

# Insights from Global Healthcare Systems: Lessons and Opportunities for Improvement



**INSIGHTS**

# INTRODUCTION

The NHS is widely recognised as one of the most comprehensive and equitable healthcare systems globally, providing free-at-the-point-of-delivery care to millions of people every year. Its guiding principle of universal access, regardless of income or social status, has made it a source of national pride and an inspiration for other countries.

However, as the demands on the system grow due to an aging population, rising levels of chronic disease, and workforce shortages, the NHS faces significant operational challenges. Long waiting times, difficulties accessing GP appointments, and growing hospital pressures mean that the system often operates reactively rather than proactively, focusing on treating illness rather than preventing it.

These challenges are not unique to the NHS, and they are not insurmountable. Around the world, countries have developed healthcare systems tailored to their populations, demonstrating innovative ways to deliver care efficiently while prioritising prevention and patient outcomes. From Japan's culture of routine health check-ups to Sweden's integrated care models, these systems highlight the transformative power of forward-thinking healthcare delivery.

It's possible that solutions to the NHS's challenges can often be found by looking outward - adapting and integrating global best practices to suit the UK's unique healthcare landscape. Drawing lessons from exemplary systems around the world offers a valuable opportunity to rethink how care is delivered. By adopting these approaches, the NHS can shift from a reactive to a proactive model, reduce operational pressures, and improve health outcomes across the board.

In this article, we explore what the NHS can learn from the healthcare systems of Japan, Germany, Singapore, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Australia. Each of these systems excels in specific areas, whether through preventive care, localised governance, or the use of technology.

### **Japan: Proactive Prevention through Routine Health Check-Ups**

Japan has one of the highest life expectancies in the world, largely due to its strong emphasis on preventive care. A key component of this approach is the annual health check-up, known as "Ningen Dock," which screens for common illnesses, identifies risk factors, and promotes early intervention. These check-ups are affordable, easily accessible, and culturally ingrained, ensuring that health issues are addressed before they escalate into more serious conditions. By focusing on prevention, Japan can reduce the long-term burden on its healthcare system and improve overall public health.

In contrast, in the UK, less than half of individuals over the age of 40 are getting the heart health checks they are entitled to, known as the "midlife MOT." Introduced in 2009, this initiative aims to help identify those at higher risk of developing heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, and diabetes, offering tailored advice and treatment to better manage these risks. Unfortunately, this preventive service is underutilised, leaving many at risk of undiagnosed conditions that could otherwise be managed early. Many NHS patients also face significant challenges in accessing even routine GP appointments, let alone comprehensive preventive care. This gap in proactive care often leads to late diagnoses, placing greater pressure on the NHS and its secondary care services, which are already stretched thin.

By learning from Japan's approach, the NHS can move towards a more preventive care model, with regular and accessible health check-ups available to the population. Not only would this reduce the long-term burden of chronic diseases, but it would also free up capacity in hospitals and GP surgeries by ensuring that health issues are identified and managed early on.

### **Germany: Strengthening Primary Care to Alleviate System Pressures**

Germany's healthcare system emphasises the role of primary care as the foundation of effective healthcare delivery. Patients can easily access GPs for preventive care, early diagnoses, and routine treatments, reducing the burden on hospitals. German GPs also act as gatekeepers, ensuring that secondary care is reserved for patients who genuinely need it.

The NHS, while offering excellent primary care in principle, is often hampered by workforce shortages and long waiting times. As a result, many patients bypass GPs and turn directly to emergency departments, increasing pressure on hospitals.

### **Singapore: Incentivising Healthy Lifestyles and Leveraging Public-Private Collaboration**

Singapore's healthcare system combines government subsidies with a cost-sharing model that encourages citizens to take responsibility for their health. Preventive health campaigns are a cornerstone of its strategy, promoting healthy lifestyles and reducing the prevalence of chronic diseases. Singapore also excels in public-private collaboration, ensuring efficient service delivery and innovation.

The NHS, though committed to public health, struggles to implement widespread preventive campaigns with lasting impact. Moreover, the potential of public-private partnerships often remains underutilised, limiting opportunities for innovation and efficiency.

