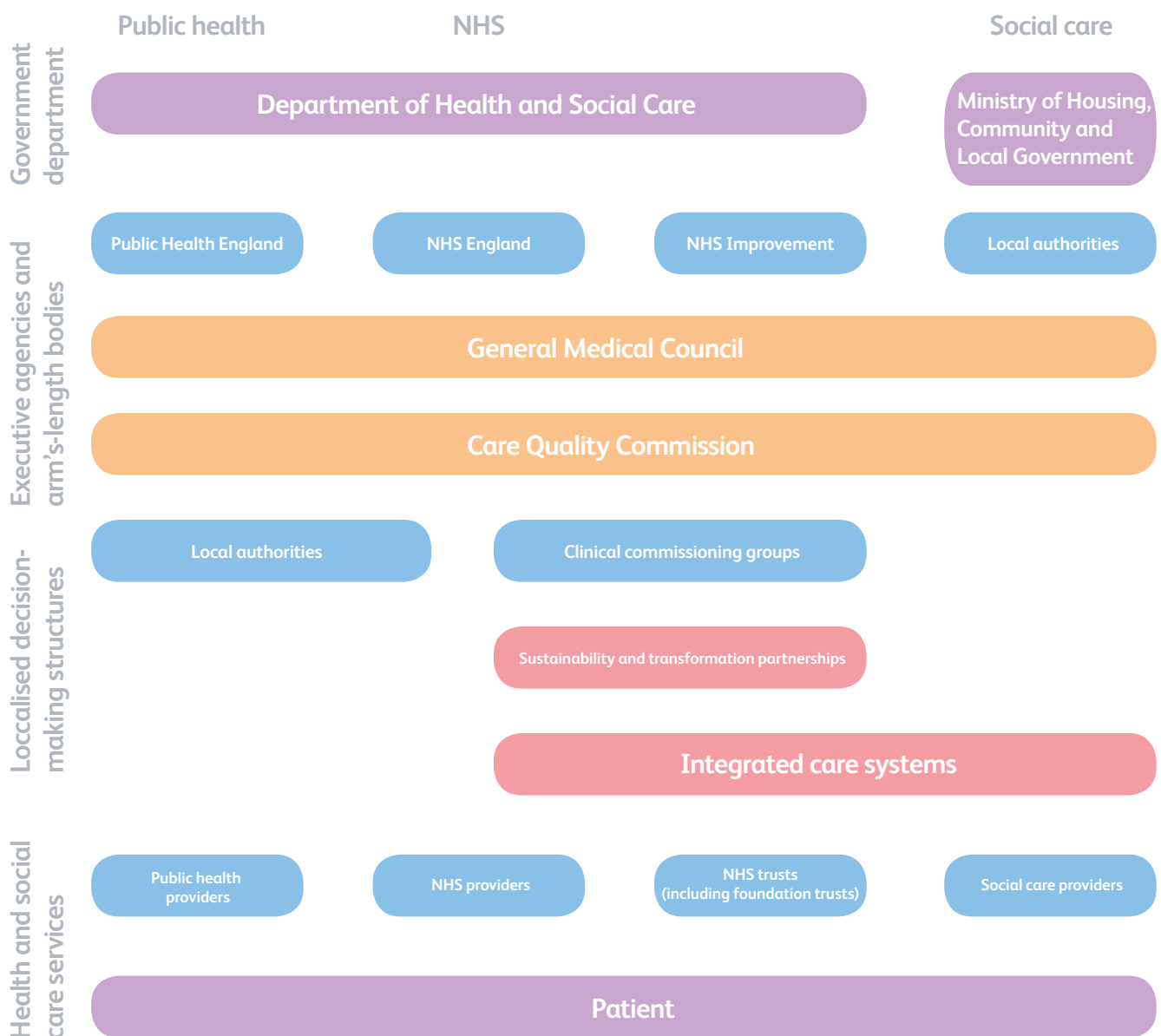
Who makes decisions in the NHS?

