

ACADEMIC HEALTH
SCIENCE NETWORK
NORTH EAST AND
NORTH CUMBRIA

STAKEHOLDER RESEARCH

LOCAL FINDINGS 2019

BACKGROUND

During summer and autumn 2019, an independent survey was undertaken of England's 15 Academic Health Science Networks (AHSNs). This research was commissioned by NHS England and NHS Improvement, and the Office for Life Sciences (OLS) to explore and evaluate the views of AHSN stakeholders. The research will support commissioners in their reviews of AHSNs, and to provide independent feedback to AHSNs from their stakeholders that include NHS organisations, researchers, private companies, government organisations, patient and public groups and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations.

Savanta ComRes, an independent research organisation, undertook the evaluation. With input from AHSNs and commissioners, Savanta ComRes developed and ran a 10-minute online survey and subsequently conducted 30-minute telephone interviews with up to 10 stakeholders for each of the 15 AHSNs and for the National AHSN Network.

A national report collating the feedback and key themes from across all AHSNs, can be viewed on the AHSN Network website: www.ahsnnetwork.com/ahsn-network-stakeholder-research.

This report summarises stakeholder feedback and themes specifically related to AHSN North East and North Cumbria (NENC).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 AHSN NENC staff are often praised for their accommodating and flexible approach to working with stakeholders. Many interviewees note feeling comfortable reaching out to staff as they are usually willing to offer support to the best of their abilities.
- 2 The Bright Ideas in Health Awards organised by AHSN NENC have been a tremendous success according to various stakeholders. Reported benefits include raising the profile of their organisation, boosting morale within their team and allowing them to stay up to date with activity in the region.
- 3 Reflecting stakeholders of AHSNs more nationally, stakeholders of AHSN NENC are keen to see better communication around the impact of work and how the organisation decides on its priorities.

OVERVIEW

Stakeholders have largely positive perceptions of AHSN NENC; speaking highly of the organisation's flexibility, inclusivity and effectiveness in driving innovation. This positive sentiment is further supported by examples of successful initiatives and events such as the 'Bright Ideas' award. These have improved stakeholders' evaluations of AHSN NENC.

Areas brought forward for consideration include better communication with stakeholders and demonstrating the ability to connect individuals with partners from other regions. Future challenges and opportunities are also highlighted by stakeholders around continuing to raise AHSN NENC’s visibility and tackling the most prominent health issues.

WHO WE SPOKE TO

Nine stakeholder groups were identified, and across these, 219 stakeholders identified by AHSN NENC were invited to take part; 84 completed the online survey from 21st August to 16th September 2019. This represents a response rate of 38% which is in line with the industry average for this type of survey. In addition to the online surveys, Savanta ComRes conducted follow-up interviews with 9 stakeholders between 9th September and 13th November 2019, who put themselves forward to discuss their experiences further. Specific quotas were not set for the stakeholders interviewed as interviewees were self-selecting and interviews were dependent on stakeholders’ availability and feasibility of bookings.

Type	# SURVEYED	% SURVEYED	# INTERVIEWED
Health or social care provider	19	23% (-14)	3
Private company or industry body	19	23% (+7)	1
Research body or university	10	12%	1
NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)	14	17%	2
Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)	3	4%	–
Local government or Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)	3	4%	–
National government, agency or Arms Length Body (ALB)	9	11%	1
Individual patient or member of the public	3	4%	–
Patients group or public group	4	5%	1
Total	84	100%	9

Thinking about your role and organisation as it relates to your engagement with AHSNs, which of the following best describes your organisation? *Base: All stakeholders answering on behalf of AHSN North East and North Cumbria (n=84).*
 Percentage point difference to the average survey response rate where difference is more than 5 (n=1,155)

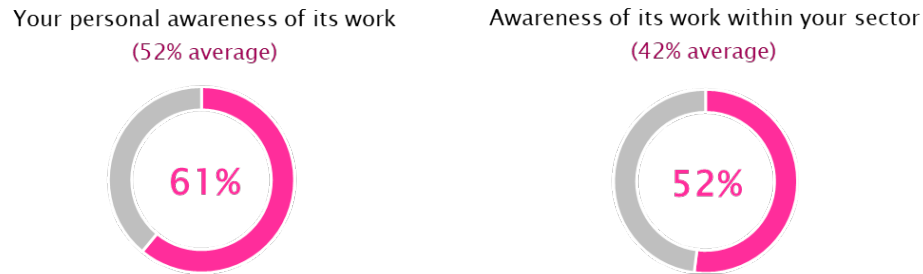
INTERPRETING THE RESULTS

The report includes quantitative findings from the online survey and qualitative findings from interviews with local stakeholders. **The number of online survey respondents are too small to draw reliable conclusions from.** Additionally, comparisons between local survey data and the average across all AHSNs nationally are not necessarily statistically significant meaning higher or lower assessments of an individual AHSN in comparison to the national response rate may be due to the ‘play of chance’. Findings from the online survey at the level of an individual AHSN should therefore be **treated as indicative only** and used with caution.

