

Northern Cancer Voices – Teeside Pilot

Funding GDN(s)	Northern Gas Networks
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	Role of GDN(s) N/A
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Total cost (£k)	*detailed separately
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	*detailed separately

1. Problem(s)

One in 2 people will be impacted by a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime and being able to cope with such a diagnosis whilst maintaining their health and wellbeing will be difficult. Cancer is a genetic disease mostly caused by damage to genes caused by smoking, alcohol, obesity, and sunlight.

There are circa 860 patients in treatment at the moment in the North East, and this is expected to grow. Cancer patients are vulnerable as the diagnosis of cancer is an extremely stressful time for the patient and their family. Their life is turned upside down and they may lose all their financial support overnight. Numerous practical difficulties immediately present themselves and a stressed patient is likely to have a worse outcome.

The cancer targets set by NHS and the National Cancer teams are very specific and limited. They are totally dependent on the public at large to come forward for screening, identifying signs of cancer early and to visit a GP. It is also important that those in hardship and receiving a cancer diagnosis have the tools and equipment necessary to maintain any equipment they may have and keeping themselves warm at home is critical.

Solution

Northern Cancer Voices (NCV) aim to improve the experience of cancer patients by increasing patient participation in their communities and strengthening the network of patient and carer groups in the region whilst promoting awareness of NGN services. It is important that NCV promote these services to those in hardship and receiving a cancer diagnosis as this positive support will be seen as a bit of a lifeline and relieve stress. NCV can reach parts of the community that are difficult to reach and identify any areas where support might make a difference, for example to ensure fewer condemned appliances are being used in the homes of cancer patients. They aim to understand why people are not attending cancer appointments and also promote the benefits of identifying signs and symptoms to provide an earlier diagnosis. Recent feedback has informed us that many vulnerable patients are not aware of their treatment pathway nor of many of the benefits they are entitled to. NCV will signpost to partner organisations to resolve this issue. Cancer patients may also have additional energy needs during their cancer pathway and may have medical equipment in their home.

2. Scope and Objectives

Teesside Engagement and Awareness – Pilot Project, 3 months

- Provide Structured/Measured monthly Patient and Customer Feedback
- Host events to meet with anyone impacted by a cancer diagnosis within North and South Tees.
- Engage with the community and record their experiences utilising online survey tool. Build NGN questions into tool to address specific areas eg energy debt.

- Join events with Chinese, Bangladeshi, BAME, LGBTQ+, high poverty, high cancer instances
- Improve appointment attendance by understanding reasons for non-attendance.
- Promote NGN services giving information on replacement of old equipment such as boilers and carbon monoxide trackers into homes.

Promote the ambition of the VCMA Strategy, the NHS Long Term Plan and Cancer Programme through improving the quality of services, reducing inequalities and promoting innovation. High quality and complete patient level data linked to clinical and patient outcomes is required to fulfil these duties. Keeping patients warm and 'healthy' as they undertake their cancer journey and remove any stress they may have about heating costs.

2.1 The objectives of this initiative are:

- To improve health and wellbeing
- To reduce fuel poverty
- To provide CO awareness and advice
- To increase awareness and registrations of the PSR

Service Improvement

- Collate information and create intelligence which can be shared with service providers and NGN to promote service improvement.
- Build effective relationships with providers to ensure the voices are heard within the communities they serve.

Community Networking

To empower people across Teesside to live healthier lives and be advocates of their own health, by spreading positive health messages in their communities and promoting early diagnosis of cancer, access to screening and NGN services.

Provide advice and information, raise awareness and recruit volunteers to networks in local areas

- Ensure that volunteers and research are representative of the community's they are in.
- Raise awareness and promote NGN services utilising survey tool
- Set up community support groups where previously no presence – e.g., Rural areas, access and language difficulties, poverty and deprivation, high lung cancer statistics
- Link to Macmillan and Northern Alliance programmes that have undertaken work with hard-to-reach communities i.e., fishing. To target Lung Health checks
- Train volunteers to deliver presentations, Shared learning across Teesside that facilitates healthier living. Recognise volunteers support needs.