This guide gives an overview of the decision-making structures that operate in health policy and in the NHS. These affect how health and social care works at every level, from decisions in your local trust to the national direction set by politicians. This guide covers the main stakeholders involved in healthcare, trust decision making, funding flow, commissioning, regulation and education in England.

Health and social care structures in England

Decision-making processes in health and social care can be complex and involve a large number of people, with different organisations responsible for different aspects of policy setting and delivery. Decision making continues to evolve with integrated care systems the latest initiative aiming to develop partnership working between the NHS and social care.

Public health, the NHS and social care each have different structures and approaches to decision making, funding and accountability. The diagram below gives a high-level snapshot of the structures in place and how they relate to each other.



Department for Health and Social Care

is the government department that sets the direction for health and care policy in England, and issues money to NHS England.

Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government

is the government department responsible for funding and supporting local authorities.

NHS England

sets the priorities and direction of the NHS and leads improvements in health and social care in England.

NHS Improvement

is responsible for overseeing NHS trusts, and supporting them to become financially sustainable.

Public Health England

is responsible for protecting and improving the nation's health and wellbeing, and reducing health inequalities.

Care Quality Commission

is the independent regulator of health and adult social care in England.

General Medical Council (GMC)

is the independent regulator responsible for setting standards for students and doctors to protect patients and improve medical education.

Sustainability and transformation partnerships (STPs)

are 5-year plans that cover all NHS services in England and are part of NHS England's *Five-year forward view*. STPs should be designed to suit local population needs and cover three areas: improving health and wellbeing; improving efficiency of services; and improving quality and developing new models of care.

Clinical commissioning groups (CCGs)

are membership bodies made up of local GP practices. CCGs are led by an elected governing body made up of GPs, other clinicians (including a nurse and a secondary care consultant) and lay members. CCGs expend two-thirds of the total NHS England budget and are responsible for commissioning healthcare, including mental health services, urgent and emergency care, elective hospital services and community care for patients within their geographical area.

Integrated care systems

(previously called accountable care systems) are new entities that seek to deliver patient-centred care by joining up health and social care funding and organisations. They are seen by some as the next iteration of STPs.

Local authorities

provide a wide range of services to people in their area; some are statutory while others are in addition to their statutory duties. They are responsible for the provision of social care and supporting vulnerable children and adults and also have devolved responsibility for the public health of their residents.

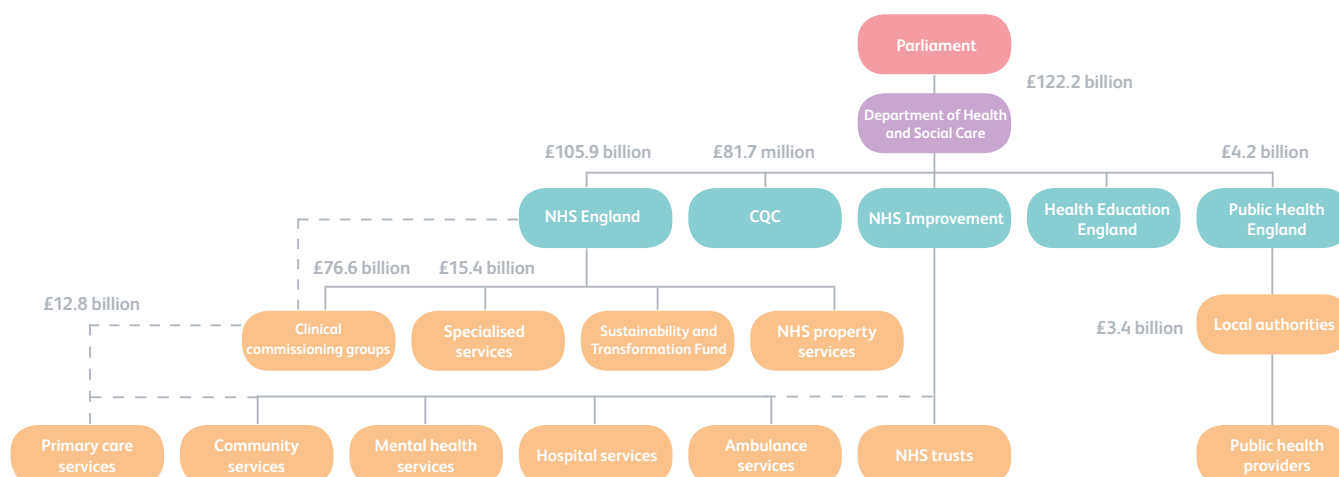
Providers

is a catch-all term to describe organisations that deliver healthcare services to patients.

