National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

International Strategy for NICE

Three year strategy

(2021-2024)

Executive summary

This strategic plan sets out the direction and priorities for international engagements and partnerships for NICE over the next 3 years and should be understood in the context of the overarching NICE Strategy 2021 – 2026. The strategy is ‘cross-institute’, that is, it covers the different engagements and collaborations that different teams at NICE have and will continue developing internationally.

The NICE Strategy 2021 – 2026 recognises that ‘successful organisations learn from the environment in which they operate and adapt to the challenges they encounter’. The COVID-19 pandemic and the realignment in government and health priorities have demonstrated that this environment is more global than ever. International cooperation and collaboration are therefore critical to achieve such purpose.

In this context, the strategic ambitions envisioned in this international strategy for the next 3 years are to:

* 1. Enhance NICE’s reputation as a world-leading institution by sharing the learning and expertise of NICE internationally
  2. Develop a proactive international intelligence for NICE by establishing collaborative relationships and projects aligned with NICE’s priority areas.

To inform this strategy, we have sought the views of internal and external stakeholders with a focus on global health. They include internal staff and senior colleagues from NICE, government agencies internationally, external collaborators and partners, influencers, funders and knowledge hubs. We also sought the views of systems partners in the UK with an international focus, such as the Department of Health and Social Care Global Health team, the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office and other government departments, other NHS organisations and Arm’s Length Bodies with international units or teams.

This strategy has also been developed in line with relevant policy context such as the UK Government’s ambition of Global Britain, the Government’s Integrated Review and Global Health Strategy and the commitment to contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. NICE, as a world leading organisation in health and care evidence-based decision making, is committed to ‘making a significant impact on health and wellbeing across the UK and globally for many years to come’. This international strategy aims to contribute to the delivery of this ambition. We are extremely thankful to all who have contributed so far and will help to shape the strategic direction of international engagements at NICE over the next three years.

Introduction

Why NICE engages internationally

The NHS is one of the oldest universal health systems in the world. Dating back to the 1940s, most treatments and services have been provided free at the point of care through this universal public health system. However, as with any health system in the world, it has not been free of challenges. In the early 1990’s, an evidence overload and a lack of clear guidelines for healthcare professionals contributed to variation in access and quality of care – the so-called ‘post-code lottery’. This was accompanied by a slow uptake of innovative technologies and practices, with rising costs, and growing public concern and increase in media criticism.

NICE was created in 1999 to develop consistent clinical guidelines, make evidence-based recommendations on the treatments that should be provided in the NHS, and end this variation of quality and access to treatments across the country. The remit was expanded over the years to cover public and social care guidelines. Amid this environment of rising costs and the need to identify those technologies that offered the best use of the limited NHS resources, the health technology assessment (HTA) function of NICE, routinely quoted as one of the most difficult public roles in healthcare decision-making, became a crucial tool to underpin transparent, scientifically rigorous and inclusive decision making. Importantly, all these efforts were accompanied by the UK Government commitment to improve the quality and range of care provided in the NHS with a prospect of significant reinvestment of resources in healthcare.

Although this background and context reflect the reality of the UK back in 1999, it can still be comparable to other healthcare systems aiming to reform their healthcare services affected by rising demand for healthcare at increasing costs, struggling to introduce innovation in a sustainable manner and inspired to achieve universal health coverage. These systems can be public or private. The challenges and pressures are not specific to any of them. But the context plays a significant role in how any changes might be implemented and contributes to the country’s overall ambition to improve healthcare for the population. While recognising that there is no ‘one-size that fits all’, many elements of NICE’s methodology, process and products can be relevant, including mechanisms that link budget allocation with improved service delivery and better health outcomes.

Drawing on its experience over the last 22 years, NICE has developed a reputation of being a world-leading institution in evidence-based health policy, assessment and decision making. This is reflected by NICE’s long list of published guidance covering topics from public, clinical and social care guidelines to HTAs for all healthcare technologies including pharmaceuticals, medical devices, diagnostics and digital health products. This guidance not only guides the incorporation and use of new and existing technologies but is also accompanied by several other products and support services, from public involvement, quality standards and indicators, early engagement and scientific advice to resource impact tools and strategies and managed access agreements. NICE is part of the wider and complex UK healthcare system, in which different organisations and partners interact with their respective functions to deliver the overall objectives of the NHS, from research and development, public health to commissioning, implementation and delivery of services. NICE contributes to these with a clear role in evidence-based evaluation and guidance. It is this role and the wide and extensive experience that places NICE in an excellent position to share its expertise with others, while learning from partners around the world.

