

Information Pack: Macmillan Q Lab

How can we collectively reimagine cancer care closer to home?

Hosted by



In partnership

MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT



Welcome

Macmillan Cancer Support is proud to be partnering with the Q community, hosted by the NHS Alliance, to deliver an innovation Lab. The Macmillan Q Lab brings together people from local health and care services and communities across the UK to come up with solutions to one big question:
How might we collectively reimagine holistic cancer care closer to home?

Join us to shape solutions that could make cancer care fairer for people living with cancer across the UK.

Read on to find out more about:

- The topic we will explore
- How Macmillan Q Lab works
- The benefits and impact of joining the innovation lab
- If Macmillan Q Lab is right for you
- The different ways you can participate in the Lab
- The application process and timeline

Our question: "How can we collectively reimagine holistic cancer care closer to home?"

Current models of cancer care often fail to meet people's needs, and some communities are affected much more than others. By shifting to being neighbourhood-led, we can design support that feels more joined up, supportive and easier to access, close to where people live.

To do this well, we need to invest in relational ways of working that treat communities as equal partners that recognise their strengths, relationships and challenges.

With growing recognition and policy ambition to move cancer care closer to home, Neighbourhood-led health has emerged as a critical opportunity to deliver more equitable, personalised and coordinated care.

It reflects an understanding that better outcomes and experiences will not be achieved through hospital and specialist services alone but through transformational approaches rooted in place.

This programme focuses on addressing power imbalances, strengthening trust and understanding what it takes to convene across different expertise and sectors.

By creating spaces where lived, learned and practice experience carry equal weight, partners will be enabled to move beyond organisational silos and share accountability to shape cancer outcomes and co-design locally-led solutions. Through collaborative approaches, we can turn the idea of 'care closer to home' into real practical change for people living with cancer.

Who are Q?

Everyone should have access to high quality health care. Right now, they don't. We know there are thousands of people working hard to change this. But without connections between them, we lose ideas and energy needed to solve the complex challenges we face. In the Q community, we learn, share and collaborate to address pressing health system challenges.

One of the funded programmes we design and deliver is Q Labs, an innovation and improvement accelerator. By sharing insight, skills, and ideas widely, we create the culture and conditions for improvement efforts to succeed.

Together, we make faster progress to improve health and care for everyone, every day.

Visit us online: q.thenhsalliance.org

Email us: Q@thenhsalliance.org



Who are Macmillan?

Macmillan Cancer Support has spent more than 100 years helping people living with cancer. We know that cancer can disrupt your whole life. And it can be made worse simply because of who you are and where you live.

But we're here to change that.

The number of people diagnosed with cancer is growing, and every one of them needs the best support to meet their unique needs.

That's why we'll do whatever it takes to help everyone living with cancer across the UK get the support they need right now and transform cancer care for everyone who will be diagnosed in the future.

Visit the Macmillan Q Lab page: [Macmillan Q Lab | Macmillan Cancer Support](#)

Email us: qlabmacmillan@macmillan.org.uk



What is Q Lab?

Q Labs support people working across health and care to experiment and develop successful solutions to complex problems. We give you the skills, support, and funding, to implement your ideas in practice.

Stage 1 Discovery and Ideation (9 months)

- The programme supports teams to explore the problem, design ideas and test early prototypes, with £75,000 to support you.
- Workshops guide you through each phase of the design process, alongside facilitated peer learning and coaching.
- We bring individual people in to support teams in workshops, lend expertise and be 'critical friends' to build teams' projects.

Stage 2 Implementation (12 months)

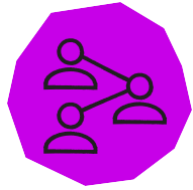
- Teams who successfully test prototypes are then invited to apply for further funding of £200,000 to implement solutions into real-life settings.

An **idea** can relate to processes or tools, patient facing or for staff.