A brief guide to health funding in England

Each year, following the government's budget announcement by the chancellor of the exchequer, the Department of Health and Social Care distributes health spending. During 2016/17 this came to a total of £122.2 billion. The majority is given directly to NHS England to deliver the NHS mandate set by the secretary of state for health.

This funding is then cascaded to clinical commissioning groups, directly to NHS providers and to specialised services. The funding environment is likely to continue to change as integrated care systems are rolled out and NHS Improvement continues to challenge NHS foundation trusts to balance their budgets.



Health Education England

is the national organisation responsible for education, training and workforce development in the health sector.

NHS Property Services

provide support to NHS trusts and clinician commission groups to manage and develop their estates; they also own approximately 10% of the NHS estate.

Specialised services

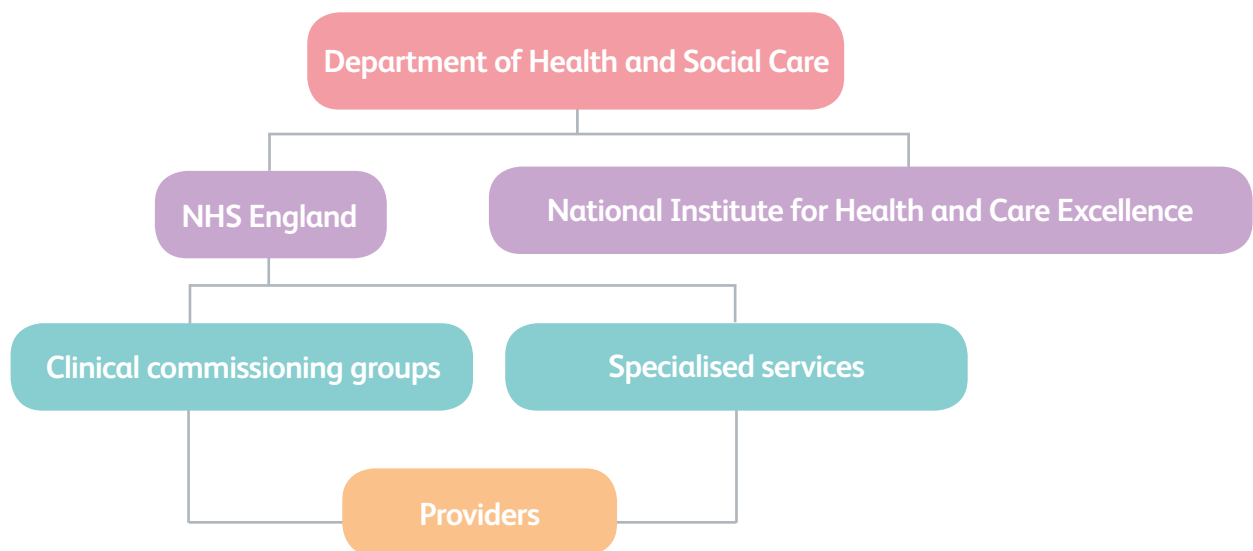
are services commissioned directly by NHS England to support people with a range of rare and complex conditions.

Sustainability and Transformation Fund (STF)

is a fund set up to support sustainability and transformation partnerships to implement their plans.

Structure of commissioning in England

Commissioning is the process NHS England and clinical commissioning groups use to plan, agree and monitor services. Commissioning has changed considerably over the last decade, particularly since the Health and Social Care Act 2012 came into force. The scale of commissioning varies, with specialised services and some primary care services commissioned nationally by NHS England, while other services are commissioned locally by clinical commissioning groups. The role of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is to develop quality standards and performance metrics for use by commissioners.



