

# NORTHERN Cancer Voices ANNUAL REPORT

2023 - 2024



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## Summary

2024 has been a remarkable year for Northern Cancer Voices. Winning the Mental Health Care Award for Best Peer Support Programme highlights the value and impact of our support work. Since becoming a registered charity in November 2023, we've seen significant growth and are committed to enhancing our services to better support our community.

## Introduction

Northern Cancer Voices is proud to present its first annual report as a registered charity. This report provides a brief overview of our organisation, our progress over the past year, and our plans for 2025.

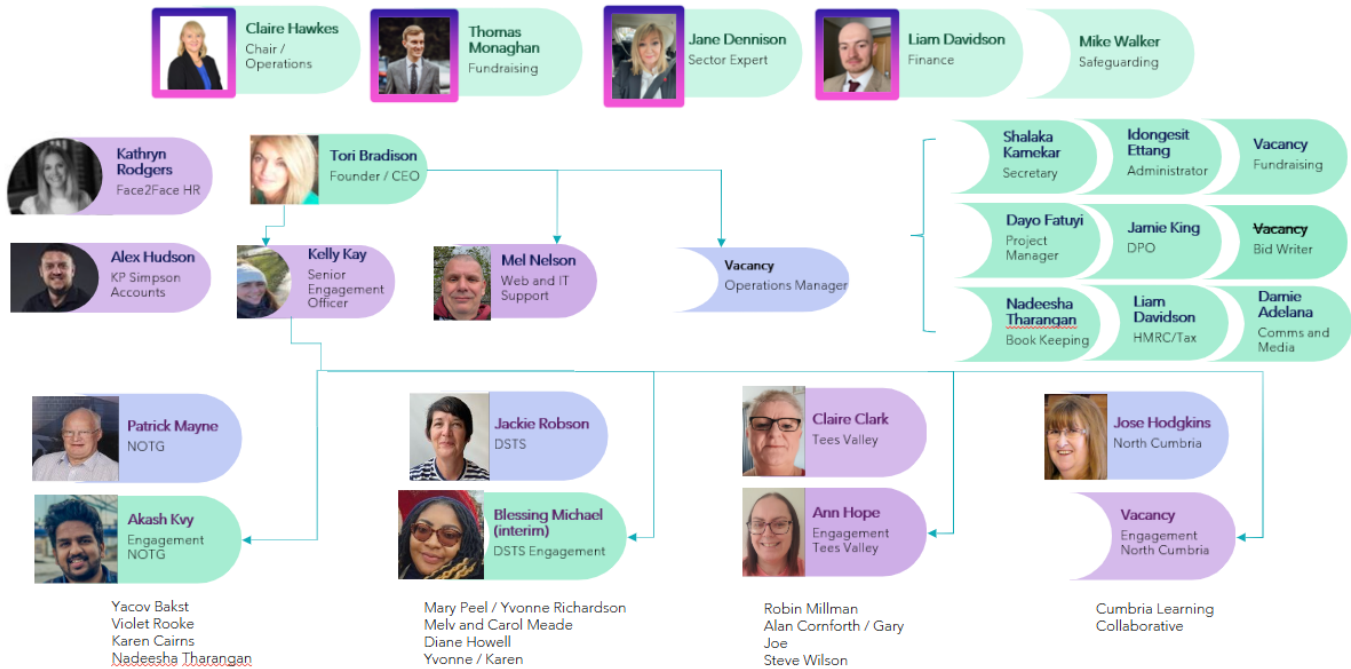
Three dedicated volunteers from the Northumberland Cancer Patient and Carer Group submitted a small bid to establish a North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System network, aiming to strengthen patient and carer involvement in the improvement and development of cancer services. Subsequently Northern Cancer Voices was founded by Tori Bradison in early 2021.

From a simple idea, driven by passionate people and a lot of hard work, Northern Cancer Voices has blossomed into a charity filled with dedicated, caring, and inspirational staff and volunteers. Our primary aim is to support patients and their loved ones during cancer diagnosis, treatment, and recovery, developing improvements from their feedback on services.