A **prototype** is designed to test the feasibility of the intervention

Test in practice: feedback on the concept

What does the Lab involve?



Build teams
December 2026

Phase description

Onboard teams and develop relationships with each other and Q Lab teams.

What we will achieve

- Set out how we will work together.

Key dates

Welcome session
8 Dec 2026
Online



Research and discovery
Jan – March 27

Develop understanding of the problem.

- Research the topic to deepen understanding.
- Share learning.

Workshop 1
27 Jan 2027
In person

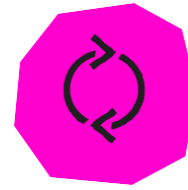


Define and refine
April – May 27

Analyse and make sense of research findings.

- Identify opportunities for change.
- Prioritise areas of focus.

Workshop 2
6 April 2027
Online

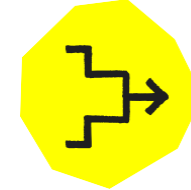


Develop and test
June – Aug 27

Generate ideas for change and create plans to test ideas in practice.

- Develop testing plans for prototypes.

Workshop 3
16 June 2027
In person



Distil and share
Sep 27

Develop plans for implementation.

- Undertake early-stage testing.
- Communicate and share learnings.

Workshop 4
14 September 2027
Online



Implementation
Nov 2027 - Oct 2028

Teams that reach proof-of-concept stage are invited to apply for grant funding to support testing for a further 12 months.

What kind of impact can the Lab have?

Previous participants said:

Space to experiment

“That lack of competition and that feeling of collaboration was really quite a breath of fresh air... there was that feeling of everyone in it together pulling everyone along”

Benefits for whole organisation problem solving

“From an organisational perspective I think it was quite transformative... in terms of how we approach future projects, the engagement that we did with participants, the influence it had on other pieces of work that we led and the inclusion of mental health within those projects.”

Diverse perspectives

“I really welcomed the views and experience of others trying to solve a similar challenge or problem.”

Increased confidence and skills

“Working with Q Lab has built the confidence and the skills and the knowledge and all those sorts of things to really be able to increase the speed of change.”

Lab case study 2025

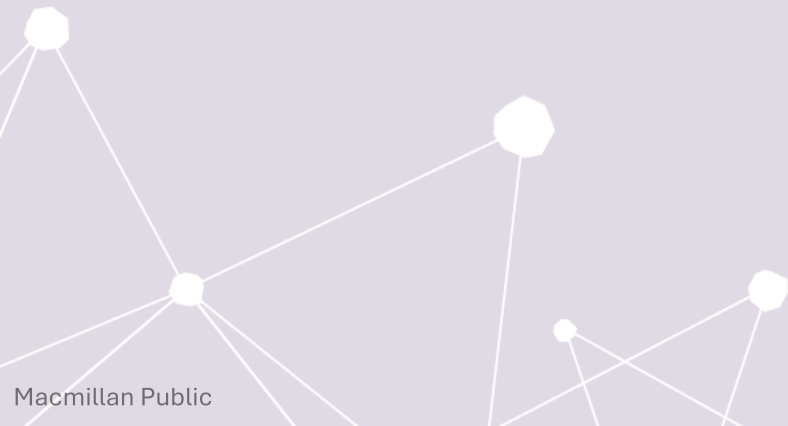
Urology care pathways, Birmingham Integrated Care System

- Lab participants understood root causes of delays
- Piloted new care model: consultants in primary care with access to full GP record
- Over 60% patients managed without referral
- 96% of patients were satisfied with the new service
- Local and national commissioning interest

Read the full case study on [the Q community site](#).

Participating in Macmillan Q Lab

The experience, benefits and application process for our innovation lab.



Is the Lab for me?

Joining a Lab isn't about having a specific expertise: it is all about mindset and focus.