NICE’s international relationships work in both directions. While NICE has wide and extensive experience that it shares with others, NICE also learns from others’ experiences, leverages expertise from other countries to support methodological development and makes best use of its resources by using research and HTA outputs developed by others to inform its work. NICE has longstanding involvement in collaborative international research projects, such as the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI) and Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe. It actively participates in international networks such as The International Network of Agencies for Health Technology Assessment (INAHTA), Guidelines International Network (GIN), Health Technology Assessment International (HTAi), and International Society for Pharmacoeconomic Outcomes Research (ISPOR). Alongside these formal projects and networks also exist strategic partnerships with other international agencies and informal links to many others. There are individualities in all healthcare systems and decision contexts that mean that methods and processes must be adapted to that context. However, the global nature of healthcare, health technologies and scientific methodology means that there are also similarities that can be capitalised on. We can work together to tackle and anticipate common challenges and inform future healthcare initiatives.

Environmental and political context of the International Strategy

The NICE Strategy 2021 – 2026 recognises that the world around us is changing. New treatments, practices and technologies are emerging at a rapid pace. This is also recognised in the UK Life Sciences Vision, which outlines that “the NHS needs to focus on the right interventions early in the course of disease, with a reinvigorated approach to deliver innovations for the major diseases that drive most morbidity and mortality, with predictive and monitoring technologies, genomics and data used to prevent, detect, diagnose, and treat disease early, rather than concentrating on late-stage disease”. Although challenges in healthcare are wide-ranging and vary according to the country’s context, income, healthcare budget and the maturity of the healthcare system, the impact of rising costs associated with innovative technologies and digitalisation is not unique to the UK. Ensuring that healthcare budgets are spent effectively is thus crucial to creating and maintaining a sustainable healthcare system which also encourages innovation.

There is a need to ensure that health and care professionals can easily access up-to-date information to support their decision-making. It is also important to inform and incorporate the public in decisions about their care. Low-and-middle-income countries are considering developing and adapting guidelines to guide the management and treatment of different conditions, with the aim to ensure high quality services are delivered and evidence-based standards and indicators are set. These countries are considering investing in developing their own processes and committees and setting up principles for public engagement. High income countries are also investing in new methods to keep abreast with the rapidly emerging evidence to ensure that guidelines become dynamic and are quickly updated.

The rise of non-communicable diseases is a common challenge and undoubtedly the COVID-19 pandemic is having a detrimental impact across healthcare systems around the world, with the impact in fragile healthcare systems being greater. Collaboration between jurisdictions has become more important than ever. Reductions in aid funding and increases in poverty and health inequalities mean that countries around the world need to focus on trying to strengthen the healthcare systems to make them more resilient and less fragile. Social care is also starting to receive more attention than ever, with countries recognising the need to invest in both health and social care systems.

All these factors highlight the need for shared learning on a global scale as recognised in the UK Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, which states that “we will support others to become more self-sufficient through trade and economic growth and increase our ability to achieve long-term change through combining our diplomatic and development expertise”. NICE is well positioned to share and learn from others internationally to achieve the common aim of putting evidence at the heart of health and care decision-making.

The international strategy for NICE has been developed in response to this environmental and political context and will contribute to each of the four strategic pillars of the NICE Strategy 2021-2026. These pillars all emphasise the leadership role that NICE plays, underpinning the need for NICE to engage internationally:

* 1. Rapid, robust, and responsive technology evaluation
  2. Dynamic, living guideline recommendations
  3. Effective guidance uptake to maximise our impact
  4. Leadership in data, research and science.

The international strategy encompasses all the international engagements, services, projects and collaborations from different teams at NICE. It is fundamentally a cross-institute strategy, co-led by NICE International and the Science, Policy & Research programme but with contributions from the whole organisation.

