



# Evaluation of the Always Events Programme

Executive Summary

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# Picker

Picker is a leading international health and social care charity. We carry out research to understand individuals' needs and their experiences of care. We are here to:

- Influence policy and practice so that health and social care systems are always centred around people's needs and preferences.
- Inspire the delivery of the highest quality care, developing tools and services which enable all experiences to be better understood.
- Empower those working in health and social care to improve experiences by effectively measuring, and acting upon, people's feedback.

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## Background



NHS England has been using Always Events as a methodology for working with people using services, families and carers in co-production to improve services since 2015. NHS England and Improvement (NHSE&I) commissioned Picker to evaluate the Always Events programme to identify learning and to inform improvements. The results presented are based on:



- 79 respondents to an online survey
- 12 in-depth interviews

This summary highlights the key challenges and facilitators to implementing Always Events and the impacts of this approach on services users and staff. The key learnings for the Always Events programme are then discussed. It is intended that the findings from this review will support NHSE&I with the future roll-out of the programme.

## Findings

### Summary of key challenges and facilitators to implementation

Area	Challenges	Facilitators
<p><b>Staff time</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A lack of staff time was the most reported challenge by survey respondents</li> <li>○ There is a challenge for staff to find enough time, especially for those in clinical facing roles</li> <li>○ Covid-19 has affected staff capacity to work on Always Events and has negatively impacted on progress for some teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Protected time or flexibility in staff workload/time is helpful. This often necessitates senior-level support.</li> </ul> <p><i>[Note: that many of the facilitators for staff engagement listed below may also help to support staff so they have greater capacity to work on Always Events.]</i></p>
<p><b>Staff engagement and buy-in</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Staff not recognising the value of the Always Events approach</li> <li>○ Difficulty understanding the concept and methodology</li> <li>○ Lack of staff knowledge and experiences in quality improvement tools and measurements</li> <li>○ Over-reliance on a few key staff</li> <li>○ Maintaining momentum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Prior engagement work, such as 'What Matters?'</li> <li>○ Harnessing the power of the patient voice</li> <li>○ Communication with staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Providing regular updates</li> <li>- Listening to staff and making any changes</li> <li>- Sharing the impacts and successes</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Getting the 'right' people involved</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ NHSE&amp;I training, other in-house training and highlighting the development opportunities to staff</li> </ul>
<p><b>Co-production</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Recruiting and sustaining engagement (particularly in transient services/areas)</li> <li>○ ‘Fully’ co-producing an Always Event</li> <li>○ The need for a cultural shift in the way of thinking and working</li> <li>○ Length of time to implement</li> <li>○ Lack of appropriate staff skills and confidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Recruiting people via existing groups/forums or linking in events with such groups</li> <li>○ Helping staff understand the value of co-production (NHSE&amp;I training and/or prior engagement work)</li> <li>○ Using different approaches and being responsive to people’s needs.</li> <li>○ Educating staff on the differences of the Always Event approach to other methodologies/projects</li> <li>○ Staff training or getting support with facilitation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Senior level support and visibility</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Incorporating – and retaining - Always Events in organisation improvement strategies</li> <li>○ Always Events can be isolated from other quality improvement work</li> <li>○ Obtaining the support, commitment, and accountability from senior level staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Inclusion of Always Events in QI strategies (<i>but managing executive-level expectations regarding timelines and deliverables</i>).</li> <li>○ Oversight working group that regularly reports to executive/senior level staff</li> <li>○ Having a department/directorate that can drive the work</li> <li>○ Linking to existing groups that include senior level members of staff</li> <li>○ Discussion of Always Events at board meetings</li> <li>○ Organisation-wide communication about Always Events to spread awareness and learning</li> </ul>



## Key strengths and successes of the programme

- Over 100 organisations have participated in the Always Events programme since 2015.
- 52% of survey respondents said their Always Event had influenced co-production work in their organisation either 'a great deal' or 'to some extent'.
- There is evidence that Always Events can be successful in improving the experiences of service users.
- NHSE&I training and support is highly valued and seen as key to supporting teams with successful implementation.
- The Always Events approach was considered 'enlightening' by interviewees for putting service users at the centre of the process. Working in collaboration with people that use services was deemed important for ensuring quality improvement work is worthwhile and effective.
- There can be unintended positive benefits for both staff and service users involved in co-producing an Always Event (such as improved wellbeing, increased skills and better working relationships).
- The structured approach enables improvements to service user experiences to be focused and provide evidence on success (but the precision can sometimes be a challenge/limitation).
- There is a growing requirement for organisations to evidence how they are partnering with their service users and Always Events can support with this.



## Limitations and challenges for the programme

- A relatively small proportion of organisations have achieved accreditation for demonstrating their Always Event has met the key criteria (such as being co-produced and resulted in sustained improvement).
- Organisational-level factors and/or culture underpin some of the main challenges to implementation, such as:
  - Always Events require a 'shift' in the way of working. Building the right mind-set for co-production can be difficult if there is a lack of dedicated time and resources. The approach can be viewed as a one-off project rather than initiating sustained change.
  - Always Events take time to implement which can sometimes create tensions with a need to evidence outcomes at an executive level within a typically shorter timeframe.
  - Always Events can be isolated from other quality improvement work and/or organisational-wide strategies and not given the same level of priority.

- The extent to which Always Events are fully co-produced with service users is varied. In some teams, there was less collaborative working with service users on how to bring about the improvements.
- There are challenges to effectively measuring and evidencing the impacts of Always Events.
- The Always Events approach requires staff having some knowledge/skills in quality improvement methods and facilitation skills (for co-producing change with service users).
- The Always Event methodology (and the information contained within the toolkit) can be difficult to explain to colleagues which can adversely affect engagement.



## Key learnings for improvement

- Organisational culture and ‘readiness’ appear to be key:
  - A staged approach could be valuable where staff are involved in prior engagement work/activities *before* commencing an Always Event (such as ‘What matters to staff?’)
  - Greater awareness/education on the value of co-production and more training and support for staff on how to co-produce effectively with people with lived experience.
  - The ‘positioning’ of the Always Event, in terms of the department/directorate, can influence its visibility within an organisation and the ability for teams to draw on wider staff resources and support (e.g. linkage between quality improvement and patient experience teams)
  - There is a need to win the argument that co-production is worthwhile doing and that this approach can be a cost-effective way of working, in addition to the positive outcomes for service users and staff. However, it can be difficult to evidence that improved service user experiences (and other positive outcomes/unintended or wider benefits) are linked to increased efficiencies or financial savings.
- Training/education in quality improvement tools and measurement (or better linkage with those people/teams that can support with this within an organisation).
- Senior level staff (who are the executive sponsors) need to have greater accountability for the implementation and success of their Always Event(s).
- Some of the Always Events’ change ideas appear more focused on physical/transactional/functional aspects of care which may be more difficult to sustain (and measure their impact), than the relational aspects of care, such as staff behavioural change.

- There can be a tension between quality improvement work, in general, and fulfilling business and financial requirements. To ensure Always Events are not deprioritised within an organisation, being able to evidence how the positive impacts on service users and staff can lead to financial/operational efficiencies could help to embed the approach and achieve operational buy-in.

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