

East Midlands Cancer Alliance Career and Development Workforce Strategy 2025-2030

October 2025

Alison Broughton, Senior Programme Manager, EMCA

General principles

Version number: 5.0

First published: November 2025

Updated: N/A

Prepared by: Alison Broughton, Senior Programme Manager, EMCA

Classification: OFFICIAL

Version No.	Date	Author Name	Status	Comments
1.0	November 2025	Alison Broughton	Draft	
5	May 2026	Alison Broughton	Final	

Context

The East Midlands Cancer Alliance (EMCA) brings together NHS organisations, local authorities, cancer charities and patient groups across the region to improve cancer outcomes and reduce inequalities in care. Serving a population of around 5 million people, the Alliance covers five Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) and eight acute trusts across Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicester, Leicestershire, Rutland, and Northamptonshire. Each year, the East Midlands records approximately 26,000 new cancer diagnoses and around 12,000 cancer-related deaths, underscoring the ongoing challenge of prevention, early detection and equitable access to treatment.

EMCA's strategic priorities align closely with the national vision set out in the NHS 10-Year Cancer Plan, supporting its key commitments to deliver 75% of cancers diagnosed at stage 1 or 2, ensure faster diagnosis within 28 days, and improve survival and quality of life for people living with and beyond cancer. The Alliance is working with system partners to expand screening participation, enhance diagnostic capacity through community diagnostic centers, modernise treatment pathways, and embed personalised care approaches that reflect the plan's focus on prevention, early intervention and patient-centered outcomes.

The health of the East Midlands population continues to be shaped by an ageing demographic and health inequalities linked to deprivation, obesity and smoking prevalence. Workforce constraints remain a significant barrier: the region faces an estimated 26% shortfall in clinical oncologists (compared with 15% nationally), and national data indicate ongoing radiology consultant (9%) and mammography workforce ($\approx$ 18%) vacancies. Addressing these shortages through workforce planning, education and recruitment initiatives is central to both EMCA's regional strategy and the long-term ambitions of the 10-Year Cancer Plan to ensure a sustainable, skilled cancer workforce delivering earlier diagnosis, faster treatment and better outcomes for all.

(Data sources: ONS mid-2023 population estimates; East Midlands Cancer Alliance reports; NHS England Cancer Dashboard; Royal College of Radiologists Workforce Census 2024; Society of Radiographers.)

This Workforce Strategy outlines the vision and strategic plan for developing and sustaining the cancer workforce across the East Midlands Cancer Alliance. Our aim is to ensure a high-quality, person-centered, and equitable approach to cancer care from prevention through to end-of-life. This strategy is aligned with national policy priorities, ICS workforce planning frameworks, and the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan.

To ensure that we have the right mix of skills and resources to best meet the needs of people affected by cancer across the East Midlands region we have co-created this strategy with key partners from the five Integrated Care Systems, and regional workforce leads.

EMCA Vision

The East Midlands Cancer Alliance vision is to build and sustain a skilled, innovative and compassionate cancer workforce across the East Midlands — one that delivers earlier diagnosis, faster treatment and better outcomes for every person affected by cancer.

EMCA have provided a Cancer Academy to be a central repository for the most up to date, quality assured training and education activities.

In order to achieve our vision we have the below ambitions which we set out to achieve by working with our ICB's, Trusts and partners:

- **Strengthen the workforce pipeline** through regional recruitment, education and training initiatives that attract and retain skilled professionals to work in cancer services
- **Empower and support staff** by promoting new roles, flexible career pathways, and multidisciplinary working across diagnostics, treatment and personalised care.
- **Innovate through collaboration** — using technology, data, and digital tools to enhance productivity, integrate care, and free up clinical time for what matters most.

- **Champion wellbeing and inclusion** by fostering a supportive culture that values diversity, develops leadership and enables every staff member to thrive.
- **Plan for the future** through shared intelligence, workforce modelling and regional coordination to ensure sustainable, equitable cancer services for years to come.

EMCA Regional Objective



The key deliverable for cancer alliances relating to workforce is to facilitate the implementation of the ACCEND career pathway, core cancer capabilities and education framework in providers for relevant nursing, AHP and support worker roles in cancer.