- Develop cancer champions to help with the following:
 - To share positive health messages on social media and via our website.
 - To spread the messages within their own communities and networks through events, presentations, distribution of posters/leaflets etc
 - To raise awareness of cancer symptoms and NGN benefits
- Calculate social return on investment due to better awareness – ie less visits to GP's, less energy debt due to better signposting

2.2 Scope

People will be:

- more aware of symptoms of cancer and any unusual body changes
- feel more confident to visit their GP and discuss concerns.
- feel more encouraged to attend screening.
- be better informed about lifestyle choices to reduce their risk.
- will know where to get information and support.
- Know where to go with energy related questions and support.

3. Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA

This project qualifies under the criteria for VCMA funding, as it will support vulnerable customers who are living with or impacted by a cancer diagnosis across the Teesside locality, addressing fuel poverty as well as raising awareness of CO and the PSR. As the project has mental wellbeing and financial hardship themes, it aligns with NGN'S Vulnerability Strategy.

There will be no collaboration from other GDN's nor other funded sources.

3.1 Eligibility criteria

- This project has a positive SROI
- This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the Financial hardship theme and the wider vulnerability categories of:
 - Financial hardship
 - Socio-demographic
 - Cultural
 - Temporary vulnerability
 - Mental Wellbeing themes
 - Medically Dependent on Energy

- Has defined outcomes as required
- Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms

4. Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

Within the Northern Gas Networks region, we serve 2.7 million gas-using households. The socio-economic characteristics of our region mean that we operate in many communities that are amongst the most economically deprived in the whole country. This was a key factor in our prioritising engagement with vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups of customers, telling them about our services, about what we do and how we could improve.

Each year, we undertake analysis of all the insight we've heard in the previous year to prioritise those issues our stakeholders most want to engage on. Over the past 12-18 months, we've done this in a number of ways.

4.1 Customers in Vulnerable Situations (CIVS) Workshops

Asking our stakeholders what's important – using our wide range of engagement mechanisms from strategic workshops to customer perceptions, we asked stakeholders to prioritise what is most important to them. Since 2019 we've held regular workshops with our stakeholders, on the subject of Customers In Vulnerable Situations (CIVS). This ensures that we are well informed to address the needs of customers across our network and through collaborative projects.

Stakeholder engagement throughout 2022, told us that fuel poverty and the choice between heating and eating is becoming more prevalent. The energy and cost of living crises have further compounded this issue. This project provides a solution to helping those customers who are financially struggling and need extra help to address energy affordability. The project fully aligns with the need to help vulnerable customers in fuel poverty.

Recent social indicator mapping research carried out in June 2022, indicated that Bradford, Hull, Scarborough, South Tyneside, and Sunderland were the top five places, to emerge as having the greatest concentration of vulnerabilities within NGN's network. This was based on a combination of the following vulnerability factors:

- Fuel poverty
- Benefit claims
- No qualifications
- Long term health problem / disability

Our most recent stakeholder engagement during 2023 has informed us that financial hardship is still a key area of focus, alongside the health impacts associated with, or

exacerbated by, living in cold and damp homes. Stakeholders also told us that increasing capacity for support within services would be key to addressing the immediate and longer term impacts of fuel poverty and energy affordability. This project addresses this need and ensures additional capacity to support households who may be at risk, through a well-established and trusted advice service.

Each year we use our annual Customer Perceptions Research to understand the priorities of our customers. Amongst a set of general tracker questions i.e., same questions that are asked year on year, the evidence in the most recent research (March 2023), indicated that keeping bills as low as possible ranked more highly, than providing a safe and reliable supply of gas. This is a clear indication, as to how concerned customers are about the cost of energy and the subsequent impact this will have on other bills. Customers were also asked to prioritise the list of vulnerabilities listed below:

- Mental wellbeing
- Rurality
- Temporary vulnerability
- Physical challenges
- Financial Hardship

This was the order of priority from the customers surveyed:

- Financial Hardship
- Physical challenges
- Mental wellbeing
- Rurality
- Temporary vulnerability

Financial hardship continued to be the dimension of vulnerability that most customers prioritised, with more customers in the most recent survey selecting this as their top priority. Physical challenges were second, closely followed by Mental well-being third. Rurality and Temporary vulnerability were ranked fourth and fifth.