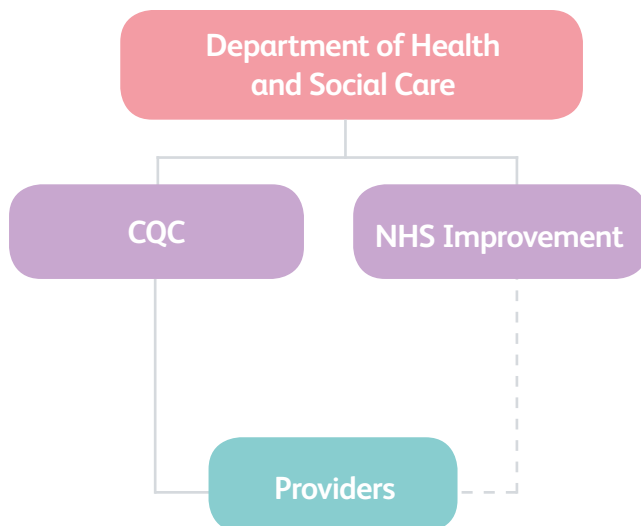
National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

provides guidance and advice to improve outcomes for people using the NHS and other public health and social care services.

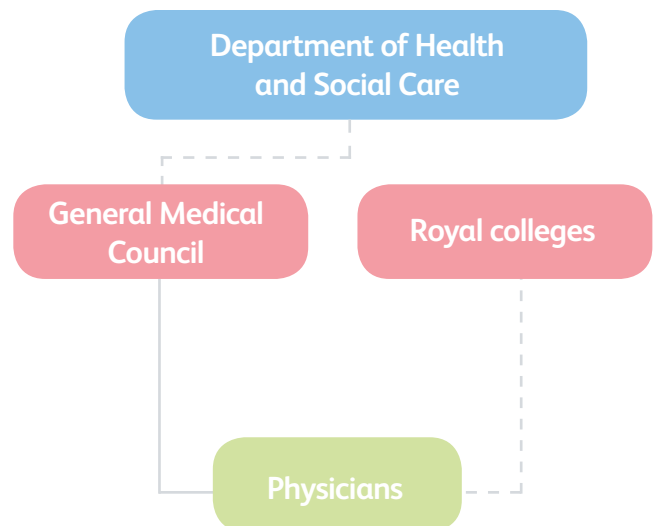
Regulation in England

Regulation in England is split between the General Medical Council, which regulates doctors, and the Care Quality Commission, which regulates providers. The royal colleges also play a role in setting the expected standards for both clinicians and providers and holding a voluntary register for physician associates via the Faculty of Physician Associates. There are also a number of other regulators which regulate different healthcare professionals, including the Nursing and Midwifery Council and the Health and Care Professions Council.

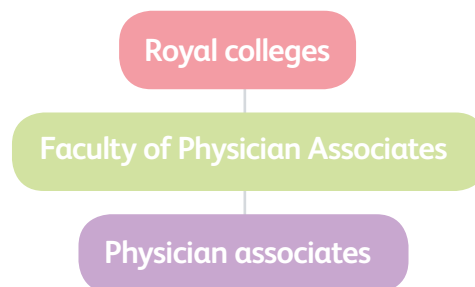
Provider Regulation



Regulation of doctors



Physician associate regulation



Faculty of Physician Associates (FPA)