In order to achieve this, national milestones have been given which ask the cancer alliance to:

- Identify local training and development opportunities to support staff in different roles/levels of practice within the ACCEND framework
- Work with providers to establish and implement uniform job descriptions for workforce roles, aligned to the levels of practice and competencies set out in the ACCEND framework

- Share information and best practice on local ACCEND implementation with regional workforce teams and other relevant partners – including through participation in communities of practice forums
- Work with providers to embed the core cancer capabilities outlined in the ACCEND framework within professional development processes (supervision, review, appraisals etc.) in the cancer workforce, with sharing of evidence on capability gaps
- Provide leadership to the nursing and AHP workforce within the alliance, and engage them in ACCEND and wider workforce development, through cancer nursing and AHP networks

To achieve these milestones, EMCA will:

- Work with providers, Lead Cancer Nurses, AHP Leads, and Workforce Leads to map existing training provision across the region and identify gaps aligned to ACCEND roles and capabilities.
- Support Lead Cancer Nurses with the preparation of NHS England training and education funding bids, and submit Alliance-led funding applications for key courses such as Fundamentals of Cancer Care, Foundations of Cancer Care, and cancer-specific leadership development.
- Promote access to regional and national learning opportunities, ensuring equitable availability across all providers.
- Convene a regional ACCEND working group
- Develop template job descriptions aligned to ACCEND
- Maintain a centralised repository of ACCEND implementation resources accessible to all East Midlands providers.
- Collaborate with Lead Cancer Nurses, AHP Leads, and provider education teams to integrate ACCEND capabilities into supervision, appraisal, and professional development structures.
- Support learning and development by implementing an e-portfolio linked to ACCEND competencies
- Facilitate leadership development opportunities for nurses and AHPs, including through EMCA-supported and NHS England-funded programmes.

Cancer Alliance Objectives

1. Capacity & Capability

- By 2027 we will aim to reduce workforce shortages through targeted upskilling of workforce and retention initiatives. We will also work to amend and review pathways which support with workforce shortages.
- By 2027 we will aim to expand specialist roles in diagnostics, oncology, and personalised care. With the help of a cancer workforce dashboard we will be able to map staffing against patients to review if staffing levels are satisfactory.

2. Education & Development

- Implement Cancer Career and Education Programme region-wide – ACCEND and Aspirant Nurse Programme. By 2027 we aim to have 50% of the cancer workforce utilising the digital core competency framework. We will invest in staffing to support this.
- Partner with universities and NHS Graduate Scheme for talent pipeline.

3. Equity & Inclusion

- Embed health inequalities training (123 Approach). By June 2026 we aim to have 100% of the EMCA team completing the 123 approach training.
- Increase representation of underserved communities in workforce planning.

4. Innovation & Efficiency

- Deploy digital solutions and AI for pathway optimisation. By 2027 we aim to have at least one AI solution for pathway optimisation embedded across the East Midlands.
- Develop mutual aid dashboards for key tumour sites.

Aims

- Build a current and future workforce by sharing and developing training and education to promote best practice.
- Promote cancer care as a long-term career by promoting ACCEND programme
- Provide access to an ePortfolio to support and evidence an individual's career development.
- Improve leadership and empower patients and their carers through personalised care and innovative ways of working.
- Collaborate with system leads to reduce duplication of work.

Current Workforce

In order to address the lack of information we have on the cancer workforce across the East Midlands, EMCA will be working jointly with the West Midlands Cancer Alliance to commission the development of a workforce dashboard.

The implementation of the EMCA Cancer Workforce Dashboard will be a transformative step in supporting workforce planning and optimisation across the East Midlands Cancer Alliance footprint. By consolidating and presenting tumour-site-specific workforce data, the dashboard will provide clear visibility of capacity, gaps, and trends at both regional and provider levels. This will enable more effective recruitment and retention strategies, targeted training and education planning, and informed service redesign to meet current and future demand. The dashboard's granular insights—covering metrics such as staff headcount, vacancy and leaver rates, sickness absence, skills mix, and patient volumes—will support Integrated Care Boards and Cancer Alliances in aligning resources with cancer incidence and operational pressures. Ultimately, this digital tool will underpin compliance with national cancer standards, drive equity of access and outcomes, and provide a scalable model for workforce intelligence that can be adopted nationally.

Working Training and Education Investment

EMCA works closely with local system leaders—including ICB Leads, Lead Cancer Nurses, Cancer Managers, and Workforce Leads to identify where targeted resources can have the greatest impact. This involves supporting the Lead Cancer Nurses in preparing and submitting bids to NHS England for workforce education and training funding. In addition, the Alliance directly applies to NHS England for funding for priority cancer education programmes, including Fundamentals of Cancer Care, Foundations of Cancer Care, leadership development courses, and other key components essential to building a skilled and confident cancer workforce.