Over the past year, we have continued to grow as an organisation, inspiring people and communities to support one another and find comfort in difficult times. Feedback from our community shows that our work is rewarding for both patients, staff and volunteers, as we come together to actively combat the impacts of cancer and other diagnoses.

## Northern Cancer Voices Organisation chart

Key -  
Green Trustee and Volunteers  
Purple Paid Roles  
Blue Patient reps



Our trustees ensure the charity fulfils its mission, complies with governance, and manages resources responsibly. They provide strategic direction, safeguard assets, and support the executive team.

- **Claire Hawkes (Chair/Operations):** Experienced in improving customer and colleague experiences.
- **Thomas Monaghan (Fundraising):** With us from the start with extensive experience in fundraising.
- **Jane Dennison (Sector Expert):** CEO of Dragonfly Cancer Trust.
- **Liam Davidson (Finance):** Passionate about the organisation’s impact.
- **Mike Walker (Safeguarding):** Extensive public sector experience.
- **Tori Bradison (Founder and CEO):** Passionate about patient engagement.
- **Kelly Kay (Engagement Officer NENC):** Our first staff member. Once met -never forgotten.

### Special mention to our Patient Representative Volunteers:

Patrick Mayne, Jackie Robson and Jose Hodgkins, Patient Representative Volunteers who have set up the NOTG, South Tyneside and Sunderland group and the North Cumbria groups respectively.

### Engagement and Support Team: Staff, Volunteers, External and Students

The team have a broad range of skills and experience that helps them to forge meaningful relationships with our patients, carers, public and wider stakeholders. Each member of the team completes a full training and onboarding programme which includes EDI, safeguarding and cancer conversations. We also actively encourage continued personal development and supplementary training to enhance their skills and encourage growth.

Last year marked our first offering of student work experience opportunities, working with Newcastle University and Middlesborough College. By providing valuable experiences for students, we not only support their growth but also benefit from their fresh perspectives and innovative ideas.

## Why Our Volunteers Choose Northern Cancer Voices

We are fortunate to have a dedicated team of volunteers who tirelessly support our cause, both on the front lines and behind the scenes. When asked why they choose to volunteer with Northern Cancer Voices, many shared that they are driven by a desire to improve cancer services and collaborate with others to drive change. Our CEO, Tori, expressed her passion for enhancing cancer care, a sentiment that resonates with many of our volunteers. They see volunteering with us as a way to give back after being personally affected by cancer, and we are proud to provide a space where they can make a meaningful impact.

## Volunteer Feedback on Our Strengths and Achievements

Our volunteers highlighted several strengths and achievements over the past year:

- **Commitment to Listening:** We are dedicated to listening to cancer patients and their families, providing a vital support line for those in need.
- **Signposting to Services:** Our ability to direct people to professional services is frequently mentioned as a key strength.
- **Building Relationships:** Volunteers praised our capacity to foster relationships between volunteers, patients, and other VCSE organisations, which has helped us grow and build a strong sense of community and friendship.
- **New Support Groups:** The opening of new support groups in different areas has been extremely beneficial, providing more people with access to support closer to home.
- **Best Peer Support Award:** This award aligns with feedback about our ability to support and nurture peer relationships.

## Volunteer Suggestions for Improvement

We also asked our volunteers for suggestions on how we can improve. While 25% of responses indicated that there was no room for improvement and praised our charity for excelling in supporting both volunteers and patients, we believe they were being kind to the leadership! The feedback from our volunteers was valuable and honest, suggesting we enhance our communication strategies. By developing our networking skills and improving communication, we can create a more efficient system.

Volunteers also supported our aim to expand our work in Cumbria, and plans are already in place to develop this in 2025. We have a small team of dedicated volunteers in Cumbria, and it is crucial to keep them involved and comfortable within our charity's work as we establish support systems across the region.

## A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Staff and Volunteers

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the staff and volunteers who took the time to provide us with feedback. Your insights have been invaluable in highlighting our strengths and identifying areas for development. At Northern Cancer Voices, the voices of our staff and volunteers truly matter, and we are committed to ensuring that our team feels seen, heard, and valued.

