



Q theory of change

February 2025



Q is led by the Health Foundation
and supported by partners across
the UK and Ireland

How Q creates change

Our theory of change sets out how Q enables change effectively, sustainably, and collaboratively. It was refreshed in late 2022 to reflect the evidence and evaluation of Q. It builds on previous versions that were co-developed with members in the early days of Q.

Preventable harm and variation persist within the UK and Ireland and the challenge to achieve better quality health and care remains. Q was set up to tackle this challenge.

Our theory of change sets out our inputs and activities, the mechanisms that facilitate change and the outcomes and ultimate impact Q enables. This structure helps to clarify our approach to impact. But it necessarily simplifies the complex approach needed to create systemic change. We work in a way that embraces this complexity: we see the Q community as acting **within** the system, rather than on it, where our impact contributes to wider system change.

Inputs and activities

Q's focus is building a thriving community of people working to improve health and care. Key to our success is attracting thousands of people from different settings, roles and backgrounds and inspiring and engaging them in our multiple offers. We need members to commit their time and, where possible, to lead community activity.

Our work has a long-term focus. We have stable funding and an infrastructure that is co-designed and co-delivered with members and partners, and complements the work of improvement initiatives elsewhere. Q adapts to the changing context we operate in. As part of this we share and amplify learning with members, system leaders and others that responds to system needs and priorities.

Q offers a wide range of high-quality activities, or offers, including:

- opportunities to connect with others, both in-person and virtually
- events, workshops, visits and access to a range of learning resources
- convening those responsible for change across large systems, in supportive peer learning spaces

- innovative, participatory funding programmes, such as Q Exchange, that support members to develop improvement projects together
- a Lab network that tackles complex health and care challenges
- projects that generate and share actionable insights from across and beyond the Q community.

But Q is much more than a set of central offers. Our activities are supported by a digital platform that enables member-led activity and engagement at scale. Through this we support community-led activity and thriving smaller networks. These activities are all underpinned by communications and a recognised brand that inspires members to actively engage. Our reputation and member engagement helps secure buy-in from system leaders: this supports member participation and achieves Q's overall aims and objectives.

Mechanisms of change

What makes Q distinct is how the community activates people's expertise, experience, and energy. It is a place to participate with purpose, to make progress on individual, organisational and system needs. This is enabled through five interconnected mechanisms that are present across our offers:

- **connecting:** diversifying links across and beyond the community
- **supporting:** providing a home for people working to improve health and care, where different perspectives are valued
- **learning:** developing individually, collectively and passing on to others
- **sharing:** spreading knowledge and evidence
- **collaborating:** mobilising and delivering improvement together

Crucially, change is achieved by the five mechanisms interacting and reinforcing each other. Members will experience some of these mechanisms in action in other places too.

Routes to impact

Through these mechanisms we enable change by two mutually reinforcing routes to impact.

First, thousands of members are better equipped to bring about positive change in their work as individuals, in their teams and organisations.

Second, senior and system leaders are supported and influenced to create better conditions and cultures for improvement. The coming together of these two routes leads to both outcomes for members and outcomes for the health and care system.

Outcomes for members and their work

Equipping members to bring about change in their work means they can implement more effective and sustainable improvement on the ground.

As part of Q, members have:

- stronger relationships and collaborations
- more energy and inspiration to share and apply learning
- greater confidence and sense of agency to lead change
- better skills to put things into practice
- increased knowledge of what works and how to apply it in their context

This impact is also multiplied by members 'passing it on' and influencing the work of their teams, organisation and networks.

Outcomes for the health and care system

Wider system outcomes are achieved through Q's direct work at this level, which includes convening and influencing leaders and our insight work. But it is also supported by our work with individual members. At sufficient scale, this can add up to significant change at the collective and system level.

Through the two routes to impact there is:

- increased visibility and credibility of improvement
- enhanced improvement capabilities at every level of the system
- more compassionate and empowering leadership
- better spread and implementation of good ideas, evidence, and successful interventions
- a more joined-up system where a broader range of staff, patients and care recipients contribute fully.

This boosts the capacity of organisations and the system to achieve more effective and sustainable improvement work.

Ultimate impact

Through our inputs, activities, mechanisms, routes and outcomes at different levels, Q ultimately contributes to better health and care for people in the UK and Ireland. Together our members and partners enable care that is safer, more effective, more caring, well-led, sustainably resourced and more equitable.

Along with our established activities, over the coming years we will direct some of our work around core themes, aligned with identified member needs. They will allow our offers to achieve greater cumulative impact and make a clearer contribution to system priorities.

Our vision is for collaborative improvement that is shaped and owned by those who deliver and receive care. Within this, we will focus on three themes:

1. bringing improvement and digital together for sustainable change
2. reducing waits in a way that supports broader transformation goals
3. enabling integrated improvement across sectors

The theory of change sets out Q's long-term vision for change. We will continue to adapt to changing needs and context and what we learn from our members, our ongoing evaluations, and the wider evidence base.

How Q creates change

Inputs and activities

Q's focus is building and supporting a thriving community of people working to improve health and care through a range of activities

Attract thousands of people from across the UK and Ireland committed to improving health and care

Support community-led activity and thriving smaller networks through our digital platform

Engage people through our events, learning and development offers, participatory funding, Q lab network, actionable insights, and powerful stories of improvement

Retain a long-term focus: co-developed with members and partners and complementing the work of other improvement initiatives

Deliver with a commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion

Mechanisms of change

Our large, vibrant and diverse community activates people's experience and energy. It meets pressing health system challenges through five interconnected mechanisms

Connecting: diversifying links across and beyond the community

Supporting: providing a home for people working to improve health and care where different perspectives are valued

Learning: developing individually, collectively and passing on to others

Sharing: spreading knowledge and evidence

Collaborating: mobilising and delivering improvement together

Outcomes for individuals

Thousands of members are better equipped to bring about positive change in their work, with a multiplier effect across their organisations and networks

Stronger relationships and collaborations

More energy and inspiration to share and apply learning

Increased confidence and agency to lead change

Better skills to put things into practice

Greater knowledge of what works and how to apply it

Outcomes for the health and care system

Senior and system leaders are influenced to create the culture and conditions in which improvement efforts succeed

Increased visibility and credibility of improvement

Enhanced improvement capabilities at every level

More compassionate and empowering leadership

Better spread of ideas, evidence and successful interventions

A more joined-up system where all staff and patients contribute fully

The combined outcomes enable us to collaboratively accelerate the improvement of health and care

Ultimate impact

An embedded culture and practice of improvement that supports high quality care for all

High quality care is safe, effective, caring, well-led, sustainable and equitable