Any additional workforce or training funding, including Cancer Alliance transformation funds, will be submitted through the East Midlands Cancer Alliance Investment Committee to ensure resources are deployed transparently, equitably, and in alignment with regional priorities.

EMCA will design and distribute its own evaluation and feedback mechanisms to review all funded training courses and education placements. Findings will be shared across the region to ensure that training packages delivered through EMCA funding are of the highest quality and provide value for money. Feedback will be analysed to provide assurance that EMCA remains responsive to the needs of the cancer workforce and committed to continuous improvement in training provision.

Workforce Support Across the Three Pillars: Early Diagnosis, Operational Performance, and Treatment & Care

The East Midlands Cancer Alliance (EMCA) recognises that delivery of high-quality cancer outcomes is fundamentally dependent on a sustainable, skilled, and adaptable workforce. To enable progress across the Alliance's three strategic pillars—Early Diagnosis, Operational Performance, and Treatment & Care—EMCA will implement a coordinated workforce support programme designed to build capacity, enhance capability, and foster collaborative models of care.

Early Diagnosis

To achieve earlier and faster diagnosis for the population of the East Midlands, EMCA will:

- Strengthen primary care engagement by supporting GP practices and PCNs with education, clinical decision-support tools, and protected learning time to improve identification of cancer symptoms and referral confidence.
- Enable pathway innovation, including community diagnostic models, non-medical endoscopists (NMEs), reporting radiographers, and digital pathology hubs, supported by structured competency frameworks and clinical supervision.
- Provide a training and education offer to cancer support roles, such as Cancer Care Coordinators and Screening Champions by providing the EMCA Aspirant Nurse Programme and ACCEND training and education offers

Operational Performance

To improve cancer pathway delivery and meet national standards, EMCA will:

- Support providers with MDT streamlining programmes. By 2028 we will have supported 15 MDT's with streamlining. We will also have standards of care in place for each tumor site where deemed appropriate.
- Support workforce modelling to identify bottlenecks within tumour site pathways and implement local and system-wide plans to address gaps in diagnostic turnaround times, treatment scheduling, and follow-up capacity.
- Invest in digital and operational workforce capabilities, including training in pathway redesign, demand and capacity modelling, and adoption of new digital tools that improve efficiency and reduce administrative burden.

Treatment & Care

To ensure high-quality, Personalised, and timely cancer treatment, EMCA will:

- Support the growth of personalised care roles, such as Cancer Nurse Specialists (CNS), Allied Health Professionals (AHPs), and support workers, to deliver Holistic Needs Assessments (HNAs), stratified follow-up, and patient-centred care planning.
- Support multi-professional training and development, embedding access to continuing professional development (CPD), leadership programmes, and enhanced skills training for the cancer workforce
- Support training and education through the ACCEND Programme
- Work with ICB's to ensure that accountability agreements are in place to deliver Personalised care as BAU as per the national planning guidance

Workforce across specific tumour sites

To build a resilient and future-ready cancer workforce, the East Midlands Cancer Alliance will deliver a comprehensive programme of initiatives tailored to the unique needs of each tumour site. For breast, prostate, colorectal, and urology cancers, EMCA will expand supported self-management and remote monitoring pathways where clinically appropriate, enabling specialist teams to focus on complex cases and improving patient experience.

In lung, upper GI, and HPB cancers, the Alliance will invest in targeted health checks, support with pathway redesign, alongside enhanced GP education to drive earlier diagnosis.

Head and neck, brain and CNS, and sarcoma teams will benefit from multidisciplinary team (MDT) streamlining, advanced clinical practitioner development, and digital innovations such as virtual wards and AI-enabled triage to optimise complex care delivery.

Haematology and SACT services will be strengthened through demand and capacity reviews, expanded training for non-medical prescribers, and improved workforce modelling to address scheduling and follow-up bottlenecks.

Skin cancer teams will receive support for early detection initiatives and specialist nurse training, while psychosocial services will be enhanced by embedding psychological support, peer support worker integration, and staff wellbeing programmes across all tumour sites. These initiatives, underpinned by real-time workforce intelligence from the EMCA

dashboard and cross-system collaboration, will optimise workforce deployment, support recruitment and retention, and ensure equitable, high-quality cancer care for the region's population.

