

Community engagement approaches to improve health and reduce health inequalities

Introduction

The NIHR Public Health Research (PHR) programme evaluates public health interventions, providing new knowledge on the benefits, costs, acceptability and wider impacts of non-NHS interventions intended to improve the health of the public and reduce inequalities in health. Topics for research are identified and prioritised, and studies are commissioned to help answer questions of public health importance. The studies include both primary research and evidence synthesis.

Question

Which approaches to community engagement are effective and cost effective in improving health and reducing health inequalities?

- **Population: Communities** (researchers to define communities) and groups with distinct health needs and/or demonstrable health inequalities. Researchers to specify and justify.
- **Intervention (non-NHS):** Community engagement approaches (relating to services or activities which might be commissioned or delivered by any organisation for the improvement of public health). Researchers to specify and justify.
- **Comparator:** Different types/levels of community engagement approaches within a similar population. Researchers to specify and justify.
- **Outcomes:** Researchers to specify and justify. Outcomes might include: measures of success in community engagement, cost utility, health related outcomes arising from the community engagement approach.
- **Time:** Researchers to specify and justify
- **Design:** Researchers to specify and justify.
- **Setting:** Community. Researchers to specify and justify.
- **Impact on inequalities:** Researchers to specify and justify.

Background to commissioning brief:

A number of national strategies and targets aiming to improve health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities highlight the importance of involving local communities in health-related activities, particularly those experiencing disadvantage. The different approaches used to involve communities in decisions that affect them (community engagement) have evolved from a mix of politics, policy, theory and evidence.

It has been noted that there is a gap between the theory and the empirical evidence. NICE have identified a number of gaps in the evidence including:

- *how effectively do different approaches achieve the various levels of community engagement,*
- *how do different approaches affect individuals within those communities,*
- *what are the costs and benefits of community engagement approaches,*
- *what is the effectiveness of a variety of community engagement approaches,*
- *how much time and investment (including funding) is needed before community engagement leads to health improvements,*

•and what are the specific components that make a community engagement approach effective?

Research is required: both to identify approaches successful at engaging communities, and to demonstrate the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of such approaches in improving health and reducing health inequalities. Proposals could consider either or both types of research. Research should be designed and conducted to ensure that the findings are generalisable.

Notes to Applicants

The NIHR Public Health Research programme is funded by the NIHR, with contributions from the CSO in Scotland, WORD in Wales, and HSC R&D, Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland. Researchers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are eligible to apply for funding under this programme

Applicants are asked to:

1. Read the 'Commissioned proposal guidance notes'
<http://www.phr.nihr.ac.uk/fundingopportunities/commissioned.asp> in full before starting the online application form.
2. Refer to the Medical Research Council's Complex interventions guidance:
<http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Utilities/Documentrecord/index.htm?d=MRC004871> when planning how studies, particularly RCTs, will be supervised. Further advice specific to each topic will be given by the PHR programme at full proposal and contract stages.

If you wish to submit an outline proposal on this question, please complete the online application form at <http://www.phr.nihr.ac.uk/fundingopportunities/commissioned.asp>

Applications submitted by the cut-off date of 13:00 on 14 April 2010 and deemed within the PHR programme's remit will be considered by the PHR Research Funding Board at its meeting in 23/24 June 2010. Following this meeting shortlisted outline proposals will be invited to submit a full proposal to be considered by the PHR Research Funding Board in October 2010. Shortlisted applicants will be given a minimum of eight weeks to submit a full proposal.