

The impact on health inequalities of approaches to community engagement in the New Deal for Communities regeneration initiative: a mixed-methods evaluation

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

The New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiative was a government-funded programme introduced in 39 of the poorest neighbourhoods in England in 1998. The aim was to improve the social conditions and health of people living in these areas. Local residents had to be involved in planning and delivering NDC projects but they were engaged in different ways in different areas. We identified four main approaches to involving residents in decision-making ranging from those that gave residents a lot of influence over NDC decision-making to those in which professionals were more likely to engage with residents to get support for their organisation's agenda. We used information on social and health outcomes to assess the impact of these approaches. We also tried to assess whether or not some approaches to engagement provided better value for money than others.

Our results show a mixed picture. The general pattern suggests that, in those NDC areas in which residents had the greatest influence over NDC decisions, local people were more likely to report that the NDC had improved the area. These residents were also more likely to report that relationships in the community, levels of trust and mental health had improved over time than residents in areas in which they had less influence. We were unable to say whether or not any of the approaches to engagement provided better value for money than others. This was because we had very limited information, for example on the amount of time that residents spent volunteering on NDC projects.

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