Oncology Workforce Challenges in the East Midlands

The East Midlands faces significant oncology workforce challenges, including a severe shortage of clinical oncologists (around 26% shortfall), radiology consultants, and mammography staff, which impacts diagnostic and treatment capacity. Recruitment and retention remain difficult, particularly in rural and high-deprivation areas, compounded by limited career progression and high workload pressures. There are notable gaps in skill mix, with shortages of advanced clinical practitioners, oncology nurse specialists, and cancer support roles, alongside a need for structured competency frameworks and expanded training programmes such as ACCEND. Capacity constraints in systemic anti-cancer therapy (SACT), radiotherapy, and diagnostics create bottlenecks, while staff wellbeing and sustainability are under strain, requiring flexible working models and robust support systems.

To tackle these challenges, the East Midlands Cancer Alliance will implement a comprehensive workforce strategy focused on building capacity, capability, and resilience. EMCA will expand specialist training and career pathways through programmes like ACCEND and the Aspirant Nurse Programme, ensuring a structured competency framework for advanced clinical practitioners and oncology nurse specialists. Investment in digital tools and AI will optimise service delivery and reduce pressure on staff, while collaborative planning with Integrated Care Boards will address systemic capacity constraints in SACT, radiotherapy, and diagnostics. Additionally, EMCA will embed health inequality training and culturally competent care across the workforce to improve patient outcomes and equity.

Utilising AI to support the Cancer Workforce

The East Midlands Cancer Alliance will harness the power of artificial intelligence (AI) to support and transform the cancer workforce across the region. By embedding AI solutions into pathway optimisation, diagnostics, and workforce planning, EMCA aims to improve efficiency, reduce administrative burden, and enable earlier, more accurate cancer detection and treatment.

Nationally, the NHS is investing in AI-powered radiology analysis platforms—such as those developed by The Royal Marsden and CARPL.ai—which help clinicians interpret medical images for cancers including breast, lung, sarcoma, brain, and prostate, speeding up diagnosis and supporting clinical decision-making. EMCA will review tools such as these and if deemed appropriate and beneficial SDF bids will be encouraged to trial such initiatives across the East Midlands.

AI-driven administrative tools, like Microsoft 365 Copilot, are already saving NHS staff significant time on documentation and workflow management, freeing up capacity for direct patient care. EMCA will explore a variety of AI options to support the cancer workforce across the East Midlands, including AI-powered trial matching, digital triage, and virtual wards—to empower staff, optimise resources, and ensure equitable, high-quality cancer care for all patients across the East Midlands.

Attraction, Recruitment and Retention

The NHS People Promise underpins our approach to recruitment and retention, ensuring that every member of our workforce feels valued, supported, and empowered to thrive. By embedding the People Promise's commitments—such as flexible working, compassionate leadership, inclusive cultures, and opportunities for learning and development—we aim to attract a diverse range of candidates and retain talented staff across all roles.

Nationally, People Promise initiatives have driven significant improvements in retention, with targeted interventions like efficient e-rostering, enhanced induction, wellbeing support, and local listening sessions reducing leaver rates to their lowest in over a decade. EMCA will build on this success by promoting career development programmes, and recognition

schemes, while fostering a culture where every voice counts and staff wellbeing is prioritised. These actions will help us create a workplace where people want to join, stay, and build their careers, ensuring we have the skilled, motivated workforce needed to deliver outstanding cancer care.

The Alliance will work with stakeholders across ICB systems / providers to scope, develop and support emerging and developing cancer roles to support existing and innovative ways of working.

EMCA will support with the recruitment and retention of the cancer workforce across the East Midlands by offering tailored education and training opportunities. Work to secure funding for training, education and upskilling of the workforce. Promote communities of practice to offer peer support and share best practice. Improve cancer workforce data collection strategies to inform on resource allocation, trends and planning to encourage the development of an agile and innovative workforce.



Succession Planning

The alliance will utilise local and national workforce intelligence to anticipate and therefore prepare succession planning. By supporting knowledge transfer initiatives (legacy mentor, apprenticeships etc.) there is assurance that the cancer workforce of the future will have the necessary knowledge and skills. The promotion of leadership opportunities and talent management will ensure succession planning is identified across the region and that development opportunities are equitable and in the best needs of service provision.