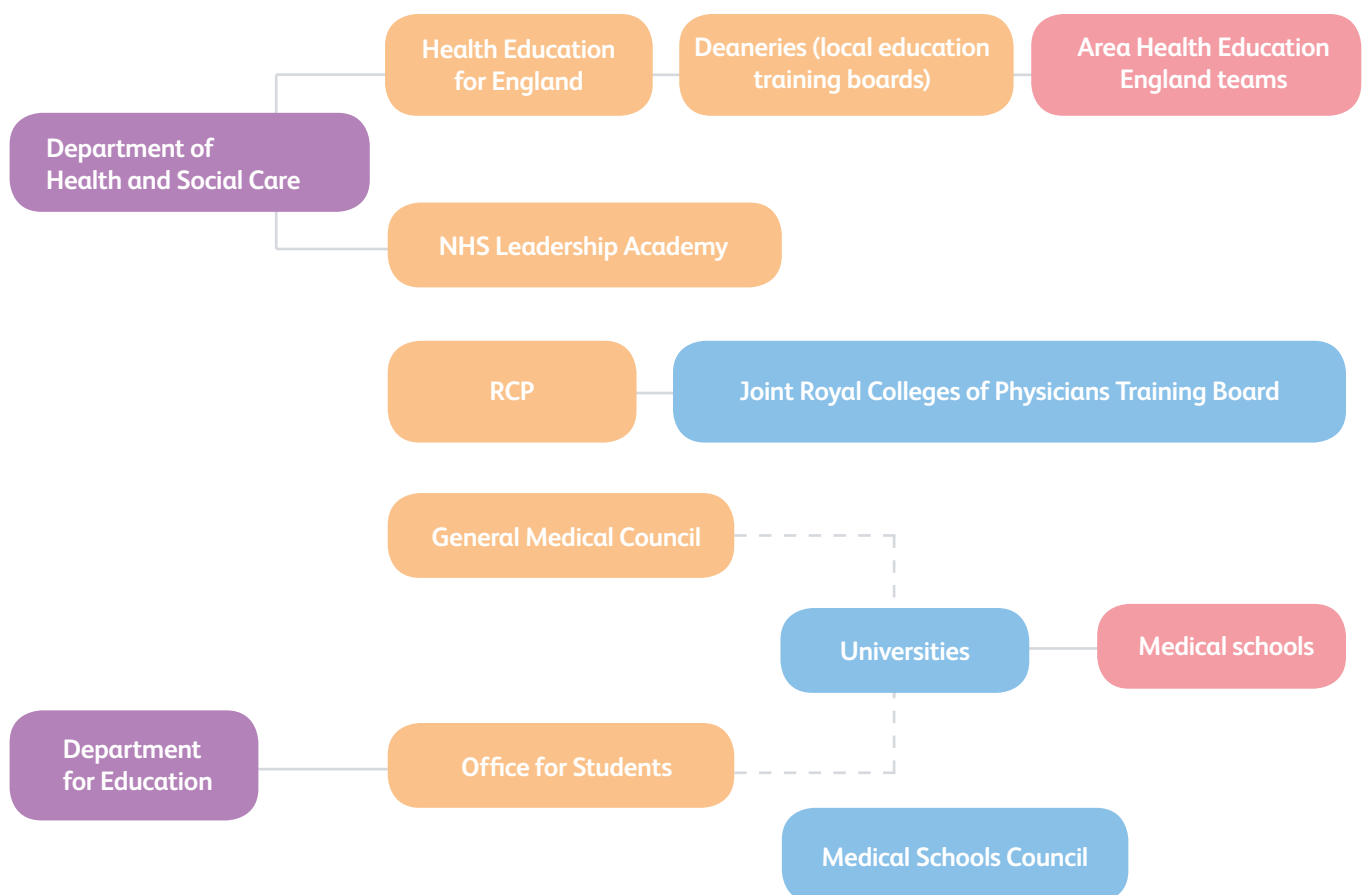
provides professional support to physician associates across the UK. It oversees and administers the running of the Physician Associate Managed Voluntary Register (PAMVR) and is campaigning to achieve statutory registration of the profession.

Education in England

Workforce planning in England is the responsibility of Health Education England (HEE), which works with a range of partners to develop the workforce to meet the changing needs of the population. Area Health Education England teams support junior doctors in the early stages of their career. Each level of education is delivered by different organisations:

- > Undergraduate medical curricula are designed and delivered by university medical schools. Curricula are designed to meet the 'Outcomes for graduates' expectations laid out by the General Medical Council (GMC).
- > The Foundation Programme is designed by the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (of which the RCP is a member). During foundation year 1 (F1) doctors gain provisional registration with the GMC.
- > UK core medical training (CT1/2) is managed by the RCP in conjunction with the Joint Royal Colleges of Physicians Training Board.
- > The MRCP(UK) exam is run by the Federation of Royal Colleges of Physicians of the UK, a partnership of the three physician royal colleges.
- > Specialty training is organised nationally by one of the royal colleges or by HEE.