International strategic ambitions

The international strategic ambitions over the next 3 years are to:

* 1. Enhance NICE’s reputation as a world-leading institution by sharing the learning and expertise of NICE internationally
  2. Develop a proactive international intelligence for NICE by establishing collaborative relationships and projects aligned with NICE’s priority area

Strategic Ambition 1: Enhance NICE’s reputation as a world-leading institution by sharing the learning and expertise of NICE internationally

This strategic ambition aims to specifically contribute to:

* 1. improvements in health and social care outcomes for the population in the UK and abroad, by supporting organisations worldwide to:
     1. Allocate limited healthcare resources through embedding HTA and health technology management, to manage rising costs and to promote innovation in a cost-effective, transparent, equitable and sustainable way. This aligns with NICE Strategic Pillar 1: Rapid robust and responsive technology evaluation.
     2. Improve the quality of care and reduce variation of access in health and social care services through the development of evidence-based guidance, standards and indicators that are implementable in local settings. This aligns with NICE Strategic Pillars 2: Dynamic, living guideline recommendations and 3: Effective guidance uptake to maximise our impact.
     3. Promote inclusivity of actors in health and social care decision making thorough participation and engagement, as well as the development of scientific networks. This aligns with NICE Strategic Pillar 4: Leadership in data, research, and science.
  2. the NHS and UK Government global health ambitions. NICE International is well positioned to champion the NHS partnership model and brand abroad, be an ambassador of the UK Life Sciences ecosystem and to facilitate conversations at a government-to-government level, contributing to improvement in relationship building, development and trade through the lens of health. NICE can also play a strategic role working with the Department of Health and Social Care and the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), aligning to their priorities when relevant, including the Government’s Integrated Review and Global Health Strategy.
  3. NICE’s transformational people strategy. Importantly increased international engagement will provide NICE staff the opportunity to enhance their collaborative skills and will contribute to their ambitions, motivation and satisfaction, while celebrating diversity and an inclusive approach.

Strategic Ambition 2: Develop proactive international intelligence for NICE by establishing collaborative relationships and projects aligned with NICE’s priority areas

NICE engages in partnerships with other HTA agencies and guideline development groups internationally. These partnerships include externally funded research projects, informal information exchanges and formal partnership agreements. Such engagements include sharing best practice and collaboration on new methodological and process developments.

NICE will continue these international strategic partnerships and apply a more coordinated and proactive approach, aligning partnerships to priority areas of NICE work, systematically identifying opportunities for international partnerships, ensuring that the knowledge of the international partnerships is captured and disseminated across NICE and providing support to NICE staff to get the most out of their international partnerships.

Delivery of the strategic ambitions

Who will deliver these strategic ambitions?

Two NICE teams (NICE International and Science, Policy and Research) have roles within the strategy as key enablers of the strategic ambitions.

* 1. The NICE International team: NICE International is part of NICE and operates under the legal and financial framework of NICE. NICE International operates on a not-for-profit, cost-recovery basis. There is a core team dedicated to NICE International work which is supported by a network of people across the organisation, as well as external collaborators. NICE International will lead on strategic ambition 1 with participation and support of the rest of the organisation. The mission, the vision and the contributions of NICE International’s advisory services will directly contribute to achieve this strategic ambition. Further details can be found in the Annex.
  2. The Science, policy and research team: The Science policy and research (SP&R) programme works with internal and external partners on scientific and research activities related to the work of NICE. One strand of activity within the SP&R Programme is international projects. This includes a portfolio of externally funded research projects, for example the Innovative Medicines Initiative and Horizon 2020 funded projects such as European Health Data Evidence Network (EHDEN), NEURONET and HTx, and support for NICE’s international collaborative activities and partnerships. Strategic ambition 2 will be led by SP&R and NICE International.

How are these strategic ambitions going to be delivered?

Strategic ambition 1: Enhance NICE’s reputation as a world-leading institution by sharing the learning and expertise of NICE internationally

