

2025 – 2028



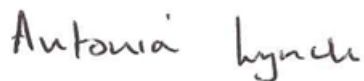
Welcome to the Royal United Hospitals Vulnerable People Strategy

Foreword

I am proud to present the Trust's first vulnerable people strategy, which represents our commitment to ensuring that every person receives the highest standard of care from our services. In an increasingly complex healthcare environment, it is essential that we prioritise the needs of those who are at greater risk, and that their safety, dignity, and well-being are at the forefront of our minds.

Our strategy is built on the principles of the trust's core values, and we are committed to working collaboratively with our patients and their support networks, and our partners in the wider community to continuously uphold these values and improve our services.

For the purpose of this strategy, and to align with current terminology, the term 'vulnerable people' is used. As part of our ongoing work with the people we care for, the people in our community and the people we work with we will continue to review our language.



Antonia Lynch
Chief Nursing Officer



Why have we made this strategy and who is it for?

We want to make sure vulnerable people get the right care and support to meet their needs when they are patients at the Royal United Hospitals (RUH) Bath NHS Foundation Trust. Delivering personalised care to improve outcomes continues to be our focus.

This strategy sets out the RUH's commitments to vulnerable people as individuals. We co-produced the strategy with patients, their families and carers, RUH staff, RUH partner organisations, people in our local community, as well as voluntary and community groups.

Co-production with the people we care for, the people in our community and the people we work with.

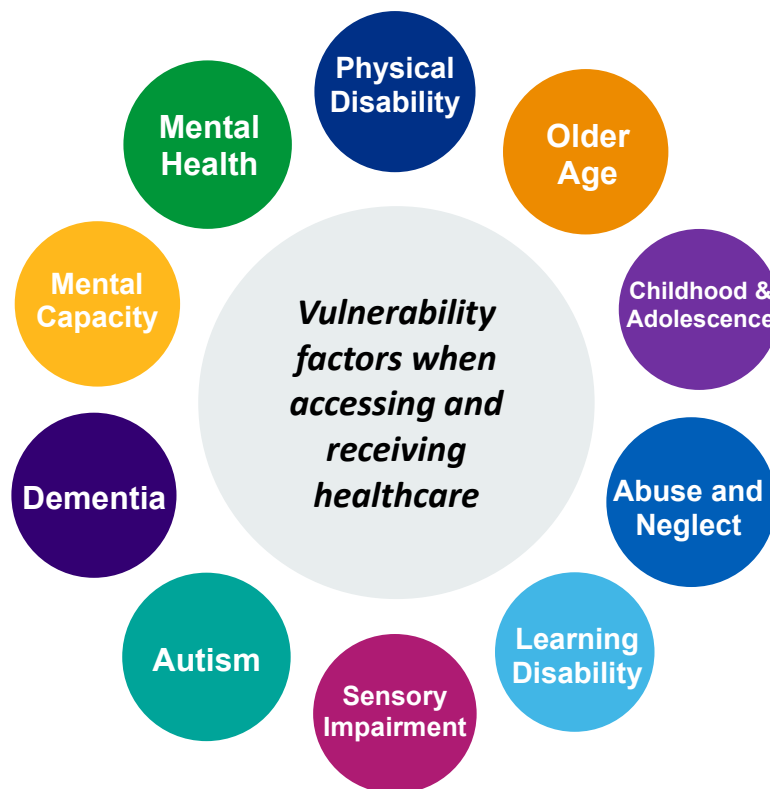


What 'vulnerable' means

The government definition of vulnerability is [a person] "in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, risk of abuse or neglect."

We wanted to better understand how this feels for the people we care for, so we listened to what the word 'vulnerable' means to people, what it feels like to be vulnerable, and what might make people feel vulnerable when receiving healthcare and treatment.

Anybody can go through periods of vulnerability depending on their circumstances, which affect people in different ways at different times. We know that people can be at their most vulnerable when in hospital or receiving care. We heard that there are some key factors that may make people feel more vulnerable when accessing healthcare. These are:



This helped us to define vulnerability for this strategy.

Our Definition

“A person who may need enhanced care and support when accessing and receiving healthcare and treatment”

What is most important to vulnerable people when accessing and receiving healthcare?

We heard what vulnerable people value most when receiving healthcare. There are a number of really important aspects, and these have helped us shape this strategy. The themes consistent throughout are:

- Healthcare staff speak clearly and provide written information when needed
- Healthcare staff ask about individual communication needs and tailor their interactions accordingly
- Sharing decision-making about care and treatment, including family and carers, advocate, as required
- If a person lacks capacity to make a particular decision at the time the decision needs to be made, make sure all actions and decisions are in the person's best interests
- Healthcare staff show empathy and compassion
- People, their families and carers feel listened to and understood
- Healthcare staff are aware of the impact sensory overload (such as lights, noise and smells) can have, and make efforts to reduce these where possible
- People are given enough time to process information
- Healthcare staff read relevant medical records before appointments, so that the person doesn't have to keep repeating their story
- Healthcare staff check with the person, family, friend, or carer that they've understood what has been communicated
- Care is joined up across different services
- Healthcare staff understand and support individual accessibility requirements

More detail on each aspect can be found in the appendix.

