

**Rhian Vandrill**, commercial health partner at Mills & Reeve, looks at the role of independent providers in helping clear record waiting lists for treatment



# New opportunities in Community Diagnostic Centres

**Sir Mike Richards' review of diagnostic services called for a rethink of diagnostic service delivery advocating the establishment of Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs) which he recommended over time could take on almost all diagnostic tests requested by GPs and many of the tests from hospital outpatient services.**

The CDC programme in England plays a key role in achieving the government's goal of reducing waiting lists by expanding capacity and implementing the NHS Elective Recovery Plan. The government has confirmed it will open 160 CDCs by the end of March 2024, a year ahead of the original March 2025 target. According to NHS England data,<sup>1</sup> these new facilities are delivering 6.5% of total diagnostic activity, making a significant impact on diagnostic capacity.

According to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Diagnostics (APPG) report, 127 CDCs are currently operational with 'at least one regular or larger-sized CDC in each Integrated Care System in England'.

To support the delivery of these services, we have seen collaboration with the independent sector expand service provision. A total of 13 CDCs are led by the independent sector, with eight of these already operational. There are a further 22 CDCs located on NHS estate where the independent sector is providing diagnostic services. They operate like NHS-run CDCs but by making use of the available capacity

in the independent sector, patients can access additional diagnostic capacity free at the point of need.

## Moving closer to home

The CDC programme has the wider ambition of delivering diagnostic services differently. It forms part of the NHS commitment to making place-based, person-centred health and care a reality.

---

INDEPENDENT  
HEALTHCARE  
PROVIDERS  
HAVE MADE A  
SIGNIFICANT  
CONTRIBUTION  
TO ENHANCING  
CAPACITY AND  
PRODUCTIVITY IN  
DIAGNOSTICS

---

According to a recent Patient Association survey finding, locality was a key concern for a significant propor-

tion of respondents, and 78% felt that diagnostic facilities should be provided closer to patients' homes. These findings are consistent with the Independent Healthcare Providers Network research, *Going Private*, which found a growing demand for easy access to diagnostic centres.

CDCs aim to 'enhance diagnostic capacity in underserved communities', with NHS England prioritising their placement within community settings to target and address health deprivation. By setting up CDCs in community-based locations, they have the potential to offer easier access to diagnostic services to individuals who might not usually seek healthcare.

One of the recommendations from the APPG is for NHS England to expand support for ICS establishing CDCs in community-based sites like shopping centres.

## Spotlight on the independent sector

It is acknowledged that independent healthcare providers have made a significant contribution to enhancing capacity and productivity in diagnostic services. Alliance Medical Limited (AML), which specialises in medical imaging is one of the private providers partnering with the NHS in running CDCs.

## Portsmouth CDC

We have been working recently with



colleagues at Portsmouth Hospitals University NHS Trust as it enters into a contract with AML for the outsourcing of the Trust's MRI x-ray and CT scanning services. Pending planning permission, these diagnostic services will be delivered by AML in a newly refurbished CDC based at Rodney Road Centre, an existing building owned by the Trust within the community setting away from its main hospital site and from which AML currently delivers PET-CT scanning services to patients in the locality. Patients benefit from improved access to a range of diagnostic services in Portsmouth and the surrounding areas and reduced travel time.

David Cahill, chief commercial and strategy officer at Alliance Medical said: 'Being a key partner to the NHS for CDCs we have learned that collaboration is important from the outset. Aligning the vision and values of the project, agreeing common aims and ob-

---

## ALIGNING THE VISION AND VALUES OF THE PROJECT, AGREEING COMMON AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

---

jectives makes navigating the detail of contracting and commissioning more straightforward.

'With all parties concerned with the Portsmouth CDC at Rodney Road, we ensured that we all kept close to the project and always pointed back to our overall aims throughout. This has been the key to our collective success with this to date.'

## A bigger role in health diagnostics

Portsmouth CDC demonstrates how working collaboratively with the private sector has enabled the NHS to increase activity by taking a partnership approach to increasing capacity in diagnostics. As a result, it has benefited patients across its systems enabling them to access tests in a timely and convenient manner.

### NOTE

1. *CDCs Unveiled: Challenges & Triumph - An inquiry into community, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Diagnostics* ([www.rcr.ac.uk/media/kiknoh1o/cdcs-unveiled-challenges-and-triumphs.pdf](http://www.rcr.ac.uk/media/kiknoh1o/cdcs-unveiled-challenges-and-triumphs.pdf))