

STRATEGY

2025-35





Introduction

This is our 10 year strategy to help create the conditions for social work and social care and support to flourish. It sets out:

- What we need to do year-to-year to improve how social work and social care works right now.
- What we need to contribute to over the long term to radically reset how social work and social care support could work for the better.

At Iriss we try hard to do what we encourage our partners to do so our strategy is purposefully short and realistic. It is focussed on actions and how we will know our efforts are effective.

The social work and social care system is huge and complicated. Although we can and do make real change as an organisation, we know that change at scale is a collective effort. There are organisations and people out there with the expertise and commitment we need. If you're reading this, and you think it might be you, please get in touch. We would welcome you alongside us in changing social work and social care support for the better.

Nigel Henderson

Chair of the Iriss Board

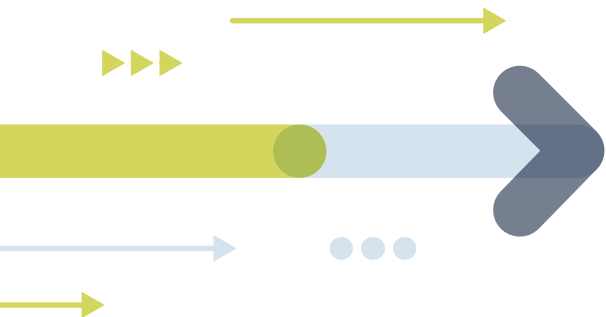
Why we are here

People working in the sector do so to make a difference to people's lives. However the social work and social care system they step into is fragmented, under-resourced, bureaucratic and overly complicated. This makes it almost impossible for workers to do their best work, and for people to get the care and support they need, when they need it.

We believe that the social work and social care workforce can do outstanding work, but that they can only do it when we create the conditions that allow it to flourish.

We are an organisation that works to create those conditions. When those conditions are in place, workers are freed up to make a real difference in people's lives.

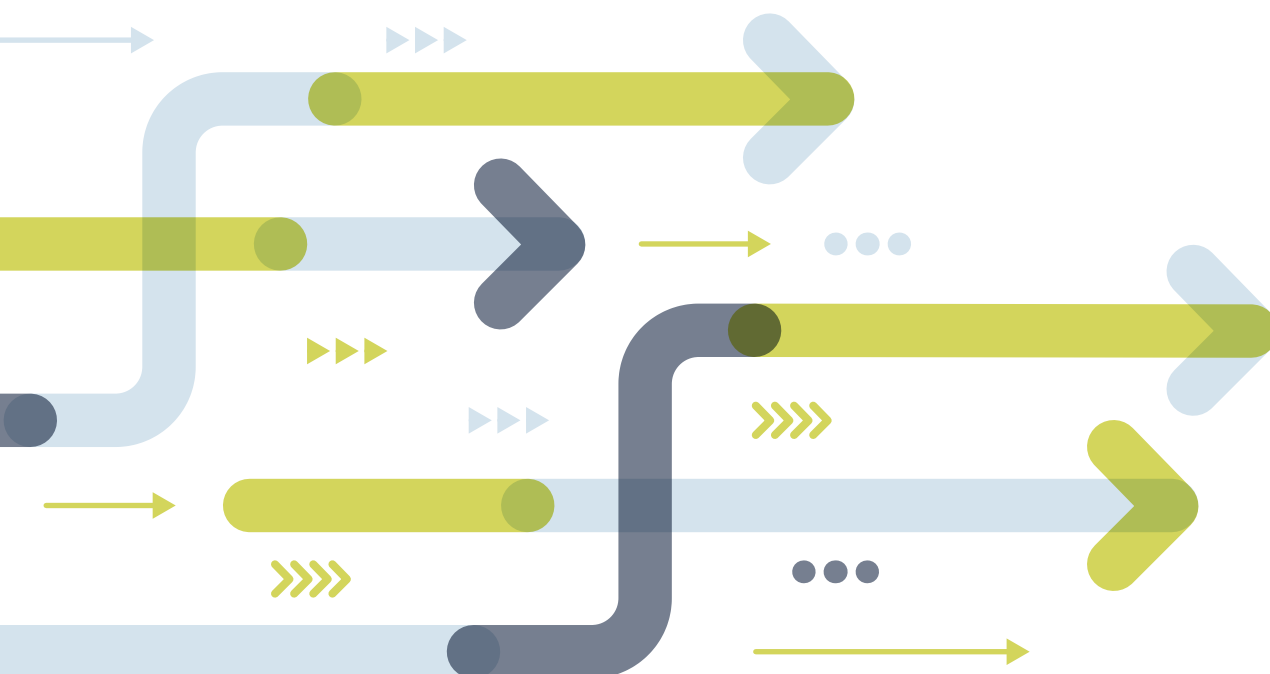




Who we are

Iriss has been working to help make social work and social care better for people since 2008. We have kept our focus on this core purpose while evolving in response to the changing context of practice, policy and priorities.