Very recent (Autumn 2023) Bespoke Vulnerability Stakeholder Mapping research identified categories of stakeholders that are hard to reach, this included:

- People living with a disability
- Senior citizens with long term conditions
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Mental health

Health conditions which are prevalent in the NGN region are:

- Cancer and chronic kidney disease
- Musculoskeletal conditions
- Respiratory
- Mental health

Through the research carried out, the findings show that the 5 original NGN vulnerability categories have now evolved to 10 categories. These are:

- Physical challenges, inclusive of communication issues, physical space

- Mental wellbeing
- Financial hardship
- Temporary vulnerability – including post hospital recovery and pregnancy / maternity
- Socio Demographic
- Household composition
- Rural Vulnerability
- Accessibility Including language
- Medical Dependant on Energy
- Cultural

4.2 Customer Engagement Group (CEG)

This group provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support our customers in vulnerable situations (CIVS). Checking we've got it right – using a range of engagement mechanisms to assess and challenge our response to stakeholder feedback, ensuring we are responding in the right way. This has offered us robust challenges into how we deal with customers in vulnerable situations which meets the needs of our stakeholders.

4.3 Vulnerability Strategy AAA Framework

Within our vulnerability strategy we have developed, with the help of our stakeholders, the 'AAA' framework. This helps us support our customers in vulnerable situations. Awareness, Accessibility and Action. By adapting this principles-based approach into our AAA framework, we will ensure that all customers are treated fairly and consistently. The themes of rural and financial vulnerability within the project, align to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy.

5. Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

To develop a formal structured process of feeding into NGN and trusts, the patient experience measured by new outcome metrics that can be captured in communities and tailored to audience. A structured method of raising awareness and uptake of NGN services with a framework for collaboration of customers, patients, carers, volunteers and professionals in Teesside with new support groups established as points of contact. Face to face sessions. Meetings / Events. Training Opportunities – Cancer Champion and NGN services awareness. To ensure clear and consistent messages are given by cancer champions so that customers know where and how to engage NGN for support. Helping patients to manage their own care by providing guidance freely available via the website and other in person and/or media channels. Encouraging more patients to attend screening appointments.

5.1 Outcomes

- Tailored Research and engagement for NGN.
- Patient and Customer Support.
- Thematic analysis of customer and patient surveys to support local improvement projects and understand energy needs of the customer base.
- Undertake investigations to see why patients are not attending or missing appointments e.g., can't afford fare and pay heating, cannot travel due to childcare, didn't understand translation of letter.
- Patients and customers are more aware of what they can get help with e.g., difficulty paying bills and energy spend when they are undergoing chemo or radiotherapy, and winter is approaching.
- Customer and Patient led opportunity areas for improvement removing the perception of a 'postcode-lottery for service and care.
- Shared learning of best practice to highlight possible expansion of project.
- More 'old for new' conversion of boilers and increased carbon monoxide tracker take up.
- Link to Warm Home Prescription programme

5.2 Success criteria

- Conduct 16 CO awareness sessions
- Deliver 16 cancer champion courses
- Engage with 3,200 customers
- 800 customers signed up to the PSR

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Healthworks will deliver cancer awareness and training programmes and generate/attend events.

Healthworks supports people of all ages to lead a healthier life; from the antenatal period, support with breastfeeding, being more active, eating healthily, giving up smoking, improving mobility and managing existing medical conditions.

They achieve this by providing information about health and health improvement, providing resources for local communities in order to improve understanding of health issues and to have access to information and enable them to make the best health choices for themselves, offering a range of preventative approaches with an emphasis on collaboration between different agencies and professional groups, promoting the health benefits of exercise, healthy eating and lifestyle changes and provide services aimed at reducing inequalities in health.

Healthworks objective is to preserve, protect and improve the health and life outcomes of communities across the North East region of England.

In 2021, they won a major national award for their work improving the physical and mental health of people across the North East of England. Following a rigorous selection and assessment process, Healthworks was chosen from more than 350 charities across the UK as one of the 10 winners of the 2021 GSK IMPACT Awards. This is a huge achievement for them, as the awards recognise the outstanding work of small and medium sized charities in improving health and wellbeing in communities across the UK.

7. Potential for new learning

Any learning will be shared with stakeholders, including GDN's, DNO's and water companies.

8. Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations

This project has a positive SROI return.

VCMA Project start and end date

January 2024 - June 2024

Geographic area

Teeside

Approved by

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Customer Experience Director