Insights are based on an aggregated analysis of discussions with participating AHSN NENC stakeholders. Therefore, themes described may not necessarily reflect the views of those answering and are not generalisable to all stakeholder types. For instance, **interviews were not conducted with stakeholders from VCS organisations, local government, LEPs, individual patients or members of the public.** Recommendations discussed are based on answering and are not tailored to specific types of stakeholders.

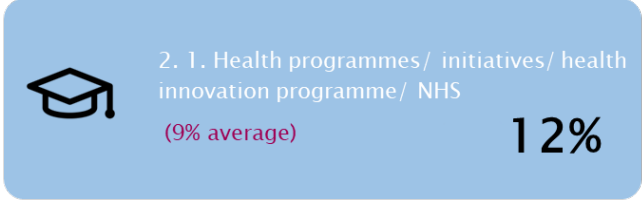
Each local AHSN report has been reviewed by a representative at the AHSN to verify the accuracy of insights and interpretations presented in each report. Savanta ComRes held **30-minute calls** with the representative to collect and incorporate such feedback. AHSNs only saw the findings in the report and not raw data collected in fieldwork.

Awareness (NET: Extremely or very aware) Figure 1



KEY
'% average' indicates the average score across all AHSNs

AHSN NENC's most impactful projects † Figure 5



† Open text box question

Knowledge and Visibility Figure 2

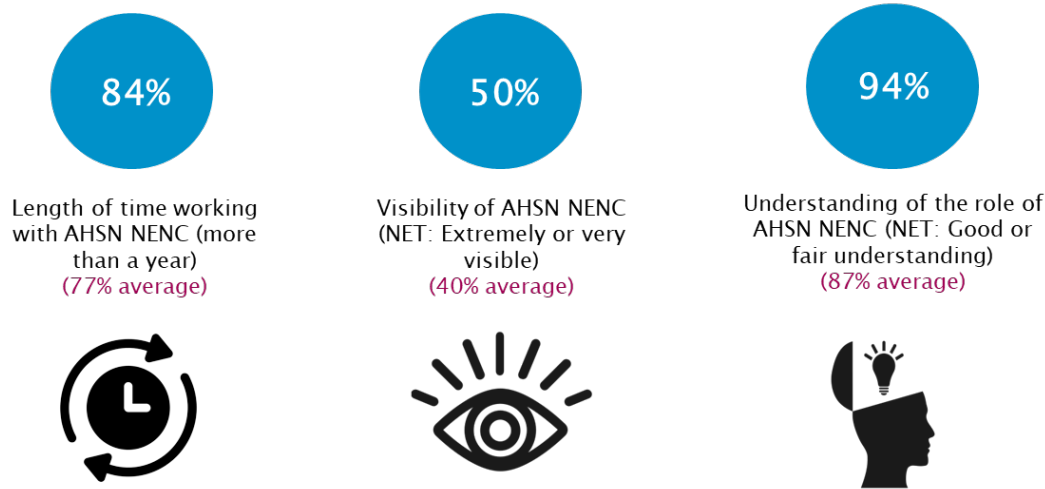
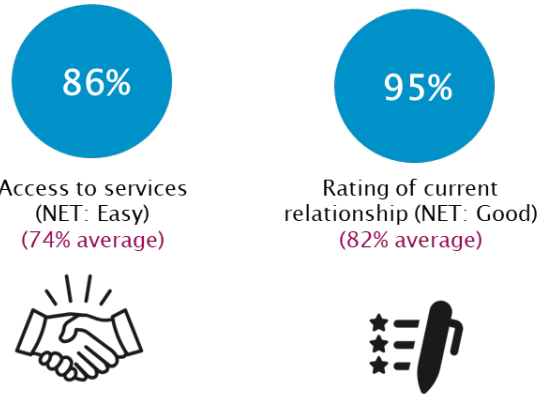


