Dear [Name],

I am writing to you in your capacity as Chair and Chief Executive of XXX Integrated Care Board to share *The public’s perspective: The state of health and social care*.

This new report from Healthwatch England explores the experiences of those using health and social care services, and proposes steps that healthcare leaders can take to improve care. It draws on feedback from over 65,000 people who used services from October 2022 to September 2023. These voices add a vital dimension to the picture that media headlines and NHS data paint of the current state of the system.

In light of the challenges facing the NHS, the report focuses on ten key areas of health and social care. These include GP and dental care, mental health and cancer treatment, elective care, social care, and hospital discharge. It also looks at the impact of wider societal change: the cost of living, a shift to digital technology, and the need for accessible information.

The report shows accessing support and treatment remains the biggest challenge people face. You will be aware that waiting lists are growing, NHS dental treatment is getting harder to find, and many can’t get a GP appointment. In this research, you’ll see how these and other pressures on the system disproportionately affect some groups.

In deprived areas, for example, people already face challenges accessing care, and have poorer health outcomes. But now, rising financial pressures are keeping people from seeking the care they need, because they can’t afford associated costs such as travel and prescription medication. One in five people on means-tested benefits said they’d avoided booking an NHS appointment for this reason, according to polling Healthwatch England conducted on the cost of living crisis.

In another poll carried out as part of this report, one in seven people said an NHS professional had advised them to consider paying for private services. And with many forced to take up this option, we are seeing a two-tier system emerge, where healthcare is accessible only to those who can afford it.

Based on their findings, Healthwatch England makes several calls for change, including some of ICBs. These include the following:

* On GP access, evidence that ICBs plan to tackle health inequalities, especially in deprived areas.
* On dentistry, listening to local communities, include dental representatives in their decision-making, and using all opportunities to join up dental care with other local NHS and public health services.
* On cancer care, personalised aftercare support, including post-treatment plans, appropriate home adaptations, and a single point of contact with care teams.
* On waiting for elective care, personalised support for those waiting, such as access to pain management, physiotherapy, and mental health support.
* On hospital discharge, more consistent implementation of latest discharge guidance. This includes single points of contact for people to use if their condition gets worse, and clear responsibility for who will arrange people’s transport home.
* On digital literacy, traditional models of access and care to remain alongside digital methods.
* On accessible information, ensuring providers implement the Accessible Information Standard (AIS).

We would welcome the opportunity to work with you to implement these key steps.