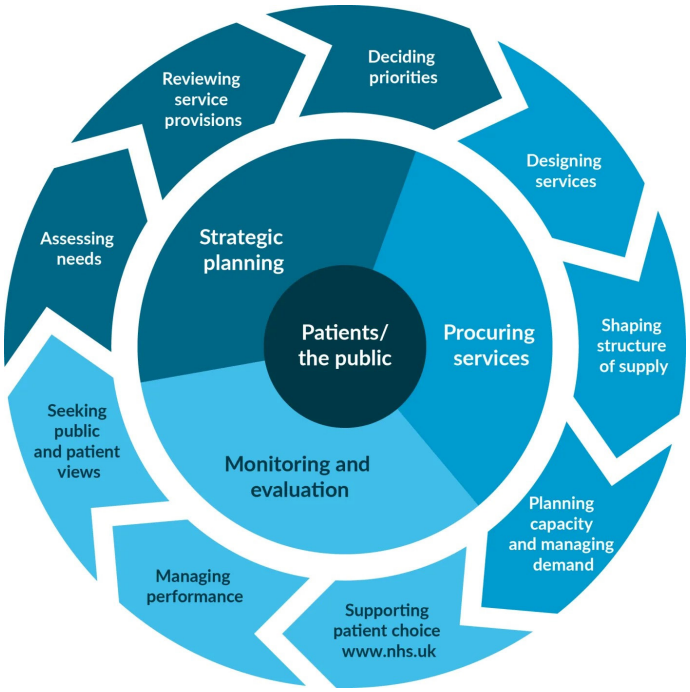
Nurseline
Community Services

What Is the Commissioning Cycle?

There are several evidence-based commissioning models to consider in commissioning, each following a similar process. There are also two different types of commissioning: strategic and individual.

Strategic Commissioning

Strategic commissioning is focused on the overall local/regional market when looking at macro-level citizen needs. Below is an infographic of the strategic commissioning cycle, defined by NHS England. It places people and the general public at the centre of the process, working to strategically create and commission new services to the market (based on analysis of the overall need), as well as review and monitor current services. It's important to consider long-term value for money and improved health and social care outcomes for a group of people, with the by-product of early intervention being lower future costs.



Individual Commissioning

Individual commissioning, also known as micro-commissioning, focuses on procuring appropriate services for people at a personal level, emphasising well-being and value for money through meeting outcomes.

This is where an individual case commissioner would consider the full picture around of a person needing care and follow a process to ensure that the right services surround them individual – from fully commissioned care providers to family carers, education, employmentemployment, and voluntary sector input. The commissioning process should include monitoring of outcomes for each person to ensure needs are being met effectively.

© 2002 IPC Commissioning Cycle. All rights reserved.

Both types of commissioning can generally be split into four different activities:

Analyse:

The Analysis Stage focuses on gathering data at population and individual levels. It's about analysing the circumstances surrounding either macro or micro-level needs before progressing to the Planning Stage. When an analysis is not fully carried out, projects risk being ineffective, causing unnecessary costs for local authorities (LAs) and integrated care boards (ICBs), and not delivering the outcomes our communities need.

At the Analysis Stage, commissioners need to gather evidence-based data while horizon scanning for new needs or trends, identify gaps, research the correct funding streams to resolve them and look at assets already present within our local communities. All of these activities build a wider contextual picture of the needs.

Plan:

The Planning Stage determines how the identified gaps/needs can be met through available services and services that may not yet have been created or commissioned in an area. The process involves a deep understanding of the local market and the ability to translate the data gathered in the Analyse Stage into tangible actions and priorities.

Commissioners need strong skills in forecasting and must be creative in how they commission services and seek out creative solutions and providers. Market shaping is an important and ongoing process – once the need is analysed, commissioners must develop a plan for implementing the solution.

Another critical element of planning is workforce shaping and development. Without a skilled workforce, it becomes very difficult to commission services (especially complex services), so an understanding of available skills and workforce capacity is crucial. As commissioners, you need to plan how you will skill people and providers to meet the needs of our communities.

At the Planning Stage, success indicators need to be set, as well as contingency plans should a project fail.

Do:

Effective implementation of the agreed plans (whether at the macro or micro level) is next in the commissioning cycle. This includes developing the market, identifying relevant providers and creating/securing contracts to deliver services. Local Authorities often use procurement portals to invite interest businesses, suppliers, or charities to tender for the identified services.

During the implementation phase, look at effective communication between all parties, the sharing and management of risks, effective and fair procurement processes, and close monitoring as the service launches.

Review:

All publicly commissioned services need to be reviewed regularly to ensure that what is being delivered meets the identified needs and outcomes of a person or a group of people. The Review Stage of the cycle is incredibly important, as a lot of learning takes place regarding what's working well and what might not be working. . It allows commissioning teams to pivot their strategies towards more effective plans as population needs evolve.

Essentially, during this stage of commissioning, we are asking questions and looking at the tangible outcomes of each project:

Were outcomes met?
2. What is the impact on people's lives and well-being?
3. How are we assuring quality?
4. Can we demonstrate value for money?
5. Has there been a positive impact on long-term health and social care inequalities?

Conclusion

For commissioning to be effective, it's critical during each stage to gain as much knowledge and input as possible about the local community being commissioned. Truly holistic commissioning, focused on well-being, requires action from many stakeholders for it to work.

For more information, check and download our free resources that help guide effective commissioning,