Figure 1 – Q1. Overall, thinking about NENC AHSN's work, how would you describe...? Base: AHSN NENC stakeholders (n=84)

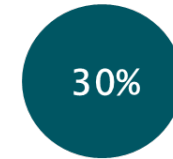
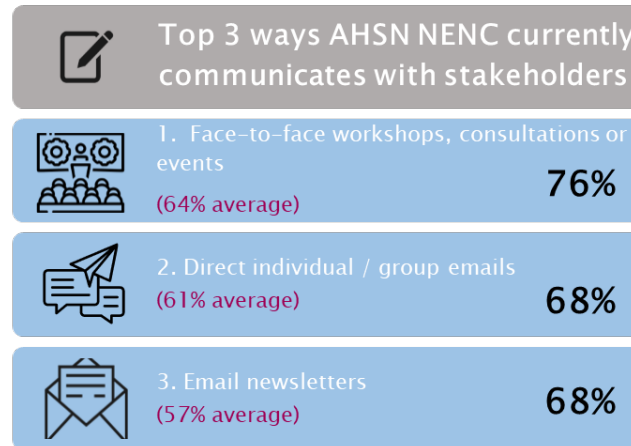
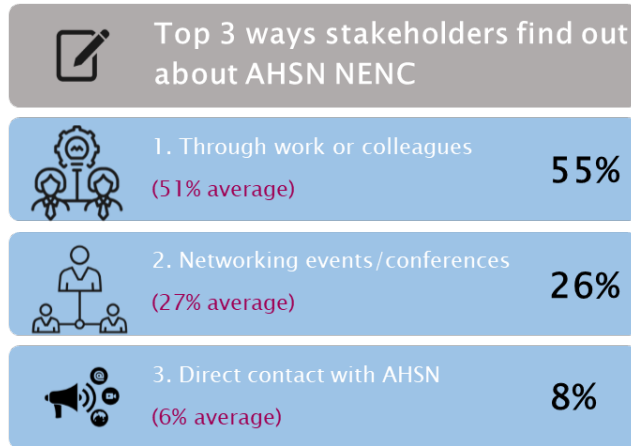
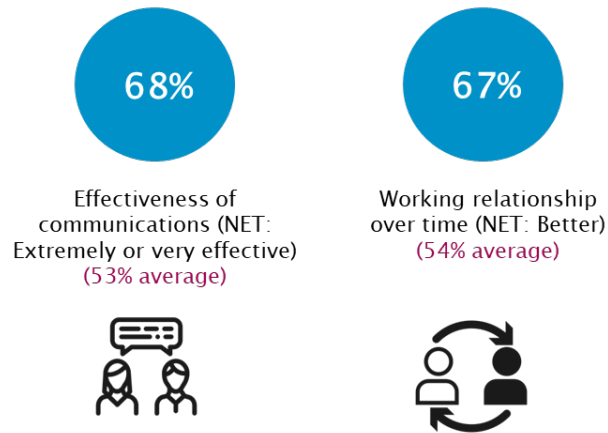
Figure 2 – D7. And approximately how long have you worked with NENC AHSN? Q22. Thinking about its overall visibility and any engagement you may have had, how would you rate the visibility of the NENC AHSN in its local area? D6. How would you rate your understanding of the role of NENC AHSN? Base: AHSN NENC stakeholders (n=84)

Figure 5 – Q15_1. Which NENC initiative, programme or support service would you say has had the greatest impact on your organisation's ability to meet its objectives or your ability to meet your own objectives? Base: AHSN NENC stakeholders (n=84)

Working with AHSN NENC *Figure 3*



Communication with AHSN NENC *Figure 4*



MOST NOTABLE FACTOR DRIVING POSITIVE EVALUATION OF AHSN NENC[†]
Figure 6
Helpful staff/management/ supportive and collaborative team/ accessible/ more involved to support
(26% average)

[†] Open text box question



TOP RECOMMENDATION FOR AHSN NENC[†]
Figure 7
Coordinated/ collaborative approach towards learning, sharing, evaluation and roll-out of products/ services
(13% average)

Figure 3 – Q14. Overall, how easy did you find it to access NENC AHSN services? Base: NENC AHSN stakeholders (n=84) Q17. Overall, how would you rate your working relationship with NENC AHSN? How did you first find out about NENC AHSN? Base: AHSN NENC stakeholders (n=84).

