

# A 10-year impact assessment of the Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation (EME) programme: an independent mixed-method evaluation study

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## Plain English summary

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## Plain English summary

The UK government funds scientists to conduct research to develop better ways to support health, treat diseases and improve long-term care for patients. The Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation programme, a partnership between the UK Medical Research Council and National Institute for Health Research, enables scientists to find out if and how a promising new approach might work in practice. Between 2009 and 2018, the Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation programme funded 145 research projects with a total of £175.5M. To understand the programme's impact, what worked well and where improvements might be needed, an independent evaluation was carried out.

Researchers from Technopolis Group (Brighton, UK) and Ipsos MORI (London, UK) looked carefully at data available about the Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation programme and projects, and gathered new information from project leads and experts involved in health research. These researchers found that the programme supports important research that tests whether or not a treatment or approach can work. Most Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation projects looked at treatments that can benefit patients or save costs in the health service but that are of little interest to industry (e.g. using a cheap existing drug to treat a disease or patient group that it is not yet used for). At the time of the evaluation, 43 projects were complete, of which seven had provided findings that informed decisions on how health care should be delivered.

Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation projects researched treatments across many health needs that exist in the UK, but some problems that affect many people were investigated by few or no projects. To steer scientists towards areas of need, the National Institute for Health Research sometimes describes the research it is looking for when inviting proposals. However, many of these calls for proposals do not lead to funded projects. Understanding the reasons for this may identify how research in these areas can be better supported.

The evaluation makes recommendations for how the Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation programme can be improved to increase its impact or make it easier for scientists to carry out research.

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Reports are published in *Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation* (EME) if (1) they have resulted from work for the EME programme, and (2) they are of a sufficiently high scientific quality as assessed by the reviewers and editors.

## EME programme

The Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation (EME) programme funds ambitious studies evaluating interventions that have the potential to make a step-change in the promotion of health, treatment of disease and improvement of rehabilitation or long-term care. Within these studies, EME supports research to improve the understanding of the mechanisms of both diseases and treatments.

The programme supports translational research into a wide range of new or repurposed interventions. These may include diagnostic or prognostic tests and decision-making tools, therapeutics or psychological treatments, medical devices, and public health initiatives delivered in the NHS.

The EME programme supports clinical trials and studies with other robust designs, which test the efficacy of interventions, and which may use clinical or well-validated surrogate outcomes. It only supports studies in man and where there is adequate proof of concept. The programme encourages hypothesis-driven mechanistic studies, integrated within the efficacy study, that explore the mechanisms of action of the intervention or the disease, the cause of differing responses, or improve the understanding of adverse effects. It funds similar mechanistic studies linked to studies funded by any NIHR programme.

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## This report

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