Whether you join as part of a team or as an individual, we're looking for people and organisations who are

- Highly motivated by the topic of neighbourhood-led cancer care, or an element of bringing cancer care closer to home.
- Curious, open to new ways of thinking, and willing to challenge the status quo.
- Have a desire and energy to work collaboratively.
- Believe that thinking collectively across systems, regions, and teams will help your work.
- Teams that can commit to working on this topic from December 2026 - September 2027.

For teams:

- You want to develop and test practical ideas that could improve cancer care.
- You know that upfront funding will support your participation in the Lab, and the ability for your organisation to implement new ideas.

How you can participate

As a team

- We are looking for 4-6 teams to take part, from across the UK.
- Teams are made up of people from different organisations working together.
- They must include:
At least one community organisation
At least one public sector organisation
- Teams may include more than two organisations, and collaborations that include organisations outside of the public and third sector.
- You will also work meaningfully alongside people with lived experience.

As an individual

- We are looking for 15-18 people to take part.
- Individual contributors join the workshops to offer expertise and act as critical friends to the system teams.
- Expertise can be lived experience, someone who has been affected by cancer, either directly, or you are a carer for a family member or friend.
- You may have expertise from working in a grassroots organisation, or in participatory research, community engagement, data and insight, evaluation and/or policy.
- You are passionate about the topic, want to learn new innovation and collaboration skills, and willing and able to help teams.

Both roles are equally valued and create diversity of people and range of experiences who are committed to addressing the challenge

Expectations and benefits

As a team

- We expect that each team member will need to spend 3-5 days a month (depending on individual role within the team).
- Receive bespoke coaching from the Q Lab team to support them try new tools and methods in practice.
- Gain new skills and confidence with applying social innovation techniques.
- Develop and test real solutions to move care closer to home.
- Gain deeper knowledge of the problem at the local level and connect this to the national context.
- Space and dedicated support to experiment and develop ideas to improve cancer care.

As an individual

- Ideally be able to participate in Lab related activities approximately one day a month.
- Use your personal experience to benefit others.
- Will gain new skills and confidence in using tools and methods.
- Take back learning to your own organisations or community.
- Share expertise to support moving cancer care closer to home.
- Links to wider Q, NHS Alliance and Macmillan networks.

Funding for participation

As a team

- Teams will receive £75,000 for the initial 9 month discovery and ideation phase.
- The host organisation distributes funds to partner organisations, reimburses people with lived experience and grassroots organisations.

As an individual

- All individual contributors will have reasonable expenses paid, including hotels and travel to in-person workshops.
- People with lived experience, carers, and patient voices will be paid for their time. They will receive £1000, split into two payments. For any full-day workshops (either online or in person) attended they will also receive £185. All payments will be received as gift cards.
- Professionals who engage as contributors will not be paid. They will receive CPD certification.

Joining the Lab

As a team

We recommend that each team includes the following roles, some of which could be combined:

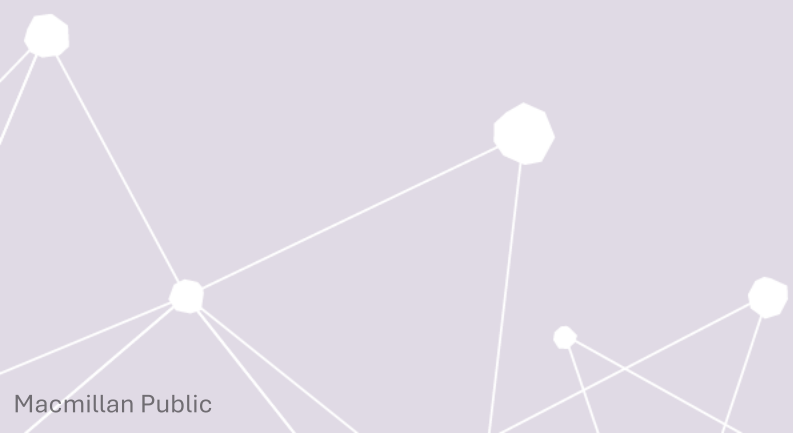
- Senior leader sponsorship who can help make the case for this work, and has the position and network to influence the system.
- Project manager or team lead who can build a team, lead the work and co-ordinate involvement.
- Strategic lead who can provide direction, make connections, consider sustainability, and how to spread the ideas developed.
- Communications support to share learning within your organisation, Macmillan, the Q community and wider networks.

