

Health Inequalities in the West Midlands

In 2024, the West Midlands Cancer Alliance developed an 8-point Health Inequalities Plan, setting out clear actions to tackle unfair differences in cancer care and outcomes, and driving meaningful change so that every person, regardless of their background or circumstances, has the best chance of earlier diagnosis, effective treatment, and better survival

Cancer in the Criminal Justice System

Through our partnership with the Criminal Justice Service, we have made significant progress in reducing health inequalities by engaging directly with prison populations and developing pathways that support prevention, early diagnosis and care. Our key achievements include:

- **Engaging with 12 prisons:** building partnerships with healthcare teams to improve awareness, access and support for those at risk or affected by cancer.
- **Cancer Champions training:** equipping staff and prisoners to raise awareness of prevention, encourage screening uptake and spot symptoms earlier.
- **Promoting prevention:** supporting healthier choices such as stopping smoking, reducing alcohol use, improving diet, and increasing physical activity.
- **Screening and early diagnosis:** helping prison populations better understand and access national cancer screening programmes.
- **Model pathways of care:** designing consistent approaches so prisoners on a cancer journey get timely referral, treatment and follow-up care.
- **Equity in cancer care:** reducing health inequalities by ensuring prisoners have equal access to information, support and services.
- **Ongoing support:** ensuring continuity of care, emotional support, and planning for release for those diagnosed with cancer.

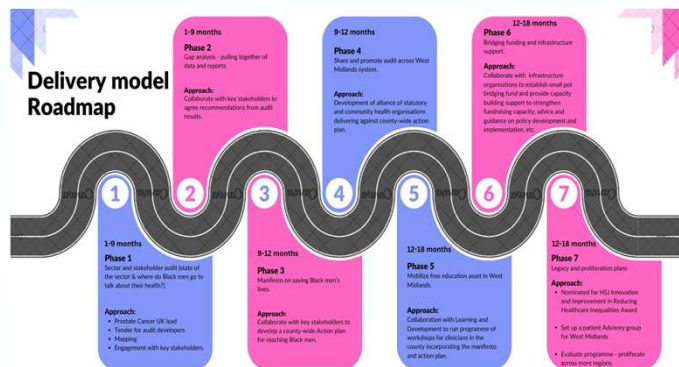
Learning Disabilities and Autism (LD&A)

A dedicated Task and Finish Group has been set up to improve cancer care for people with learning disabilities and autism. We are working across the system with a Lead GP to strengthen learning disability (LD) health checks, with a particular focus on supporting meaningful cancer screening conversations.

- **Reasonable Adjustment Flag:** rolled out in partnership with NHS England (NHSE) to ensure that important adjustments are flagged in patient records so individuals with LD&A receive the right support throughout their healthcare and cancer journey.
- **LD Health Check Survey:** achieved a high level of engagement from patients, carers, and professionals. The results provided valuable insights, leading to the development of a targeted action plan to strengthen cancer screening conversations within annual health checks.
- **Patient advocates with lived experience:** involving people with LD&A directly in shaping our work, ensuring that services are co-designed and reflect the real needs, preferences and experiences of patients.
- **'My Perfect Appointment':** creating a practical resource, co-designed with patients, to support healthcare professionals in tailoring appointments and communication. This improves understanding, builds trust and reduces anxiety for patients attending health checks and cancer-related appointments.

Health Equity Assessment (HEAT) Tool

Training is currently underway for all West Midlands Cancer Alliance (WMCA) staff on the Health Equity Assessment Tool (HEAT). This will ensure that all projects and programmes of work embed consideration of health inequalities from the outset.



Prostate Cancer in Black Men

A dedicated working group is addressing the inequalities in prostate cancer diagnosis, treatment and care experienced by Black men. Our focus is on raising awareness of increased risks, promoting earlier diagnosis and improving culturally sensitive care through collaboration with healthcare providers, community leaders and advocacy groups.

- **Sharing best practice:** bringing together clinicians and system partners across the Midlands to align approaches and reduce variation in prostate cancer outcomes.
- **Black Equity Health Model:** working in partnership with Prostate Cancer UK to roll out a model of care designed specifically to address the needs of Black men and tackle barriers to access.
- **Prostate cancer resource booklet and GP toolkit:** developing practical resources for both patients and primary care teams to support better conversations, earlier referrals and improved awareness of risks.
- **Patient stories:** capturing and sharing powerful lived experiences from Black men and their families to raise awareness, challenge stigmas and drive earlier diagnosis.

Community Co-Led projects

WMCA is directly funding community-led projects, co-designed with Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and voluntary and community sector organisations (VCSOs), to tackle persistent inequalities in early cancer diagnosis. This pioneering programme has generated significant interest, with 23 expressions of interest received, demonstrating the appetite and need for tailored, locally driven solutions.

By harnessing the strengths of trusted community networks, these projects will raise awareness of cancer symptoms, improve uptake of screening and encourage timely presentation to health services among populations most affected by inequality. Rooted in the principles of NHSE's Core20PLUS5 approach, and aligned with the WMCA Early Diagnosis Programme, this initiative represents a bold step towards reducing unwarranted variation in cancer outcomes, while creating a model of true partnership with communities that is more impactful, sustainable and inclusive.