From what people have told us, we identified three ambitions:



These are aligned to our Trust values of 'Everyone Matters, Working Together, Making a Difference'.

To achieve our three ambitions, we have four goals:

- To widen access to healthcare services for vulnerable people (Everyone Matters)
- To provide person-centred healthcare for everyone (Making a Difference)

- To listen to vulnerable people, their families and carers, and be responsive (Working Together)
- To use feedback to identify opportunities for quality improvement to ensure our services meet the individual needs of, and the best possible outcomes for, vulnerable people (Working Together. Making a Difference)

How will we achieve our goals?



We will build on the positive work already happening, while recognising and acting on what more can be done to continue to improve our services for vulnerable people. We will broaden our approach to make it easier for vulnerable people's voices to be heard. Staff will be trained to understand vulnerabilities and needs, and work in partnership with vulnerable people and their families/carers and community partners to ensure the best possible patient experience and outcomes.

Our Trust Values underpin the delivery of this strategy, ensuring we work together with the people we care for and their loved ones, the people in our community and the people we work with.

How will we know that we have achieved our goals and how will we measure them?

We will know we have made a difference by the quality and impact of the care and support we deliver. We will know this by hearing the experiences of vulnerable people and their families/carers, feedback from staff and partner organisations, and reviewing our performance measures and quantitative data.

We will seek and listen to vulnerable people and their families/carers' experiences and voices to create opportunities to shape services and ensure equitable access to our services.

	Enhanced Care and Support Team	Specialist training for staff specific to people and vulnerabilities	Personalised care
How will we measure the success?	Quality, safety, and clinical effectiveness.	Patient safety. Prevention, early diagnosis and intervention. Reduced length of stay. Reduction in preventable admissions.	Improved quality and patient experience and outcomes. People engaged in decisions about their care. Reasonable adjustments made and support provided to help people make informed decisions about their care and treatment options.
What is the impact?	People who require enhanced care have their needs met through direct access to specialised support.	Highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce who are confident in supporting with enhanced care requirements and providing person-centred care.	A workforce with behaviours, skills and competencies that support and drive person-centred approaches to wellbeing, prevention, care and support. All involved in care and treatment are working together collaboratively in a person-centred way with patients and with each other.
Improved experience and outcomes for people requiring enhanced care and support, and reduced health inequalities.			

**The above is not exhaustive. Key Performance Indicators/SMART measurables will be included in, and delivered through, the Vulnerable People Strategy Delivery Group.*

How will vulnerable people and their family/carers see and feel the impact of our ambitions?

When vulnerable people and their families/carers tell us they:

- Feel welcome and safe at the RUH
- Feel included and involved, and valued for who they are
- Have equal access to our services and their views are considered
- Are given opportunities to discuss their needs and preferences
- Are engaged in their own care and this helped them to actively manage their health and wellbeing
- Are provided with care and support based on their needs and what matters most to them

The RUH Trust Strategy

In delivering the Vulnerable People Strategy, we aim to live our Trust vision and values every day.



Our ambition is to consistently deliver the highest-quality person-centred care by listening and acting on what matters most to vulnerable people and their loved ones, to ensure their best possible outcomes. We will demonstrate our values through nurturing a culture of compassion and kindness, taking care of staff and providing opportunities to develop knowledge and skills in caring for vulnerable people. We will

continue to collaborate and work with our partners to widen access to healthcare services for vulnerable people, provide support, discuss care and treatment together, and planning for preventative care, early intervention and supported discharge.

The Vulnerable People Strategy Delivery Group will drive the delivery of the Vulnerable People Strategy, co-producing workstreams with experts by experience.

Future Conversations

We have worked in partnership with the people in our community to develop this strategy. We are committed to listening and continually learning. Our ambition is to continue on our improvement journey and to collaborate with the people we care for, the people in our community and the people we work with through engagement activities that will shape future service delivery.

We will continue to work with partners in prioritising and embedding whole-system action and the Core20PLUS5 approach to reduce health inequalities. We will join a wider range of external engagement groups. We will co-design and co-create services with underrepresented people and groups to continue to shape our services, and to provide equitable healthcare for everyone.

We will further develop our understanding of ‘vulnerabilities’, as we know that people are not always characteristically vulnerable, and that situations and environments can make people vulnerable. This will inform ongoing development of our services and training.

Some people told us they don’t like being considered as ‘vulnerable’. We will have more conversations with patients and their families/carers to better understand language used and whether we need to make any changes to our language to ensure a strengths-based approach.

Thank you to everyone who talked with us and developed the Vulnerable People Strategy in partnership.

There is an easy read version and an audio transcription of this strategy.