Structure of education in England



Health Education England

is the national organisation responsible for education, training and workforce development in the health sector.

Deaneries (local education training boards or LETBs)

are part of Health Education England and responsible for the training and education of both clinical and non-clinical NHS staff in their area.

Joint Royal Colleges of Physicians Training Board

is responsible for setting and maintaining standards for medical training on behalf of the three royal colleges of physicians.

General Medical Council (GMC)

is the independent regulator responsible for setting standards for students and doctors to protect patients and improve medical education.

NHS Leadership Academy

plays a role in developing leadership in healthcare through the development and delivery of training programmes.

Medical Schools Council

is the representative body for UK medical schools.

Universities

are autonomous but design their curricula to ensure their students meet the standards set by the GMC so that they can become registered doctors.

Office for Students

(formerly the Higher Education Funding Council) funds and regulates higher education provision in England.

Department for Education

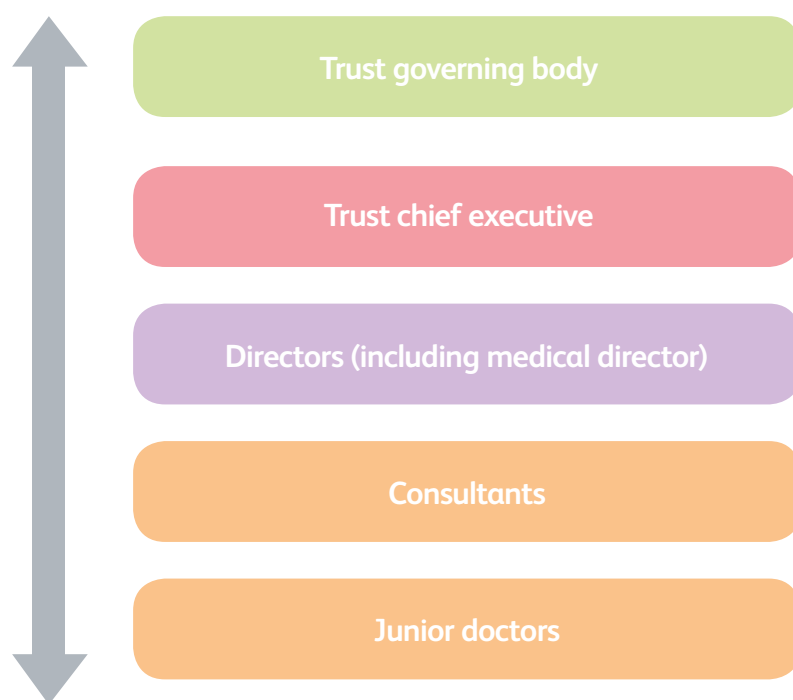
is the lead government department with responsibility for education policy.



Decision making in trusts

NHS trusts have similar internal leadership and management structures, with all trusts having a governing body. The chief executive and the medical director are two of the executive level individuals who are able to effect change locally. The RCP has a range of resources, including our [Quality Improvement Programme](#), improving [teams resources](#) and our [membership actions](#) to support doctors to create change.

Trust decision making



Trust governing bodies

are responsible for setting the strategy and vision for the trust and holding the CEO and directors to account.

Trust chief executives

are responsible for ensuring that the organisation works in accordance with national policy and public service values, and maintains financial stewardships, as well as being accountable for clinical governance and partnerships.

Trust chief executives come from a range of backgrounds; some are qualified medical professionals, others have worked in NHS management, and some come from outside the NHS.