Figure 4 – Q18. Thinking back over the period of time you have been working with NENC AHSN, would you say your working relationship has gotten better, worse, or is about the same? Q23. Which, if any, of the following ways does NENC AHSN currently communicate with you? Q24. How would you rate the effectiveness of NENC AHSN’s communications? Base: AHSN NENC stakeholders (n=84)

Figure 6 – Q19. You indicated that you have a good working relationship with South West AHSN and/or your working relationship has gotten better over the period of time you have been working with them. Why do you say this? Base: AHSN NENC stakeholders who say this (n=84)

Figure 7 – Q25. If you could make one recommendation for improvement for the local AHSN or the National AHSN Network to focus on in the next three years, what would this be? For example, is there a service you think should be expanded, or a new offering that should be explored or delivered? Base: AHSN NENC stakeholders (n=84)

AREAS OF STRENGTH AND GOOD PRACTICE

THE *BRIGHT IDEAS IN HEALTH AWARDS* IS ENCOURAGING CREATIVITY

Four interviewees cite the positive impact of the ‘Bright Ideas’ awards organised by AHSN NENC, indicating its memorability among stakeholders. The awards are salient across numerous stakeholders from those in research bodies or universities, CCGs and health or social care providers. Some of those interviewed say the awards enable them to stay informed about activity within the region, whilst others say it has been a driver of innovation and creativity. A stakeholder whose organisation won a ‘Bright Ideas’ Award for patient safety spoke about the impact it has had on the profile of their organisation and the morale boost the team has received from the recognition for their hard work.

*“[The ‘Bright Ideas’ award has] allowed me to cultivate the opportunity to submit bids for things and awards for things. [The] Bright Ideas [in Health Awards] is an innovation award, that **encourages creative thinking and innovation across CCGs.**”*

CCG

*“We also entered a Bright Ideas [in] Health Award which is a more North East based award and we actually won the category for patient safety with this ability that we’d shown; a reduction in acute kidney injury in our Trust that was sustained and significant when compared to an independent measure by an external company. [...] It **raised our profile, it improved morale** [and] it demonstrated that we were actually having some effect in the work that we were doing [...] it meant that we, as a region, had a bit more of a **uniform and consistent approach to acute kidney injury trainings** going from one trust to the next, [being] familiar with what was done rather than finding it was all ad hoc and chop change.”*

Health or social care provider

Evidence for the salience of these types of face to face initiatives among AHSN NENC stakeholders can be seen in the results of the online survey. Three quarters (76%) of respondents communicate with AHSN NENC via face-to-face workshops, consultations or events; significantly more than the regional average of 61%. AHSN NENC is also one of only two AHSNs where face-to-face workshops, consultations or events are the most common mode of communication with stakeholders.

FLEXIBILITY OF STAFF

AHSN NENC is praised in interviews for its flexible approach to projects and communication. Many stakeholders indicate that they feel comfortable reaching out to AHSN NENC with various queries because the organisation does not restrict itself to specific responsibilities and is generally very accommodating. Staff are also praised for being easily

accessible and willing to make themselves available at the convenience of stakeholders. This flexibility is considered especially helpful as some operate in busy environments and have limited windows of time to consult those outside of their organisation.

“It’s very flexible and very informal which means that it works in a busy clinical environment when you’re running between you know the nursery and you know home life and work and you know patients unwell you don’t need to think, ‘Oh I better speak to the AHSN two o’clock on Tuesday because otherwise I’ll miss them,’ you know. So, yes, and I feel free to ring like [contact name] particularly if I need to and if he doesn’t answer, he doesn’t answer it’s not you know a problem.”

Health or social care provider

Online survey data backs up these findings with 68% of AHSN NENC’s stakeholders describing the organisation’s communication as effective. This is significantly higher than the average of 53% across the different local regions which suggests AHSN NENC is especially effective at meeting its stakeholders’ communication needs. In addition, 86% of stakeholders describe access to AHSN services as easy, higher than the average of 74%.

BECOMING MORE INCLUSIVE

A further strength of AHSN NENC noted by CCG stakeholders interviewed is increased inclusivity of different types of professionals within their events and projects. One stakeholder cited that this has directly improved their perceptions of the benefits of working with the organisation and their likelihood to maintain the partnership.

“I think [AHSN NENC] has moved to being more inclusive of other stakeholders. I think there’s been a change in some of the senior leaders in the area over time that is allowing that more to happen.”

