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The Networked Data Lab: Using Novel Data Linkage to Impact Health Inequalities

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The Health Foundation ran a £6.7M, six-year programme of work that created a consortium of analytical teams embedded in the health and care system across the United Kingdom. Each year, the teams acquired, linked and analysed health and social care datasets with the goal of being responsive to local analytical needs and producing results more quickly than typical academic research. The teams then coordinated their analyses to allow results to be combined into briefing papers for national policy makers without requiring data to be shared and held in a central location. The programme gave insights on a range of health and social care topics including: care for vulnerable patients during COVID, the evolution of children's mental health care, roadblocks in journeys from hospital into community care, and the role of housing quality in

health inequalities. As importantly, the programme provides insight into: stakeholder engagement for impact; using patient expertise to improve analysis; best practices for analytical collaboration with government and NHS; and battling information governance for multi-agency data linkage. Drawing on a range of case studies, we describe how the programme shows that complex and novel data linkages are necessary to provide insights that local service planners can act on, and also highlights a complex set of conditions that need to be met to enable impactful analytics using real-world health and care data. We'll also highlight insights into making the NHS 'AI ready': the UK government's plan to use technology to address the challenges faced by the national healthcare system.

