

Community Engagement

Research Question(s)

- Which interventions, using a community engagement* approach, are effective** in improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities?

NICE has noted that “Community engagement is a highly complex area with several important purposes. These include empowering people within communities to gain more control over their lives and to play a part in decisions that affect their health and wellbeing” (1). There is growing evidence to suggest that community engagement can improve health and wellbeing.

The Public Health Research Programme is interested in the effectiveness of interventions in communities to improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. Public Health England has noted a range of approaches to community engagement (2) including: community development, asset-based approaches, and area-based initiatives. There is no strong evidence on which approaches are most effective and in what context. However, there is a rich theoretical background which applicants would be expected to draw upon. The Public Health Research Programme has previously funded research in this area (3, 4, 5) and applicants should take account of the findings and recommendations from these studies. The evaluation of interventions addressing barriers to community engagement may also be considered. Population level interventions with potential for wide reach and impact are of particular interest.

Primary research is required; the primary outcome must be health related; other outcomes may include: community and individual wellbeing, measures of community engagement, social cohesion, social capital, voice, collaboration and capacity, or others justified by the researchers. Researchers should indicate how long term impact will be assessed. Proposals should incorporate a mechanism for public involvement.

Researchers should consider whether the research is investigating the independent benefits of community engagement, or how community engagement may enhance the impact of public health interventions (or both) and justify their study design accordingly, for example in defining the comparators. Generalisability of community engagement is important so that evidence may be applied more widely; researchers to specify and justify study design.

Research must have a rationale for why and how the intervention, through community engagement, is likely to improve the range of outcomes specified. Researchers should identify the theoretical basis of their proposed interventions and may include a logic model to explain underlying context, theory and mechanisms to justify their approach to evaluation. Investigations may include the need to clarify key factors such as definitions, models and outcomes, and linked studies could help to achieve this.

For all proposals, applicants should clearly state the public health utility of the outcomes and the mechanisms by which they will inform future public health policy and practice. Details about the potential impact and scalability of interventions, if shown to be effective, should be provided. A health economic evaluation to inform affordability and return on investment may be included where appropriate.

*In this guideline, we have adopted NICE's definition of 'community engagement' as encompassing a range of approaches to maximise the involvement of local communities in local initiatives to improve their health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. This includes: planning, design, development, delivery and evaluation.

**'Effectiveness' in this context relates not only to the size of the effect, but it also takes into account any harmful or negative side effects, including inequitable outcomes.

- (1) Community engagement: improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities (NICE guideline draft for consultation August 2015).
- (2) South J. A guide to community-centred approaches for health and wellbeing. Public Health England, 2015.
- (3) Harris J, Springett J, Croot L, Booth A, Campbell F, Thompson J, et al. Can community-based peer support promote health literacy and reduce inequalities? A realist review. *Public Health Res* 2015; 3(3)
- (4) Popay J, Whitehead M, Carr-Hill R, Dibben C, Dixon P, Halliday E, et al. The impact on health inequalities of approaches to community engagement in the New Deal for Communities regeneration initiative: a mixed-methods evaluation. *Public Health Res* 2015; 3(12)
- (5) O'Mara-Eves A, Brunton G, McDaid D, Oliver S, Kavanagh J, Jamal F, et al. Community engagement to reduce inequalities in health: a systematic review, meta-analysis and economic analysis. *Public Health Res* 2013; 1(4)

Remit of Call:

All proposals submitted under this call must fall within the remit of the Public Health Research programme. Please go to www.nets.nihr.ac.uk/programmes/phr/remit for details.

General Notes:

The 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. The scope of the programme is multi-disciplinary and broad, covering a range of interventions that improve public health delivered in a non-NHS setting.

Notes to Applicants

The NIHR Public Health Research programme is funded by the NIHR, with contributions from the CSO in Scotland, NISCHR 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 recommended to seek advice from suitable methodological support services, at an appropriate stage in the development of their research idea and application. It is advisable to make contact at an early stage as possible to allow sufficient time for discussion and a considered response.

The NIHR Research Design Service (<http://www.nihr.ac.uk/research/Pages/ResearchDesignService.aspx>) can advise on appropriate NIHR programme choice, and developing and designing high quality research grant applications.

Clinical Trials Units are regarded as an important component of many trial applications however, they are not essential for all types of studies to the PHR programme. The CTUs can advise and participate throughout the process from initial idea development through to project delivery and reporting. NIHR CTU Support Funding (http://www.netsccc.ac.uk/supporting_research/CTUs) provides information on units receiving funding from the NIHR to collaborate on research applications to NIHR programmes and funded projects. In addition, the UKCRC CTU Network (<http://www.ukcrc-ctu.org.uk>)

provides a searchable information resource on all registered units in the UK, and lists key interest areas and contact information.

Transparency agenda

In line with the government's transparency agenda, any contract resulting from this tender may be published in its entirety to the general public. Further information on the transparency agenda is at:

<http://transparency.number10.gov.uk/>

http://www.ogc.gov.uk/policy_and_standards_framework_transparency.asp <http://www.contractsfinder.businesslink.gov.uk/>