CCG

“I would say that the Academic Health Science Network really punched above their weight in that process to make sure that all the partners were included [...] the local economic sector were involved, the local universities were involved, but also everybody in terms of health and social care knew what was going on. So, again, I thought that was another area where they performed really well this year.”

CCG

Survey results support the interview feedback, with 67% reporting that their working relationship with the AHSN NENC has got better over time. This compares to an average of 54% across all AHSNs on average. Similarly, almost all (95%) AHSN NENC stakeholders rate their current relationship with the AHSN as good, significantly more than average (82%).

POINTS FOR AHSN NENC AHSN TO CONSIDER

CONNECTING STAKEHOLDERS TO OPPORTUNITIES OUTSIDE OF THE AREA

In interviews, a few AHSN NENC stakeholders express a desire to be connected to work outside their region. Reasons for this given are that they think it will help drive the spread of adoption whilst mitigating against duplication of efforts. Stakeholders say the quality of connections they have made at AHSN events has been high and they would like more opportunities to network with professionals in other parts of the country.

“In terms of how they interaction with organisations outside of our area, [there] probably has been one instance that I can think of, and I’ve probably been a little bit disappointed with the support that I got from in that time.”

Health or social care provider

FINE-TUNING COMMUNICATIONS

Although stakeholders generally provide positive feedback for AHSN NENC’s communications, a few also cite in interviews that there is some room for improvement. While most say they are kept well informed, a minority give suggestions such as more consistent communication, better documentation of impact and how AHSN NENC’s local priorities are decided.

“I think their volume of communication and their style of communication is really good. It’s very professional, it’s always very clear. They run a lot of events. What I don’t think I see is the, ‘So what?’ and the impact of what we’ve done.”

CCG

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

RAISING AWARENESS OF AHSN NENC AMONG HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PROVIDERS

Some interviewees indicate that awareness of AHSN NENC could be higher among certain groups. A few stakeholders, including patient representatives, observe that the public engagement is low. This reflects the sentiments of stakeholders at a national level and is not specific to AHSN NENC. However, given that AHSNs do not engage with the public as part of their remit, this could indicate a lack of clarity on AHSNs’ roles. Meanwhile, health and social care visibility could potentially signal both a challenge and an opportunity for AHSN NENC. As AHSN NENC are aware of predominantly engaging with providers, the focus may therefore need to be on raising its visibility within primary care.

“I think perhaps they’re more familiar with the notion of hospital-based treatment and care, and maybe less familiar with prevention, with working across the health and social care boundaries.”

Research body or university

"I think certainly the general public; that is definitely a concern. I think in primary care also, there's probably less awareness and visibility. I think some people are unaware of the range of the things that they do, so I think that it would be good if they could achieve greater level of visibility."

Private company/industry

"I think it is visible in some sectors, but not universal. I think it's been very provider hospital focused for a significant amount of time and that's because of where the power base was in the North."

CCG

DEMONSTRATING AHSN NENC'S POSITIVE IMPACT

Some stakeholders interviewed suggest AHSN NENC could better focus on the biggest health priorities within the region, including mental health and self-harm. If this is already being done, the opportunity that stakeholders see is for AHSN NENC to demonstrate the progress and tangible results achieved in these areas. In doing so, it is considered that the organisation may be able generate further visibility and support for their work.

"Mental health difficulties are a huge area of need in the North East, perhaps less is being done on that, than on aspects of physical healthcare. We've got huge needs around adolescence mental health and certainly self-harm in the North East, and there's not been much work on that so what works gets done doesn't always seem to follow regional need."

Research body or university

"I think they would get more people on board if they could actually demonstrate what they can deliver [...] I think they should have some outcomes now that would say, 'I'm working with X and I'm doing this. Look what we can do. How can we do that with you?' And I think that will definitely be an improvement and be seen to do that across the health system."

CCG

SUMMARY OF POINTS TO CONSIDER

Across interviews conducted, stakeholders would like to see AHSN NENC:

- ✓ Consider whether to review **communication and engagement strategies with health or social care provider stakeholders** to grow visibility among this group.

- ✓ Continue to **utilise and promote initiatives, such as the Bright Ideas in Health Award** in the NENC area which has proven successful and is likely to continue to support stakeholders interested in innovation.
- ✓ Assess effective **communication processes** to align regional priorities and needs with those of other AHSNs and the National AHSN Network.
- ✓ Ensure that focus is placed on **evidence gathering and documenting of the progress and impact** of the successful workstreams AHSN NENC is involved in.