Trust medical directors

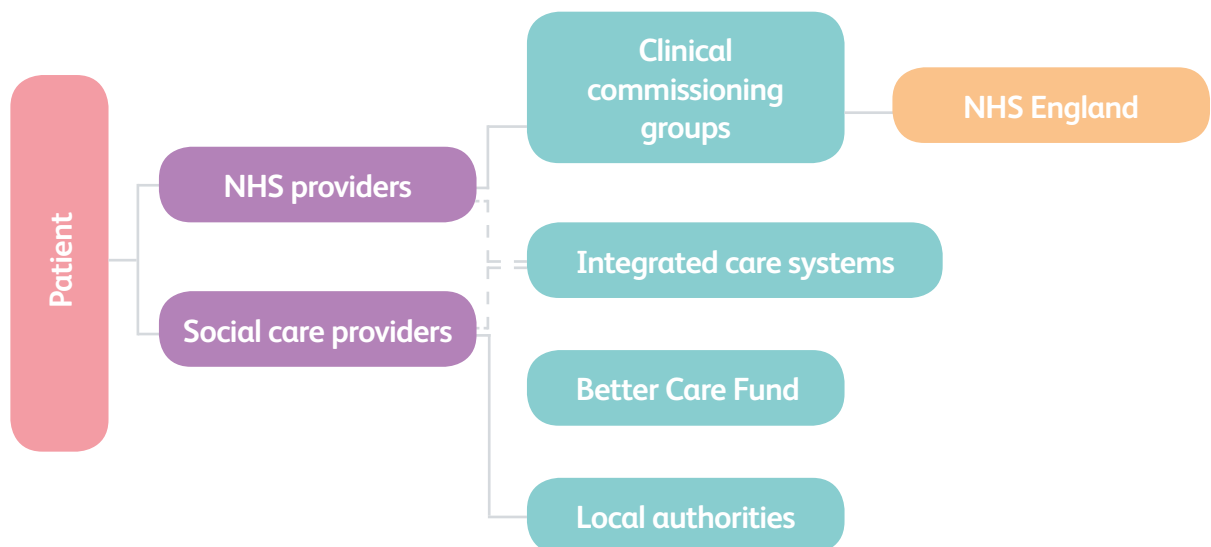
are responsible for ensuring the delivery of high-quality care for patients and setting the high standards for clinical practice and governance. They are also responsible for the appropriate skillmix in the medical workforce and for ensuring patient safety.

Adult social care decision making

The provision of adult social care is currently the responsibility of local authorities. Funding for social care is complex; adult social care is not free for everyone. Patients are assessed by local authority social services to identify needs and funding options. Local authorities normally only pay for packages of care for adults identified as having high needs and limited means for funding their care.

Publicly funded adult social care is primarily funded through local government; the government have ring-fenced additional funding, including the Better Care Fund which seeks to join up health and care services. Sustainability and transformation partnerships are seeking to improve joined up health and social care to help reduce delayed transfers of care and ensure that patients are receiving care in the best location for their needs.

Adult social care decision making



Better Care Fund

is a programme designed to span both the NHS and local government, which seeks to join up health and care services.

