Crown Commercial Service

Discovery and evaluation for health pathways

G-Cloud 15 service definition

Healthia®

Discovery phase

If you need to understand a health pathway and identify opportunities for improvement and where technology can help, this package of work will uncover exactly what staff and patients need.

Our discovery package is based around the NHS Digital Service Standard. It uncovers user needs, technology or legislative constraints and identifies gaps and opportunities to improve.

We take a mixed-methods research approach to discovery, with quantitative and qualitative techniques, to explore user needs and their context, and understand stakeholder perspectives.

We are experienced in inclusive research, including diverse users across socio-economic backgrounds, seldom-heard, under-represented and vulnerable groups.

- We have extensive experience in planning, conducting and managing a wide range of user research, remotely and in person in our purpose-built, in-house research lab
- We have a dedicated research operations team to manage research logistics and ensure adherence to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) at all times
- We take an agile approach to user research and user-centred design, in line with GDS and NHS Service Standard. We have supported successful assessments.
- We work in the open as one team to drive decisions collaboratively, taking every opportunity to share knowledge, upskill, build internal capabilities and enable sustainable benefits
- We've delivered discoveries for clients including NHS England, NHSX, NHS Digital, BNSSG, NHS MSE, NHS Gloucestershire, Macmillan and Breast Cancer Now

Mixed-methods research approach

We use a wide range of methods and adapt our techniques to specific audiences, contexts and the problems we are exploring.

Pre-discovery / inception involves aligning stakeholders on the challenge, purpose, goals and outcomes for the research, creation of recruitment strategy and stakeholder engagement plan.

Desk / secondary research and expert reviews enable us to deep-dive into existing research, available documentation, and current services.

Quantitative techniques expose the extent of the problem and identify areas of focus. Surveys and analytics review help us understand behaviour and uncover painpoints, gaps and opportunities.

Stakeholder research enables us to understand individual contexts, needs, priorities and build on valuable expertise. We take time to understand the background, overarching strategies and policy intent.

Business analysis and process mapping help us understand the organisation and assess user and business needs, dependencies and system constraints.

Content and IA evaluation helps us map out existing content types and navigation structure, identifying gaps and opportunities.

Qualitative research delves deep into user experience, journeys, behaviours, motivations, needs and pain points. Research includes:

- Depth interviews
- Contextual research
- Ethnographic research
- Diary study
- Guerrilla research / intercept interviews
- Focus groups and co-creation / co-design workshops
- Usability testing

Inclusive research and design

We take an inclusive approach to our work to ensure all voices are represented. This reduces the risk of missing opportunities and fits with our ethos of leaving no-one behind.

We make it easy for people to participate in research, adapting to specific needs or requirements. Recent research has included people with autism, people with no fixed abode / address, and people with English as an additional language.

We have developed ways to effectively engage with diverse groups to co-create and co-design solutions in a collaborative and transparent way, helping design accessible services, policies and places that work for everyone.

We are experienced in researching, collaborating and designing with complex stakeholder groups including staff, local authorities, communities, charities, businesses, partner organisations and technology providers.

Seldom-heard and under-represented groups

- We include diverse, seldom-heard, under-represented and marginalised communities in our research as standard, including low digital literacy
- We include people from outside the mainstream and across socio-economic backgrounds, so we can design for people with markedly different lives and needs
- We have created a guide to conducting research around sensitive topics with vulnerable users to ensure the wellbeing of both participants and our researchers. Please contact us for a copy
- Through experience we have developed a number of techniques for recruiting from these groups which we tailor to each engagement

Research operations

We have a dedicated research operations (ReOps) team to manage logistics and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance.

Our team manages research planning, scheduling, consent, incentive payments and data protection. We regularly conduct and manage research for organisations requiring utmost data security, including NHS and National Cyber Security Centre.

With over 20 years of experience across sectors and methodologies (agile, kanban, waterfall), our ReOps team ensures that research delivery is smooth, timely and on budget. They oversee resourcing, track project progress against objectives and maintain open communication.

This enables our researchers to focus their time and effort on the research delivery and the quality of research outcomes.

Recruitment strategy

We have recruited thousands of research participants. This includes the general public, subject specialists, senior / board level, internal / external users, existing / new users, community members, international users, vulnerable and under-represented groups, and people with health conditions and access needs (motor / cognitive impairments).

We work closely with our clients to align on research objectives and agree on clear, unambiguous participant profiles to ensure we speak to the right people. To reach target audience groups we use various recruitment techniques:

- Specialist recruitment partners
- In-house via relevant networks
- Closed lists supplied by clients where we manage the process, adhering to GDPR
- Disability panels

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement is fundamental to our approach. We use innovative ways of keeping disparate - often time-poor - stakeholders involved.