## Key Achievements

### Empowering Patient Voices

In 2024, we launched several initiatives to address patient concerns, such as transportation to and from the hospital and privacy during chemotherapy. These efforts are detailed in the 2024 Results section of this report. We also collaborated with the Northern Cancer Alliance to establish a Reader's Panel, which advises on NHS communications and literacy. This panel ensures that the priorities of our community are reflected in the NHS Cancer Patient Experience Survey.

### Supporting Patients, Carers, and Loved Ones in Need

We introduced a support system to help patients struggling to access essential medication due to supply shortages. Additionally, we established new peer support groups in Teesside and North Cumbria, providing crucial support to underserved areas.

### Media & Public Engagement

Our team has been featured in multiple TV and radio interviews, amplifying patient concerns and raising awareness of critical cancer-related issues. We also maintain an active social media presence to engage with the community and spread our message.

### TREAT, HEAT or EAT Project with Northern Gas Networks

The cost-of-living crisis has made it difficult for many people to heat their homes and provide food for their families. When combined with a cancer diagnosis, some individuals struggle to afford hospital visits for treatment. Our Integrated Care System, the largest in size versus population, means many patients must travel long distances for care. To address this, our teams engage with the public to check in on these issues and signpost relevant support.

### Cancern Network Roadshow

In collaboration with the Northern Cancer Alliance, Macmillan, NHS Trusts, and VCSE partners, we co-designed and delivered the Cancern Network Roadshow in North Cumbria and Tees Valley. This initiative brought together stakeholders to listen to and act on the needs of those impacted by a cancer diagnosis across the North East and North Cumbria (NENC).

### Raising Awareness & Research Involvement

Our volunteers are actively engaged in various research projects, strengthening collaborations with the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) to drive impactful change. Notable involvements include:

- Serving on the **steering committee of the Cancer Research UK Programme 2025-2030: Inequalities in Cancer Care and Outcomes**.
- Volunteering to design a project aimed at understanding why people are diagnosed with **cancer in A&E**.
- Assisting in identifying patients with various cancers for specific **research projects**.
- Joining a project with **Flatiron partners** and NHS Trusts to transform routinely collected NHS data on cancer patients at scale.
- Representing on a committee that aims to use **AI to identify deteriorating patients in real-time remotely**.
- Encouraging the **public to participate** in cancer screening when invited.

