

# Early evidence of the development of primary care networks in England: a rapid evaluation study

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## Plain English summary

Development of primary care networks

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## Plain English summary

Over the past 20 years, many general practitioners have been working more closely with other local practices to offer a wider range of services for patients. In July 2019, NHS England (now NHS England and Improvement) asked general practices to join together into primary care networks and use new funding to offer extra services to improve the health and well-being of local communities.

This research looked at how these networks were established, what they have achieved so far and what has helped or hindered progress. We were particularly interested in the experience of those involved in primary care networks in rural areas, and how networks fit in with other types of collaboration, including general practice federations and super-partnerships.

To do this, we first examined previous research that had sought to understand general practice groups. We then chose four primary care networks, in which we carried out interviews and a survey with staff, observed meetings, and reviewed reports and papers. The COVID-19 pandemic emerged during our study, which meant that we had to stop collecting information from sites earlier than expected.

This research revealed that the networks made good progress in their first 9 months, forming their new organisation, recruiting staff and preparing plans to start more services in future years. Although they made considerable progress, primary care networks also faced challenges in their first months, including how to ensure sufficient management support, some tension in trying to agree on the goals and direction of the networks, and concerns about excessive workload.

We concluded that primary care networks can help general practices run a wider range of services for their patients, and make changes that are needed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be important for government to give primary care networks the freedom to plan for what local people need, monitor carefully the progress made and ensure that the particular priorities of primary care networks in rural areas are taken into account.

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