Fragile Services

Within the East Midlands Cancer Alliance (EMCA), fragile services are identified as those at risk due to workforce shortages, reliance on temporary contracts, and limited specialist capacity. The Alliance works closely with Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) to monitor and mitigate these risks through regular meetings, open communication, and collaborative workforce planning. Substantive job adverts and business case development are promoted to ensure long-term stability and to attract highly skilled individuals to the region.

This approach is fully aligned with the NHS England Fragile Services Strategy, which defines fragile services as those at risk of failure within 12 months due to workforce or operational constraints. The national strategy emphasises:

- Early identification and escalation of fragile services to NHS England Medical Directorate.
- Use of multi-system reviews, Operational Delivery Networks, and Clinical Advisory Groups to manage and stabilise services.
- Integration with the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan to ensure sustainable staffing and service resilience.
- Adoption of the Sustainable Services Framework, focusing on service redesign, mutual aid, and system capacity optimisation.

By embedding these principles, EMCA ensures that fragile services are proactively identified, risks are escalated appropriately, and actions are taken in line with both regional and national best practice.

The East Midlands Cancer Alliance will promote open and honest conversations with ICBs through the establishment of regular account manager meetings to fully understand and jointly support the mitigation of the risks. The alliance will support business case development to support the long-term stability of these roles.

Governance & Delivery

- Attend the NHS E working groups on a monthly basis
- Align with ICS workforce plans and national cancer policy
- Discussion via EMCA Cancer Board and ICB Account Manager Meetings
- Quarterly progress reviews and annual strategy refresh



Metrics & Evaluation

- Recruitment and retention rates
- Training uptake and completion
- Equity indicators (e.g., representation of underserved groups)
- Performance against cancer pathway standards

Appendix 1. Cancer Alliance planning pack, NHS cancer programme (2025/26).

Cross-Cutting:

ACCEND: Supporting patient care, performance and productivity through enabling recruitment, retention and upskilling in key roles

Deliverables:	Facilitate the implementation of the ACCEND Career Pathway, Core Cancer Capabilities and Education Framework in providers for relevant nursing, AHP and support worker roles in cancer	Category:	1: Locally driven programmes led by Cancer Alliances
Rationale:	Workforce is essential to the delivery of high-quality care within cancer waiting times standards, and for implementation of transformation initiatives to improve cancer outcomes. Modelling suggests that the cancer workforce – particularly cancer nursing, which is essential to SACT delivery and patient care and support - is experiencing shortfalls which exist now and will continue in the future without intervention. The NHS Long Term Plan commits to all cancer patients having access to a CNS or support worker, and these roles covered by the ACCEND Programme are vital to the delivery of cancer services. The ACCEND Programme can help with upskilling, recruitment and retention, but requires local implementation supported by experienced nursing and Allied Health Professionals (AHP) workforce leaders in Alliances.		
Cancer Alliance role:	- Identify local training and development opportunities to support staff in different roles/levels of practice within the ACCEND Framework - Work with providers to establish and implement uniform job descriptions for workforce roles, aligned to the levels of practice and competencies set out in the ACCEND Framework - Share information and best practice on local ACCEND implementation with regional workforce teams and other relevant partners - including through participation in communities of practice forums - Work with providers to embed the core cancer capabilities outlined in the ACCEND Framework within professional development processes (supervision, review, appraisals etc) in the cancer workforce, with sharing of evidence on capability gaps - Provide leadership to the nursing and AHP workforce within the Alliance, and engage them in ACCEND and wider workforce development, through cancer nursing and AHP networks.		
Direction of travel:	This deliverable has been maintained from 24/25. Deliverables will transition to BAU in the next 12-24 months, contingent on progress made.		
Inequalities:	Alliances to give particular attention to ensuring that the ACCEND Framework is implemented in providers which serve more disadvantaged communities. This is in line with the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, which states that disadvantaged areas face greater challenges attracting and retaining staff, and this needs to be addressed.		
Success measures:	Narrative updates to be provided quarterly.		
Use of funds:	Cancer Alliances can use cross-cutting allocations to pursue ACCEND activities.		
Relevant guidance		Monitoring and support	
ACCEND Framework including info on different levels of practice Links to ACCEND Framework implementation guides		- Monthly meetings via Cancer Alliance Workforce Group and ACCEND Communities of Practice - Optional quarterly 1:1s with Alliance leads to discuss off-track areas	