* 1. NICE International is in a unique position to share NICE’s work with international stakeholders and represent NICE internationally. While we recognise there is an international demand for NICE to share its work and expertise, we need to do so in an efficient, valuable and sustainable manner. That is why it is important that we adapt our services to meet the needs of international stakeholders, identifying those areas where NICE can most valuably contribute to global health improvements. We will also specifically investigate approaches and funding models to work with low- and middle-income countries.
     1. Our current service offering, including a list of topic areas, is detailed in the annex. However, we recognise the changing needs of international stakeholders and will adapt and focus our offerings as we progress and learn from each engagement. We will further develop our service offering around key priority areas, such as the approach for supporting developers and the evaluation of digital health technologies.
     2. We will develop international partnerships with international networks and work with other UK system partners working internationally. We will do this through established forums as part of the NHS Consortium for Global Health and the NHS Export Collaborative, and we will also explore direct partnerships where relevant with organisations which share similar objectives to us such as Health Education England, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and others.
     3. Supported by our ongoing strong collaboration with the NICE Centre for Guidelines and Science Evidence and Analytics directorate, NICE International will explore how our guideline contextualisation offer can mirror the focussed guideline portfolio being developed at a national level, and leverage the promotion of it, and how our services can contribute to developing a new digital guidelines’ platform.
     4. Through international projects, NICE International will celebrate and showcase the work of its international partners and will bring learnings back to NICE and the UK, identifying areas at NICE that would benefit from our international experiences.
     5. We will routinely track impact and value of our work, with the aim of collecting internal and external measures of impact and value. We will look to measure, where possible, the outcomes and impact of our activity, obtaining stakeholder feedback, and we will share our learnings with the rest of NICE.
  2. Objectives: In summary, in order to deliver this priority, NICE International will:
     1. Refine the NICE International service offering to meet the needs of international audiences
     2. Explore alternative funding models for low- and middle-income countries with less ability to pay cost-recovery fees
     3. Jointly showcase the work of international partners inspired by our collaborations internally and externally
     4. Identify areas at NICE that would benefit from international learnings from our collaborations
     5. Collaborate with system partners (nationally and internationally) to contribute to global health initiatives
     6. Raise the profile of NICE International through implementation of a new marketing and communications strategy.

Strategic Ambition 2: Develop a proactive international intelligence for NICE by establishing collaborative relationships and projects aligned with NICE’s priority areas.

* 1. Objectives: This strategic ambition aims to deliver the following objectives:
     1. Coordinate and drive international engagements and partnerships across the organisation, aligning them with NICE’s priority areas
     2. Identify latest developments and updates in NICE’s priority areas by establishing and maintaining key strategic international partnerships and collaborative projects
     3. Support NICE teams to get the most out of their international partnerships by providing advice and support for partnership working and helping staff to make links to relevant international partners.

Resource requirements

In order to deliver our service offering in a sustainable manner, NICE International is required to operate on a not-for-profit, cost-recovery basis. This is in line with NICE’s Regulations (2013), which allows for operating on a commercial basis. NICE International will aim to recover the costs of its advisory role when working with international organisations and sharing NICE’s learnings and expertise, under strategic ambition 1. NICE’s Science Policy and Research Programme includes some resources for international collaboration.

We will know we have succeeded when…

We have made meaningful contributions to improvements in health outcomes and evidence-based decision-making in health and social care in the UK and other countries.

We will work to derive metrics to track the impact and value of our international work, which will inform the measures of success to monitor these ambitions. Success indicators will explore areas such as:

* 1. Evidence of changes being implemented into health care systems inspired by our collaborations
  2. Acknowledgement of contribution, grants that have been granted that have included NICE in them or helped with third party funding
  3. Acknowledgement of our contribution in development programmes
  4. Number of requests received through other system partners
  5. Participation in relevant international projects, forums, blogs in NICE key priority areas:
     1. Number of opportunities raised through internal meetings, strategic meetings, learning engagements
     2. Recognition of NICE in international forums
     3. Marketing strategy statistics
     4. Participation in joint conferences and events with partner organisations internationally
     5. Mentions in contributions to trade and government policies
     6. Feedback from NICE International projects
     7. Number of projects where we have provided advice to NICE on partnership working with other countries
     8. Number of projects that have included an international collaborative element
     9. Changes implemented at NICE informed by our international collaborations.

NICE’s Values and behaviours that guide our international work

1. NICE’s values and behaviours will be embedded in our international work. In addition, NICE will commit to international principles and standards such as the principle of do no harm, avoiding imposing our views when working with other countries and acknowledging and recognising that everyone has something to share and learn from each other

Next steps

This strategic plan will be underpinned by a detailed action plan with deliverables for the next 3 years and will feed into NICE’s annual business plan objectives.