Teams are made up of community organisations and public sector organisations working together to bring cancer care closer to home.

Teams will work with people with lived experience of cancer or those caring for people who have cancer as part of Lab activities.

- Although it is not essential, it is desirable to have people with lived experience of cancer, or carers of loved ones who have cancer, to be part of your team.
- We particularly encourage the involvement of people from ethnically diverse communities, disabled people, LGBTQ+ people, and those living with other long-term conditions.

Applying to Macmillan Q Lab



How we will assess team applications

There is a written application where you will be asked to include:

- Information about which organisations are applying with you. You need a named team who will be involved from December 2026 to September 2027.
- A host organisation who can coordinate the funds to other organisations and individuals involved.
- What roles you have in your team.
- Your current work relating to neighbourhood health and cancer care.
- How your team will have the ability to enact change within the system.

What your team need to demonstrate:

- Readiness for collaboration across organisations and sectors; a willingness to interrogate and work through power dynamics and work as equal partners.
- A commitment to working with communities who experience the poorest cancer outcomes, experiences and access, and how you will involve them in this work.
- Skills such as data and insight, and experience of participatory approaches is desirable.
- Operational responsibility to effectively create change.

If shortlisted: You will be invited to an informal conversation about your application. You will also need to provide further financial and due diligence materials.

How we will assess your individual expression of interest

Individuals will be asked to complete a written expression of interest where you will be asked to include:

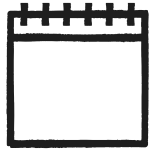
- Your interest in the topic, relevant experience, and what you might bring to the programme.
- You will also need to complete an EDI monitoring assessment to ensure we are recruiting diversely.

How we will select individual contributors:

- For experts by lived experience are recruiting to ensure that a diverse range of experiences are represented on the programme.
- For experts by profession, we are recruiting based on skill gaps within teams.



Application and onboarding timeline



Applications open

Apply to be a system team or individual contributor through our online forms.

Teams:
27 July

Individuals:
8 September



Information call

Join to ask any questions about the Lab.

All: 5 August
12-1pm



Applications close

Complete your application form or expression of interest;

Teams: 14
Sept, 11.45pm

Individuals:
7 Oct, 11.45pm



Application decisions

You will hear back with the results of your application, including feedback.

Teams:
20 October

Individuals:
By 9
November



Welcome call

Kick off session and welcome packs delivered.

All: 8 December

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I find out more?

If you need to contact us or have any questions about the Lab, get in touch at qlabmacmillan@macmillan.org.uk

Or have a look at our QLab Macmillan webpage which will give you the link to the application and more information.
<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/macmillan-funding-grants/q-lab>

We will hold a webinar for you to meet the team and ask any questions about the process and applications on 5th August 12-1pm. The link will be the webpage above.

Thank you

What types of community organisations are we looking for?

You can apply if you are a voluntary, community, faith or social enterprise (VCFSE) organisation based in the UK, including:

- Registered charity
- Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
- Community Interest Company (CIC)
- Company Limited by Guarantee
- Faith-based organisation
- Residents/tenants association and community groups

I want to participate, but I don't know what design thinking, systems thinking and social innovation methods are?

We will introduce all methods we use on the programme, so you can participate without any prior knowledge of these.

Thank you

Q is hosted by The NHS Alliance and supported by the Health Foundation and partners across the UK and Ireland.

Hosted by



In partnership



18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ
q@thenhsalliance.org
q.thenhsalliance.org