We put effort into creating an effective and inclusive engagement plan to understand individual perspectives, wider context, priorities and build on their valuable expertise.

We have extensive experience collaborating with SMEs and stakeholders at all levels and adapt our communication to meet technical and non-technical needs.

Through our work with government and NHS clients, we have developed ways of effectively engaging with complex stakeholder groups across organisations and government departments. We bring stakeholders together to align priorities and collaboratively drive evidence-based decisions.

“They are capable of liaising with and managing stakeholders at all levels so for us they’ve interacted with people at board level all the way down, sensitively and empathically building relationships with customers who are often at a point of crisis. That can be quite a difficult thing to do and those softer skills really matter”

- Service owner, Cabinet Office

“They work openly and collaboratively with stakeholders to plan, execute and act on the research and design. This is so important when you are looking to transfer skills into the organisation and unlike other agencies or consultants we have worked in the past they do not exclude clients from the process or take specific parts of the project, work on it and then deliver a finished product.”

- Insights and engagement manager, NHS BNSSG

Discovery approach

Activities:

- Workshops
- Stakeholder mapping
- Stakeholder interviews and engagement
- Prioritisation workshop and KPIs definition
- Detailed recruitment and research plans
- Analytics review
- Survey design and analysis
- Contextual research / depth interviews
- Facilitated research observation
- Research playbacks
- Content audit
- Co-creation, sketching and storyboarding

Outputs:

- **Roadmap and service concepts to explore in alpha**

- Discovery report with prioritised recommendations
- Documented, prioritised user needs and journeys
- Personas
- As-is and to-be service maps
- Service blueprints
- Service vision
- Sketches and storyboards
- Content and IA findings report

Our experience

NHS England: GDS-aligned discovery to shape a system-wide vision for video in elective care

With more than seven million people waiting for elective treatment, NHS England needed better ways to support patients during long waits. Video offered clear potential to improve understanding, reduce anxiety and promote self-care, but its use across the NHS was fragmented. Quality, clinical assurance and accessibility varied, leaving patients unsure what to trust. Healthia was commissioned to lead a GDS-aligned discovery to create a shared, evidence-based vision for how video could be used consistently and safely across elective care pathways.

Our approach

We embedded with national teams and brought together clinicians, Royal Colleges, patient representatives, content creators and digital leads. Using collaborative workshops, in-depth research and synthesis, we focused on user needs, system constraints and long-term sustainability. Video was treated not as a standalone digital asset, but as part of a wider service transformation challenge. We tested early prototypes to explore how these capabilities could operate in real NHS contexts.

What we found

To make video work at scale, the system needs five core capabilities:

- Content creation and curation
- Quality assurance and clinical maintenance
- Hosting and accessibility across pathways
- Proactive distribution to patients
- Ongoing impact monitoring and improvement

Outcomes

A shared, system-wide strategic model for video, evidence-led insight into patient and clinician needs, practical next steps bridging strategy and delivery.

“Working with the superb team at Healthia has been an absolute joy... The project helped us devise strategies around the long-term future of educational video content in the NHS.”

- Digital Innovation Manager, NHS Transformation Directorate

Public Health Wales: Discovery for diabetes prevention and care

Public Health Wales (PHW) appointed Healthia to lead a Digital Diabetes Discovery as part of the Tackling Diabetes Together Programme. With Wales experiencing the highest proportional prevalence of diabetes in the UK, and Type 2 diabetes continuing to rise, PHW needed a robust, evidence-based way to guide future digital and telehealth investment.

Healthia led a GDS-aligned discovery to understand how digital tools could meaningfully support prevention, self-management and care delivery, while reducing health inequalities across Wales.

Our approach

- User-centred research and co-design
- Mapping needs and pain points across the full diabetes care journey and eight care processes
- Developing an evaluation framework to assess digital tools based on outcomes, not features

Outcomes

- A clear, evidence-based framework to inform strategic digital investment decisions
- Insight into where digital can best support prevention, self-management and equitable access
- A stronger focus on addressing health inequalities through inclusive, accessible design
- Alignment with Wales' prevention vision and long-term system goals

The discovery provided PHW with a practical foundation for making confident, people-first decisions about digital diabetes innovation, supporting better outcomes and a more sustainable health system.

"This discovery project is a vital step towards improving how we support people living with Type 2 diabetes in Wales. By exploring innovative digital tools and addressing health inequalities, we can empower individuals to manage their health more effectively, enabling them to live healthier, longer lives."

- Louisa Nolan, Head of Data Science at Public Health Wales