Social care providers

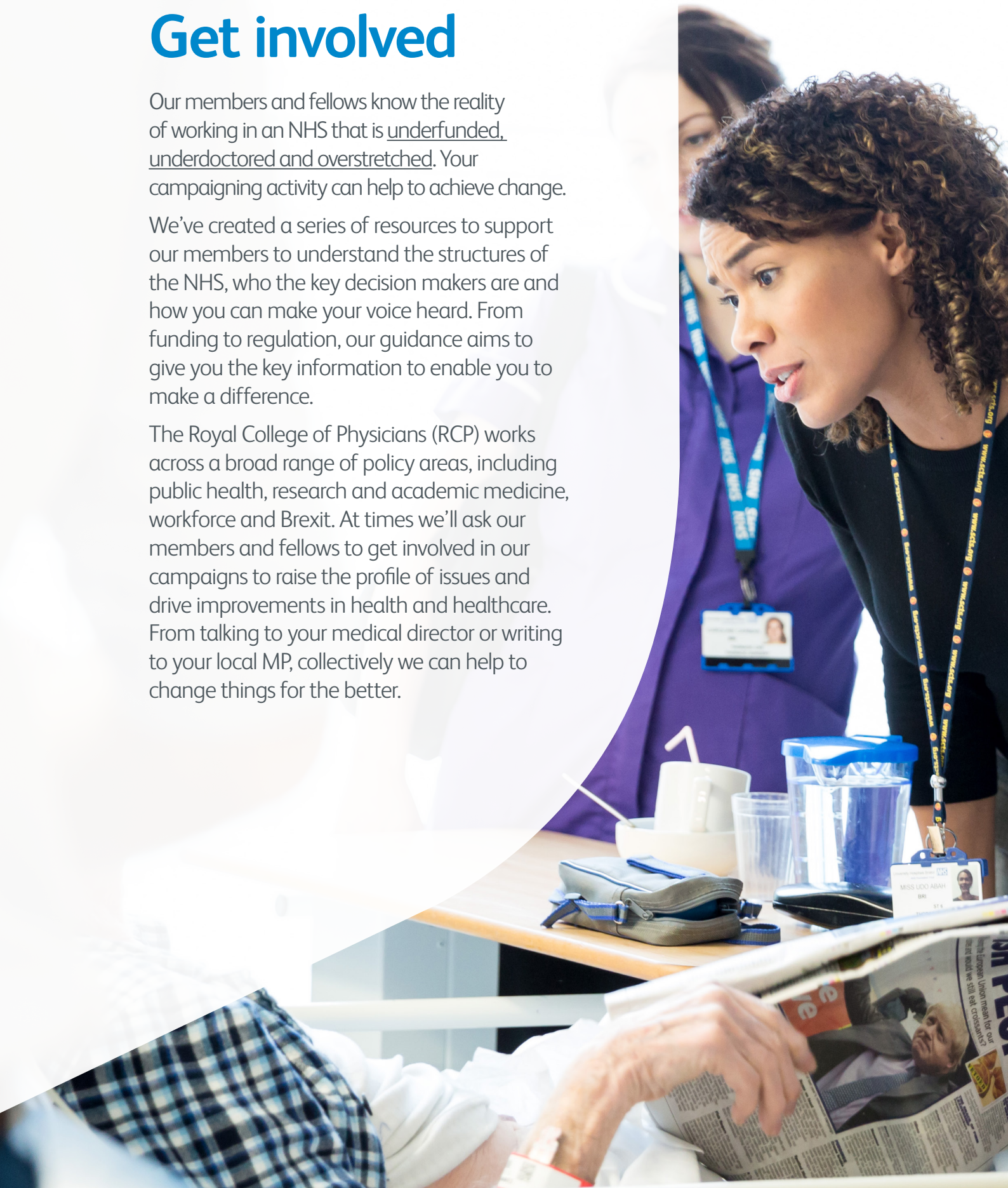
provide social work, personal care, protection or social support services to children or adults in need or at risk, or adults with needs arising from illness, disability, old age or poverty.

Get involved

Our members and fellows know the reality of working in an NHS that is underfunded, underdoctored and overstretched. Your campaigning activity can help to achieve change.

We've created a series of resources to support our members to understand the structures of the NHS, who the key decision makers are and how you can make your voice heard. From funding to regulation, our guidance aims to give you the key information to enable you to make a difference.

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) works across a broad range of policy areas, including public health, research and academic medicine, workforce and Brexit. At times we'll ask our members and fellows to get involved in our campaigns to raise the profile of issues and drive improvements in health and healthcare. From talking to your medical director or writing to your local MP, collectively we can help to change things for the better.



About the RCP

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) plays a leading role in the delivery of high quality patientcare by setting standards of medical practice and promoting clinical excellence. We provide physicians in over 30 medical specialties with education, training and support throughout their careers.

As an independent charity representing more than 34,000 fellows and members worldwide, the RCP advises and works with government, patients, allied health professionals and the public to improve health and healthcare.

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