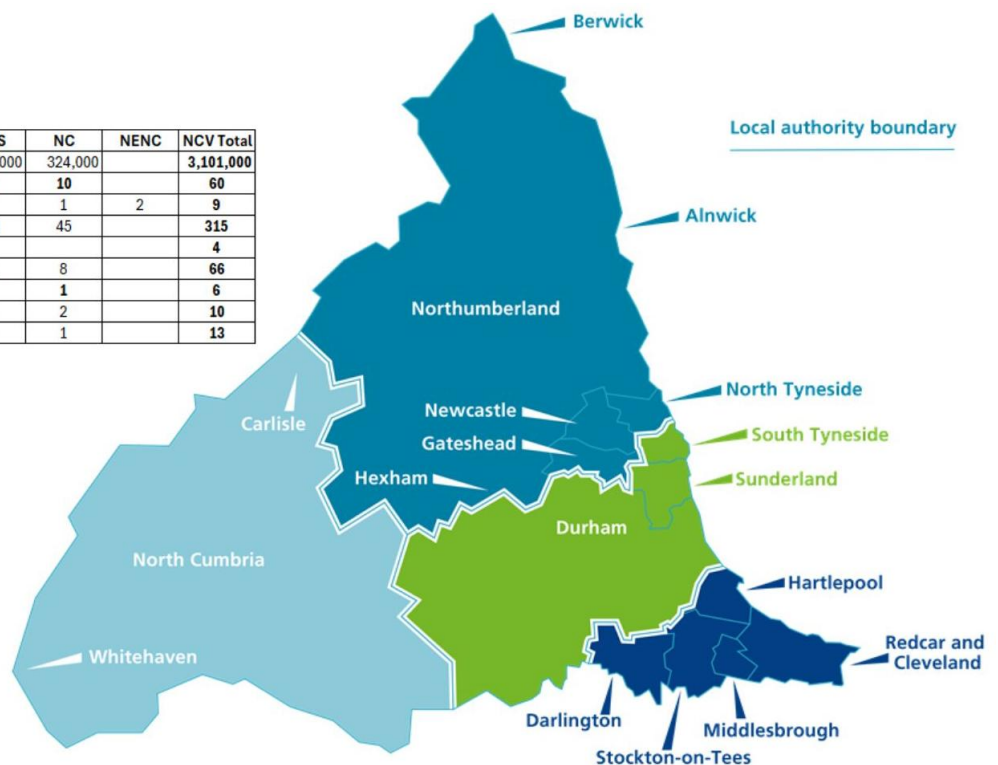
## How and where we deliver our program

Our staff and volunteers attend numerous events across North East and North Cumbria (NENC), focusing on areas of deprivation and marginalized groups, including those with mental or physical health issues. These health and wellbeing events are held in various settings such as corporate offices, prisons, community centres, GP surgeries, and village halls. We meet many new patients, carers, and members of the public affected by cancer, who share their experiences with us.

We excel at collaborating with other organisations to offer a well-rounded service which include organisations such as Healthworks Newcastle, Cancer Connections and South Tyneside Healthcare PCN. The additional offer includes:

- Signs and symptoms checking and Myth Busting: Make people aware of cancer screening options, including FIT
- Collect feedback from cancer patients, carers and loved ones, aimed at improving and make changes where necessary
- Signposting to Health and Wellbeing support
- Identifying opportunities for collaboration and future pathways of work for NCV
- Recruiting volunteers
- General and Lung Health Checks
- Flu and Covid Vaccines

	NoTG	Teesside	DSTS	NC	NENC	NCV Total
Population	1,079,000	701,000	997,000	324,000		3,101,000
NCV Members / Volunteers	15	25	10	10		60
NCV Staff	2	2	2	1	2	9
VCSE Org	70	100	100	45		315
NCV Support Groups	1	3				4
Primary Care Networks	22	14	22	8		66
NHS Foundation Trusts	3	1	1	1		6
Hospices	3	3	2	2		10
Council Areas	4	5	3	1		13



## Testimonials

### **A Cancer patient and his carer**

"My cancer journey began in early 2023 at the age of 56. I was shocked to find that I had stage three bowel cancer. However, my surgery was successful and I moved on to an intensive three month course of chemotherapy. My head was all over the place, my wife, Lisa, was seeing my mood change and I'd become lost when my treatment had finished. I didn't know where to turn or what & why I was feeling this way. My cancer nurse then suggested WE say hello to a group called Northern cancer voices. It was here I found so many answers to questions I didn't even know I had. Together, Lisa and I found an amazing group of people who "understood" and helped us, as a family to process what we'd gone through.

So please, don't feel you're alone in this. Make sure you take that next step and come meet your local group."

*Kenny & Lisa McDonald.*

### **VCSE Leader**

"When I first heard of Northern Cancer Voices I thought it was a new choir. However, I quickly discovered that it is a much more innovative venture that sought to meet a genuine need: to provide an opportunity for people experiencing cancer to feed back their experience and opinions concerning the quality of the overall management of their condition, to the provider responsible for their care, namely, the NHS. The annual national review of patient satisfaction collects and summarises valuable information, albeit by means of a heavily bureaucratic process that offers little detailed information.

In the North East, cancer treatment – surgery, radiotherapy, systemic therapies – is of good quality but the infrastructure – communication, appointments, waiting times, the information given to patients and the communication skills of some medical and nursing staff – is often poor.

