



# Co-operative Councils

## Innovation Network

## HEALTH

### Lambeth Food GP Co-op

## Growing Food, Growing Healthy Communities

### Context

Founded in 2013, the Lambeth GP Food Co-op is an innovative co-operative of patients, doctors, nurses, and residents creating food growing spaces across the 45 general practice (GP) surgeries in the London borough of Lambeth.

The co-op's objective is to transform unused land in GP surgeries (e.g. alleyways or scrubland) into food growing spaces. Patients - especially those with long term health conditions - are invited to join gardening groups led by experienced nurses with gardening knowledge to learn how to grow food in a safe and secure environment and how fresh food can help improve their diets, health, and wellbeing.

### Development

Since 2016, the catering service of King's College Hospital (also located within the Lambeth borough) agreed to purchase vegetables grown by the co-op. Although the co-op does not yet produce the volume required, they have been selling their vegetables to staff who love the idea of buying locally grown vegetables grown by patients in the community.

### Implementation

The garden at King's College Hospital is one of the co-op's food growing gardens located outside of GP practices; others include the St Thomas' Hospital, which uses a hydroponic system, and The Pulross Centre, a 20-bed rehabilitation unit in Brixton where gardening supports patients recovering from COVID-19. The co-op is currently exploring the idea of an NHS Vertical Farm in Lambeth, using large wall spaces for growing vegetables and further contributing to the supply of fresh vegetables used in patient and staff meals.



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The Lambeth GP Food Co-op provides a space for people to socialise, learn, and grow food together

### Review

Expanding and developing the project requires financial investment, but there is currently insufficient evidence of the cost / benefits, and the existing business-as-usual culture inhibits innovation and change.

### Key Takeaways:

- Collaboration with the local council, healthcare system, and individual hospitals / healthcare facilities increases support for food growing spaces.
- Growing spaces help patients participate in gardening activities with a social purpose.
- Gardening complements patient therapy but can also provide revenues for reinvestment into sustainability funds and continued gardening projects.
- Patients are actively involved in all aspects of the food co-op, supporting them to be more confident in managing their own health and wellbeing.

### Action Opportunity:

Build working relationships with other hospitals and GP surgeries, to achieve important benefits for patients, especially those with long term conditions.

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### For further information, contact:

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