### **The Netherlands: Enhancing Patient Choice and Streamlining Care**

The Netherlands offers patients significant choice in healthcare providers while maintaining a strong focus on primary care. GPs in the Netherlands act as coordinators, ensuring patients are referred appropriately and efficiently to specialists. Additionally, the system's patient feedback mechanisms continuously improve service delivery.

The NHS could benefit from adopting a more structured approach to patient choice and feedback. While patient satisfaction is a priority, mechanisms to incorporate feedback into service design are often inconsistent.

## **Sweden: Localised, Integrated Healthcare Models**

Sweden's healthcare system is highly decentralised, with local councils responsible for delivering care. This localised model ensures that services are tailored to community needs and that care pathways are seamlessly integrated across primary, secondary, and social care.

The NHS's centralised structure can sometimes lead to fragmented care, particularly when patients transition between care settings. This fragmentation often results in inefficiencies and poor patient experiences.

## **Australia: Harnessing Telemedicine and Expanding Remote Care**

Australia's healthcare system has embraced telemedicine to improve access, particularly in rural areas. Virtual consultations, remote monitoring, and community nursing services play a vital role in delivering care efficiently.

The NHS has made huge strides in adopting digital tools, but barriers remain, particularly in ensuring equitable access and integrating technology into traditional care models.




The challenges facing the NHS today - rising patient demand, workforce shortages, and financial constraints—are significant but not insurmountable. By looking beyond its borders and learning from healthcare systems around the world, the NHS can reimagine its service delivery to better meet the needs of its population. Each of the systems explored in this article offers valuable insights.

Japan's commitment to routine health check-ups demonstrates how a focus on prevention can improve life expectancy and reduce the long-term burden on secondary care. Germany's robust primary care model shows how empowering GPs can alleviate pressures on hospitals while ensuring timely interventions. Singapore provides a blueprint for incentivising healthy behaviours and forging public-private partnerships to enhance efficiency and innovation. The Netherlands highlights the importance of patient choice and feedback, ensuring services remain responsive and effective. Sweden's integrated care models underscore the value of tailoring healthcare delivery to local needs, while Australia's widespread use of telemedicine illustrates how technology can break down barriers to access and improve operational efficiency.

For the NHS, adopting these lessons is not just about solving today's problems—it's about futureproofing the system. Prevention, integration, and innovation are the pillars upon which a sustainable, patient-centred NHS can be built. These improvements require not only strategic planning but also the right expertise to design, implement, and embed change.

Linea brings extensive expertise in programme transformation to support the NHS in building a scalable preventive care model that enhances accessibility and operational efficiency. By leveraging workforce planning, digital tools, and optimised resource allocation, Linea helps reduce strain on frontline staff while delivering measurable health benefits. Our integrated care pathways and upskilling initiatives empower GPs to focus on their core roles while ensuring patients receive timely care at the appropriate level. Through impactful health campaigns and partnerships with private organisations, Linea facilitates the development of digital tools for patient education, preventive health monitoring, and expanded community services. Our commitment to stakeholder engagement and quality assurance enables the NHS to incorporate patient feedback into decision-making, fostering responsive, trusted services. Drawing on international best practices, such as Sweden's integrated care model, Linea works with Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) to bridge gaps across primary, hospital, and community care for seamless patient journeys. Additionally, we support the scaling of telemedicine initiatives, ensuring digital health services are user-friendly, accessible, and effective in alleviating pressure on physical infrastructure.

We are committed to supporting the NHS in adopting these best practices. Through our expertise in healthcare transformation, workforce planning, and digital innovation, we can help build a more resilient, patient-centred system. By focusing on prevention, integration, and innovation, the NHS can not only address its current challenges but also ensure a healthier future for all.



**At Linea, we understand that achieving efficiency goals is not just about making incremental improvements - it's about transforming how your organisation operates to achieve sustainable success.**

**Our team of process improvement specialists brings a wealth of experience and a fresh perspective to your challenges, driving enhancements that are both impactful and lasting. By leveraging our expertise, you gain access to innovative solutions tailored to your unique needs, ensuring that every process is optimised for peak performance.**

**Don't let inefficiencies hold you back - contact us to discover how we can help you optimise your operations and achieve your strategic objectives.**

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