We will collaborate with internal and external partners working in global health and international collaborations to deliver the objectives covered in the plan.

We will monitor the delivery of the plan, recognising the dynamic and changing context in which we operate. Therefore, we will evolve the actions as needed with the aim to continue delivering the strategic ambitions set up in this plan.

Annex

About NICE International

Our mission

The mission of NICE International is to support countries to improve their nation's health and wellbeing, and to gain learnings and initiate international collaborations that help to shape our work at NICE. We do this by offering services that share best practice and expertise from NICE to help drive improvements in health and care decision-making, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and UK global health ambitions.

Our vision

Strong and resilient health and care systems worldwide through evidence-based decision making.

Our audience

NICE International service offering is aimed at supporting organisations, ministries and government agencies internationally whose task is to improve evidence-based decision making in health and social care in their context. We aim to work collaboratively with other system partners, strategic partners and stakeholders nationally and internationally to deliver our service offering and engage with influencers and funders to support and promote our work. NICE International does not impose any particular method or process rather it shares the learnings from developing, adapting and modifying them throughout the years, as well as supporting and learning from others through partnerships and collaborations.

Our contributions

NICE International will contribute to health systems strengthening and improvements in health and social care around the world by supporting the use of evidence-based decision making. In doing so, NICE International contributes to NICE wide strategic priorities. This strategic ambition reflects on how our work with international partners can support NICE’s ambition to ‘continue to improve health and wellbeing by putting science and evidence at the heart of health and care decision-making, while keeping ahead of the challenges of a rapidly changing world’.

Our service offering

NICE International provides advisory services to organisations, ministries and government agencies internationally to support the use of evidence-based decision making in health and social care systems.

Services include knowledge transfer seminars and workshops, consultancy services and speaking engagements.

Knowledge transfer seminars are hosted at NICE office, in country, or via webinar. These seminars vary in length, detail and complexity dependent on country needs (e.g. half day to longer engagements) focused on one area to facilitate knowledge exchange and share learning. Knowledge transfer seminars are delivered by NICE International and other NICE staff and experts. They usually cover an introduction to NICE and different programmes and an understanding of NICE and NHS context, programmes and principles. Through the knowledge transfer seminars organisations can gain a greater understanding of issues based on NICE experience and collaborative discussion with NICE.

Through the consultancy services, NICE International can support scoping exercises and situational analyses as well as provide more tailored advice and support in specific areas. Scoping exercises and situational analyses cover activities such as a series of 2-way discussions to get deeper understanding into an issue or challenge, analysis of the current state, stakeholder analysis, assessment of capacity and support. Outputs from this include analysis and discussion with NICE on challenges and opportunities identified, and a report and roadmap outlining potential next steps and a proposed programme of further support from NICE. The outcomes of the scoping exercise and situational analysis include a deeper understanding of opportunities, challenges and solutions with advice and support from NICE, which can be acted upon.

Scoping exercises and situational analyses will vary in terms of complexity and length and will depend on the commitment and experience from the partner country organization, and the expertise and resource requirements from NICE.

Further advice and support options are also available through the review of inception and implementation plans/deliverables; advice in setting up frameworks, committees, terms of engagement, networks for stakeholder involvement, processes, methodologies; awareness raising and stakeholder involvement; capacity building; contextualisation of products to local context (e.g. guidelines), pilot projects as well as retained advice and support. Organisations can gain practical advice and review of plans and outputs based on NICE’s expertise, as well as new capabilities, competencies and technical expertise and outputs that can be embedded, built upon and implemented.

NICE International service offering: examples of topic areas we can cover as part of our international engagements

* 1. Health Technology Assessment and Management (from topic selection, to evaluation and managed access) of all types of technologies (medicines, medical devices, diagnostics, procedures, digital health technologies…)
  2. Clinical, public and social care guidelines and advice recommendations
  3. Quality standards and indicators
  4. Patient and public engagement
  5. Specific stakeholder engagement (e.g. industry or academia)
  6. Research, evidence reviews and health economics analysis
  7. Core business support for HTA/guidelines programmes and agencies: governance arrangements, business and resources
  8. Data and analytics
  9. Communication strategies for HTA/guidelines programmes and agencies
  10. Implementation of recommendations in local settings.
  11. NICE’s priority areas: health inequalities, sustainability, digital health, living guidelines