We have helped people to make real change through research, improvement and innovation. We have experimented with new ideas and approaches, some have worked, and some haven't. As an organisation with innovation at its core, we keep learning from our work. This makes us better at supporting the sector.





What we do

We are a team of facilitators, coaches, designers and researchers with expertise and skills across design, social work, social care, change, implementation, systems reform, policy and practice improvement.

We specialise in:

- Supporting innovation, implementation and improvement, creating the conditions for people to try something new.
- Creating and sustaining communities of changemakers. Amplifying and connecting their work to build impact, supporting them to keep going to sustain change.
- Synthesising evidence and practical learning about what actually works. We influence national efforts for change by understanding innovation, implementation and improvement.

Our Board sets the strategic direction for Iriss. It comprises people with breadth and depth of experience in the sector, with skills in innovation, improvement, leadership, strategy and oversight.

What we know

Working across the system with different people and teams has shown us that:

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- ▼ Some of the foundational problems in social work and social care support are too big to be solved directly by our organisation.
 - ▼ There is a strong pull to stay talking about and defining problems, because acting is difficult and could be costly.
 - ▼ There is a strong pull towards simple 'solutions' that appear logical. However, when these are just 'something we can do' in the face of complexity, and challenge, they aren't effective.
 - ▼ There is a strong desire to scale ideas across Scotland. However, effective interventions are often local and bespoke, with limited scalable elements.
 - ▼ Under resourcing, cuts and overwhelm are undermining the purpose of public service which is to support the person, not the process.

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- ▲ People working in, and who use social work and social care support have good ideas for better. It's what's around them that gets in the way.
 - ▲ There are committed and hopeful people focussed on change for the better out there. They need to be supported and sustained in their work.
 - ▲ People working in the sector want to do so in an evidence-informed way, as well as become research practitioners themselves.
 - ▲ Effective change happens when there is good leadership; space to think; the courage to prioritise and make progress; sustainability; and commitment over the long term.
 - ▲ Expert, human and responsive support is critical to success, as is the development and promotion of cultures that drive agency, learning and positive risk taking.





Our focus across the next 10 years

Three resets

For social work and social care to truly flourish we need three resets. We need to create the conditions for making a difference in day-to-day care and support roles, in leadership, and across systems.

ROLES

- Develop and test new roles and reconceptualised approaches to the practice of social work and social care support. This includes **building ways of working from the question of ‘what people need’** instead of what currently exists.

LEADERSHIP

- Develop and test new and reconceptualised social work and social care leadership that combines a **fundamentally person centred, systemic approach** with functional and other leadership approaches.

SYSTEMS

- Develop and test new approaches to organising social work and social care, taking a fundamentally systemic approach to **influence locally and nationally**.
- Put together what we learn, drawing together wider evidence and practical knowledge.

Year-to-year we will continue...

- **Supporting people working in social work and social care** to innovate and improve, helping them get beyond rehearsing the problem to sustainable action.
- **Drawing together evidence and other practical learning** to support what works in policy and practice implementation at local and national level.
- **Creating and sustaining communities of changemakers**, amplifying and connecting their work to build impact, supporting them to keep going to sustain change. We will share our work plan, setting out our activities for every year of the strategy.



How we know where to focus our effort

People working in and using social work and social care know what the problems are and where they need support. We asked the sector what they thought our focus should be for this strategy and the most common response by far was “support us with change”.

Every year we will review our work plan and check in with the sector to make sure we are still moving in the right direction.





How we will know if our efforts are working

To make sure that we continue to improve our offer to the sector we will:

- Build and share our learning about innovation, improvement and implementation and what these look like in different parts of the social work and social care support system.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of our work through our organisational outcomes:
 - We know more about the complex problems of social work and social care support.
 - People working in social work and social care know more about what works.
 - People working in social work and social care support have a better understanding of how to tackle the complex problems they face.
 - People working in social work and social care are better able to improve and innovate.

Together these contribute to creating the conditions needed for social work and social care support to flourish. This is what makes a real difference to people's lives.



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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