Thanks to the dynamic leadership of Tori Bradison, Northern Cancer Voices engages with individuals and families who have experienced cancer, and the general public, to obtain a true picture and what it is like to be "on the receiving end" of current NHS cancer treatment. By collaborating with the South Tyneside Health Collaboration this vital, lived experience of cancer is then made available to local NHS authorities to improve its provision of cancer care. The innovative role of Northern Cancer Voices in this much needed process deserves wider recognition and support."

*Reg Hall – Cancer Connections*

### **A Healthcare Worker**

"As healthcare professionals working alongside the Patient Steering Group on the Macmillan project focused on the late effects of pelvic radiotherapy, we are acutely aware of the ongoing challenges that these late effects can pose. They can significantly impact a patient's quality of life, affecting both physical and emotional well-being.

In response to a request from the Patient Steering Group for a dedicated support group, we invited Northern Cancer Voices to collaborate with us on this initiative. This collaborative approach has ensured that the group is tailored to meet the specific needs of the individuals who will benefit most. It is evident that Northern Cancer Voices is deeply committed to listening to the concerns of patients and ensuring that the support group is designed with their voices at the forefront.

The team at Northern Cancer Voices has shown exceptional dedication and sensitivity in their approach. They have taken the time to understand the group's needs and are diligently exploring the most suitable venues for these support sessions. This thoughtful, collaborative approach reflects their commitment to creating an environment that is not only accessible but also supportive and welcoming for all participants.

Working together in this way has proven to be incredibly beneficial. The combination of healthcare professionals, patients, and the Northern Cancer Voices allows us to provide a more holistic and patient-centred solution.”

*Yvonne Anderson, Macmillan Gynae-Oncology Lead Nurse*

## **Volunteer: Antreas' Experience**

One of our student work experience volunteers, Antreas, shared his positive experience with Northern Cancer Voices. He highlighted how we excel in creating an engaging, welcoming, and friendly atmosphere for both volunteers and the public. Antreas said, "Speaking from my personal experience, Tori, Kelly, Blessing, and many more, have made me feel as if I have known them for years when in reality it has only been a few weeks! This made me feel at ease and more productive in my task of engaging with the public, as it gave me confidence in what I was doing."

## Looking Ahead to 2025

- **Promoting the ACCEND Programme:** Focus on supportive roles for patients.
- **Developing the TREAT, HEAT or EAT Project:** Expand support offerings.
- **Increasing Mental Wellbeing Support:** Collaborate with mental health partners.
- **Seeking Sustainable Funding:** Secure long-term funding sources.
- **Recruiting More Volunteers:** Enhance our support network.
- **Developing Impact Measurement:** Implement a structured system to measure effectiveness.
- **Boosting Engagement:** Increase activities within communities and strengthen online engagement.

## Conclusion

Reflecting on 2024, we are proud of our progress and impact. Our dedicated team, support from partners, and community feedback have been instrumental in our success. We look forward to another year of growth and positive impact.

**Thank you for your continued support and commitment to Northern Cancer Voices.**

# Appendices

## Additional Engagement Activities

Beyond our place-based engagement program, we also:

- **Carbon Monoxide Awareness:** Partner with Northern Gas Networks to offer awareness sessions and ensure eligible individuals are logged on the Priority Services Register as part of our **TREAT, HEAT or EAT** project.
- **Reader’s Panel:** Collaborate with the Northern Cancer Alliance to review NHS information and communications.
- **Steering Committee Participation:** Serve on the steering committee for the CR UK Programme 2025-2030: Inequalities in Cancer Care and Outcomes.
- **Medication Support Scheme:** Introduce a support system for patients struggling to access essential medication.
- **Head and Neck Cancer Project:** Distribute posters and leaflets for the Northern Cancer Alliance.
- **Feedback Provision:** Provide feedback on the National Cancer Patient Experience Survey questions and Cancer Plan.
- **A&E Diagnosis Project:** Volunteer to help design a project to understand why people are diagnosed with cancer in A&E.
- **Research Awareness:** Raise awareness of research projects, surveys, podcasts, webinars, and more through our distribution lists.

