

Embracing change:



social care
institute for excellence

Harnessing the potential of innovation in social care

Through SCIE's leadership in the care sector, we believe innovation holds enormous potential to achieve positive changes in social care and improve people's lives.

Innovation can drive both efficiencies and better outcomes in social care. A broad term, 'innovation', encompasses new service models, emerging digital and assistive technologies, and even alternative providers and funding mechanisms.

The independent Casey Commission's root-and-branch review of England's adult social care system creates a unique opportunity to think differently about how we realise our ambition for a fairer care system.

We believe innovation, whether incremental, radical or disruptive, can play a significant role in achieving a better future for people who draw on care and support and their carers.



Actions for policymakers and social care leaders

SCIE urges policymakers and social care leaders to create the right conditions for innovation to flourish, spread and scale as part of the national strategy for social care reforms.

Both top-down and bottom-up support are needed for innovation to thrive, enabled by dedicated leadership, time and resources.

We are calling on national leaders to:

- ✓ build innovation into the fabric of policy reform, starting with co-production with people and communities. This will ensure people's insights and experiences are shaping priorities and embedded in the design and delivery of innovation
- ✓ incentivise the full cycle of innovation by taking a multi-year innovation fund approach and funding the infrastructure for generating, testing, sustaining and scaling the best ideas
- ✓ invest over several years to build capacity, skills and networks for innovation across local councils and care providers, including significant investment in digital support and guidance for commissioning innovation
- ✓ create a flexible regulatory space that enables a culture of testing and learning through innovation. Rather than aiming to eliminate risk from care, regulation should help providers and commissioners to recognise and manage them, creating space for new models of care to emerge.

SCIE's insights on innovation

SCIE has a long-standing commitment to supporting and evaluating innovation in adult social care. Our recent work includes:



supporting the Department of Health and Social Care's Accelerating Reform Fund (ARF), backing over 120 projects across England, with the majority of projects designed to support unpaid carers



supporting social care innovation networks that amplify bold thinking across the sector, including working with communities to sustain investment



evaluating digital technology in the home. Our Longitude Prize evaluation explores how digital technology can detect early signs of distress in people living with dementia, helping prevent crises and improving daily support.

Learning from the Accelerating Reform Fund (ARF)

SCIE's recent hands-on support for the local projects funded by the £42.6m ARF has helped us identify the challenges of introducing innovation in social care. Co-production was requested from all projects from the outset. Projects focused on scaling promising models, tackling health inequalities and supporting unpaid carers.

Our analysis and case studies offer solutions and powerful insights about how to start, sustain, spread and scale social care innovation.

Scan the QR code to read SCIE's full ARF report and explore the case studies.



What holds innovation back?

Despite incredible energy and creativity, innovation in adult social care is often stifled by structural barriers.



The sector is diverse, with services provided by a mix of independent and statutory providers of different sizes serving different needs.



There is uncertainty over who pays for innovation and who benefits.



Pressures on the workforce limits capacity for testing new approaches.



While many promising pilots exist, they often struggle to grow or spread without the right support.