

“Evaluating Integrated Care Innovations: NICHE Anchor Institute’s Impact on Overcoming Constraints in Tackling Health Equity in Rural Coastal Communities ’

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Norfolk Initiative for Coastal & Rural Health Equalities (NICHE)
Web site: <https://www.uea.ac.uk/groups-and-centres/projects/niche>



NICHE: Enabling Enablers

- NICHE = Norfolk Initiative for Coastal & Rural Health Equality
- Based at University of East Anglia, UK (since 2022)
- Focus: Integrated care for rural and coastal communities
- Responds to workforce shortages, poor access, socio-economic deprivation
- Mission: **Ignite**, **Innovate**, **Embed** sustainable, community-driven solutions



Evaluation Approach: Embedded and Participatory



- **Critical realist + participatory evaluation**
- **"Evaluate-with," not "evaluate-on"**
- **50+ professionals, community leaders engaged**
- **Tools: interviews, ripple mapping, thematic analysis**

Early Results and Why They Matter

Emerging Results:

- Tailored integrated care pathways improving access
- Fellowships and leadership programmes boosting workforce confidence
- Reaching people in ways traditional services haven't:
"It's not just better—it feels different."
- Early ROI: reduced duplication, more appropriate referrals
- Lived experience shaping care delivery

Implications:

- Scalable, transferable model for underserved regions
- Supports policy, workforce, and system-level learning
- Longitudinal studies planned for long-term impact



Implications: Beyond Norfolk and Waveney



NICHE offers more than a set of good projects—it is an operating model for integrated care in underserved regions.

- For practitioners: **Innovation doesn't need to be large-scale—relevant, relational, and rooted in place.**
- For system leaders: **Participatory evaluation that improves care without burdens.**
- For policymakers: **Real-world insights on achieving integrated care in underserved areas.**

Next Steps:

- Sharing learning locally, nationally, and internationally.
- Expanding NICHE beyond the region.
- Continuing longitudinal evaluation to track sustained impact.