## SWOT Analysis

- **Strengths:** Clear mission, essential service, dedicated team, secured funding.
- **Weaknesses:** Funding security, volunteer recruitment.
- **Opportunities:** Growth potential.
- **Threats:** Proving value to secure future funding.

## 2024 Patient and Carer Survey Results

Membership	100 approx.
Events attended	100 approx.
Members of the public attending events we participated in	2000 approx.
Cancer patients spoken to	500 approx.
Cancer patients surveyed	140
Carbon Monoxide Gifted	39
Number of Carbon Monoxide Training Delivered	39
Members of the public added to Northern Gas Networks Priority Services Register	71

Issue	Possible Solution
<b>Aftercare Support:</b> Patients need more follow-up care and emotional support post-treatment	<b>Follow-Up Programs:</b> Implement structured follow-up programs that include regular check-ins, both in-person and via telehealth, to monitor recovery and provide ongoing support. E.g. Cancer Care Co-ordinators <b>Emotional Support Services:</b> Offer access to counselling and support groups to help patients manage their emotional well-being post-treatment
<b>Communication Problems:</b> Improve information sharing between hospitals, GPs, consultants, and nurses to reduce delays and stress	<b>Standardised Protocols:</b> Develop and implement standardised communication protocols to ensure clear and consistent information sharing between hospitals, GPs, consultants, and nurses. <b>Technology Integration:</b> Utilise electronic health records (EHR) and other digital tools to facilitate real-time information sharing and reduce delay
<b>Support Services Access:</b> Increase awareness and tailored options for support groups, especially in rural areas	<b>Awareness Campaigns:</b> Conduct awareness campaigns to inform patients about available support groups and services. E.g. NCA Media campaigns <b>Tailored Options:</b> Develop tailored support options for patients in rural areas, including mobile clinics and telehealth services. E.G. Berwick Cancer Cars
<b>Efficiency in Pharmacy and Appointments:</b> Streamline processes to reduce delays in accessing medications and appointments	<b>Pharmacy Management Systems:</b> Implement pharmacy management systems to streamline prescription processing and reduce wait times. <b>Automated Scheduling:</b> Use automated scheduling systems to optimise appointment bookings and minimise delays
<b>Mental Health Resources:</b> Provide mental health support throughout the cancer journey, from diagnosis to aftercare.	<b>Integrated Care:</b> Integrate mental health services with primary care to provide comprehensive support throughout the cancer journey. <b>Telehealth Services:</b> Expand telehealth services to offer mental health support remotely, ensuring accessibility for all patients.

What could be better for Cancer Patients	Possible solution
<b>Post-Surgery Care:</b> Patients felt neglected and uncomfortable.	<b>Volunteer Programs:</b> Engage volunteers to assist with patient care and comfort, reducing the burden on staff. <b>Patient Comfort Kits:</b> Provide kits with essential comfort items
<b>Communication:</b> Poor communication caused delays and frustration.	<b>Digital Communication Tools:</b> Implement affordable patient portals and messaging systems to improve communication and reduce delays. <b>Regular Staff Training:</b> Conduct periodic training sessions to ensure staff are up-to-date on communication best practices
<b>Support Services:</b> Lack of information on support groups.	<b>Partnerships with Local Organisations:</b> Collaborate with local support groups and services to provide information and resources to patients. <b>Online Resource Hubs:</b> Create and maintain an online hub with comprehensive information on support services
<b>Food Quality:</b> Hospital food was widely disliked.	<b>Local Sourcing:</b> Partner with local farms and suppliers to provide fresh, nutritious meals at lower costs. <b>Patient Feedback Programs:</b> Regularly collect and act on patient feedback to improve meal options.
<b>Medicine Waits:</b> Long waits for post-surgery medications.	<b>Automated Dispensing Systems:</b> Use automated pharmacy systems to streamline medication dispensing and reduce wait times. <b>Pre-Packaged Medications:</b> Prepare medications in advance for patients scheduled for discharge.
<b>Screening:</b> Need better access to screening services.	<b>Mobile Screening Units:</b> Deploy mobile units to provide screenings in underserved areas, reducing the need for patients to travel. <b>Community Health Events:</b> Organise health fairs and screening events to raise awareness and provide services.
<b>Aftercare:</b> More recovery and emotional support needed.	<b>Telehealth Services:</b> Offer virtual follow-up appointments and support groups to provide ongoing care and emotional support. <b>Peer Support Programs:</b> Establish peer support networks to connect patients with others who have had similar experiences.
<b>Transport:</b> Unreliable patient transport services.	<b>Ride-Sharing Partnerships:</b> Collaborate with ride-sharing services to provide reliable transportation for patients. <b>Volunteer Driver Programs:</b> Recruit volunteers to offer transportation services for patients in need.
<b>Appointment Delays:</b> Long waits for appointments and tests.	<b>Efficient Scheduling Systems:</b> Implement advanced scheduling software to optimise appointment times and reduce delays. <b>Telehealth Appointments:</b> Offer virtual appointments to reduce the need for in-person visits and alleviate scheduling bottlenecks.
<b>Holistic Care:</b> System focused too much on disease, not overall needs	<b>Integrated Care Teams:</b> Form multidisciplinary teams to address the physical, emotional, and social needs of patients. <b>Patient-Centred Care Plans:</b> Develop individualised care plans that consider the overall well-being of patients.

