

Practical care

Supply Management Awards 2007 CATEGORY Best public procurement project
WINNER NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency
NHS Pasa devised a successful sourcing strategy to develop England's telecare infrastructure.
Rebecca Ellinor finds out how.

A project that invests in our future is how the judges described the winning entry by the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency (Pasa).

Over the next 50 years the number of people in England aged 65 and older is estimated to increase from 9.3 million to 16.8 million. The next generation will have higher expectations for the delivery and quality of public services and the number of people requiring increasingly complex community-based health and social care is also expected to rise. Telecare products and services - detectors, monitors and alarms that allow older people to remain in their own home for longer - are considered one way to cope with this.

The Department of Health committed £80 million to build on these services and asked Pasa to devise a sourcing strategy to develop the telecare infrastructure in England.

The project began in 2005 with Pasa examining the dynamics of the market and innovative ways to source. The research discovered a fragmented and uncoordinated market for telecare, highlighted by price differences of over 25 per cent for some identical products. It also found few global suppliers in the UK market, while there were many SMEs and social enterprises with innovative technology struggling to get noticed. It concluded a national sourcing solution would help to develop the market for the benefit of the public sector and industry.

A tendering process began and a four-year national framework agreement was awarded in June 2006 to 15 suppliers. By March 2007 recorded sales through the agreement had reached £9.8 million - exceeding the estimated target of £9 million a year. Paddy Howlin, project manager and telecare category manager at Pasa, says the project has produced £27 million in efficiency savings.

It has also created a once-only procurement process for the public sector and enabled the telecare industry to channel activity and develop a sustainable UK market.

Neil Griffiths, lead category manager at Pasa, says: "This practical solution supports the wider government agenda on collaborative procurement. It also uses procurement to support the government's policy initiative."

Clare Skidmore, telecare project manager in Kent County Council's adult services department, adds: "It provides a straightforward mechanism for purchasing telecare equipment to meet current demand as the telecare service expands across Kent, without undertaking a costly procurement exercise."

Suppliers say Pasa's work has given them a route to market and they have also seen quality improve and prices drop.

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