This strategy will be made available on request in large print, braille, and for a specific language. Please contact:

Email: ruh-tr.psct@nhs.net

Phone: 01225 825656

References

Vulnerabilities: applying All Our Health Guidance - Published 29 March 2022
<https://www.gov.uk/>

APPENDIX

What is important to vulnerable people when accessing and receiving healthcare?

This is what we've heard from people during our conversations.

Older People

- Healthcare staff speak clearly, they provide written information when needed and write down points to take away
- Healthcare staff ask about individual communication needs. Remember, not all people have computers and mobile phones, so using printed letters is important
- Sharing decision-making about care and treatment, including family and carers if needed
- Having good links between primary and secondary care. This means GPs, community services and the RUH are sharing relevant information when making referrals and feeding back after appointments
- Healthcare staff show empathy and compassion

Children and Young People

- Feeling listened to and understood
- Healthcare staff listen to the child and parent/carer as well as observe the child
- Use creative ways to engage children and talk directly with young people. In either case, not using long words when it can be said simply
- Sharing information and decisions with parents and carers, and children and young people when appropriate
- A smooth transition of care from children's healthcare to adults' healthcare, and helping the young person and their family to prepare
- For children and young people with special educational needs to have equal and fair access to healthcare services
- An accessible environment
- A family-friendly environment, by providing toys and activities for children and young people

People with Learning Disabilities

- Clear signage with easy-to-understand pictures and words
- Healthcare staff use easy to understand words and speak clearly. Healthcare staff check that what's been said has been understood
- Communicate in a way that individuals understand, for example Makaton signing, drawings, or easy read leaflets
- Making decisions together. This means communicating with the person and deciding together about tests, care and treatment. Including the person's parent/carer/family/friend if needed to help make the decision
- Staff have good knowledge and awareness about learning disabilities
- People with a learning disability have equal access to healthcare
- People with a learning disability have enough time to talk to healthcare staff and ask questions, which may mean having longer appointments

Autistic People

- Healthcare staff are aware of the impact sensory overload (such as lights, noise, and smells) can have, and make efforts to reduce these where possible
- Ask the person for their Hospital Passport and have it accessible
- Healthcare staff keep their language clear and brief, and check that what's been said has been understood
- Healthcare staff have an awareness and understanding of the impact of literal language, and using words that may have multiple meanings
- Avoid metaphors, idioms, and small talk
- Healthcare professionals ask the person what communication is best for them
- People are given enough time to process information
- It's important to let the person know if appointments are running late and keep them updated if things change

People with Physical Disabilities

- Wheelchairs are available in the main entrances
- Accessible changing spaces
- Blue badge parking spaces
- Drop off area at the main entrances
- Visible and clear signage around the hospital
- Accessible pavement routes for wheelchairs around the hospital site, including from the car parks to the buildings

- Automatic doors
- Working lifts
- Accessible reception areas in both Outpatient and Inpatient areas
- Healthcare staff to read the person's medical history ahead of each appointment to avoid repeating the whole story and to stop asking unnecessary questions

People with Mental Health Needs

- Healthcare staff listen and don't make assumptions
- Healthcare staff are kind, compassionate, and understand the person is suffering. They help the person and try to understand their feelings
- Healthcare staff understand mental health needs
- Healthcare staff read relevant medical records before the appointment so that the person doesn't have to keep repeating their story
- Services work together and keep the person at the centre of their care
- Services work together so that there is crisis support available

People who lack mental capacity to make a particular decision at a particular time

- Don't assume people lack capacity simply because their communication needs are different
- Wherever possible, do everything to help people to make their own decisions
- If healthcare staff make a decision for a person who does not have capacity to make a decision at a particular time, make sure it is in the person's best interests

People suffering or likely to suffer abuse and neglect

- All staff having an awareness of safeguarding children, young people and adults
- All staff being able to understand and recognise signs of abuse and neglect, and know what to do

People Living with Dementia

- Do not infantilise the person living with dementia. Do not assume they cannot understand or lack capacity
- Ask the person and/or family/carer for their This is Me document and keep at hand to help healthcare staff support the person living with dementia
- Person-centred care
- Treat with dignity, kindness and respect
- “No decision about me without me”, communication is key. Sometimes health professionals don’t communicate key diagnoses or plans to the person living with dementia
- Involve carers as much as possible in the “Triangle of care”
- Good communication between different services e.g. primary and secondary care and social services
- Reasonable adjustments: easy read leaflets/ information, flexible visiting, flexible appointment times, making sure carers can come into appointments with you and are copied into letters

People with Sensory Impairments – Hearing and Sight

- Minimising background noise and providing a quiet area
- Healthcare staff speak clearly and look at the person they are speaking with. Where possible, masks don’t cover their mouth and their hands aren’t in the way for lip reading
- Speak slower than in general conversation when covering important information
- Healthcare staff check with the person, family or carer that they’ve understood what has been communicated
- Audio and visual announcements are offered in waiting areas as appropriate
- Large print and braille information is available
- Leaflets are available to view and download from the website in an accessible format
- People are shown where everything is on the ward