What do you want to see in Cancer Services	Possible solution
<b>Personalised Care:</b> Patients want personal attention and stress-reducing adjustments.	<b>Private Rooms:</b> Private rooms for treatments like chemotherapy to reduce stress and anxiety where possible. <b>Comfort Enhancements:</b> Provide amenities such as adjustable lighting, temperature control, and noise reduction measures.
<b>Family Support:</b> Better support and guidance for caregivers.	<b>Caregiver Training:</b> Offer training programs to equip caregivers with the necessary skills and knowledge. <b>Support Groups:</b> Establish support groups and counselling services specifically for caregivers
<b>Support Services Access:</b> Information on support groups outside hospitals.	<b>Information Campaigns:</b> Conduct awareness campaigns to inform patients about available support groups and services. <b>Online Resources:</b> Develop comprehensive online resource hubs with information on support services
<b>Communication:</b> Improved doctor-patient communication and easy-to-read materials.	<b>Clear Communication Protocols:</b> Implement standardised communication protocols to ensure consistent and clear information sharing. <b>Patient Education Materials:</b> Create easy-to-read materials and use plain language to improve understanding
<b>Mental Health:</b> Mental health resources from treatment start to aftercare.	<b>Integrated Mental Health Services:</b> Incorporate mental health services into primary care to provide continuous support from diagnosis to aftercare. <b>Telehealth Options:</b> Expand telehealth services to offer remote mental health support
<b>Faster Treatment:</b> Reduce long waits for medicines.	<b>Streamlined Pharmacy Processes:</b> Implement efficient pharmacy management systems to reduce wait times for medications. <b>AI and Automation:</b> Use AI and automation to speed up diagnostic and treatment processes.
<b>Screening Awareness:</b> Increase cancer screenings for various age groups.	<b>Public Awareness Campaigns:</b> Run campaigns to educate the public about the importance of regular screenings. <b>Mobile Screening Units:</b> Deploy mobile units to provide screenings in underserved areas
<b>Rural Access:</b> More local services and better transport in rural areas.	<b>Telemedicine:</b> Expand telemedicine services to provide remote consultations and follow-ups. <b>Mobile Clinics:</b> Use mobile clinics to bring healthcare services directly to rural communities
<b>Aftercare:</b> Ongoing follow-ups and support programs post-treatment.	<b>Structured Follow-Up Programs:</b> Develop structured follow-up programs with regular check-ins and support. <b>Multidisciplinary Support:</b> Provide multidisciplinary support involving physical therapists, mental health professionals, and nutritionists
<b>Service Coordination:</b> Integrate all care types to reduce stress and improve support	<b>Care Coordination:</b> Utilise care coordination to streamline communication and manage patient care transitions. <b>Integrated Care Pathways:</b> Implement integrated care pathways to ensure cohesive and continuous care