

Establishing a Forum for Public Engagement and Involvement in Health and Social Care Research in Wales

Public Engagement and Involvement Workshop: Summary of Discussion

This document provides a summary of the discussion from the Health and Care Research Wales Engagement and Involvement Workshop held on 26 January 2021.

The workshop provided an opportunity for attendees to hear about the [‘Discover Your Role in Health and Care Research’ Action Plan](#) which can be found on the [Health and Care Research Wales website](#).

The workshop also covered discussions on the proposed establishment of a Public Engagement and Involvement Forum for health and social care research, addressing focus area 1 of the Action Plan. A briefing pack that provides an outline of the Forum proposal was shared with all attendees, and is available to view on the [Health and Care Research Wales website](#).

Key summary

The main points emerging from discussions at the workshop are:

1. There is strong support for the idea of a Public Engagement and Involvement Forum. The proposed model should be suitable, and plenty of suggestions have been made for how to organise and run these events effectively.
2. There are several potential audiences that Health and Care Research Wales is trying to engage with, and further work is required to define the scope of the Forum in contributing to research engagement alongside other approaches.
3. It will be important to ensure the Forum adds value and bring research involvement ‘to life’ rather than risk becoming a ‘talking shop’ with much discussion but little action. Attendees outlined several themes that were considered important to keep the content interesting and action-focused.

4. There is plenty of interest from many parts of the research community to be involved in the working parties that can focus on developing detailed pieces of work to address priority topics.
5. A further exercise to identify priorities will be undertaken to seek contributions from those not able to attend the workshop. Emerging priorities from the workshop include:
 - Developing a meaningful engagement plan that addresses need for greater diversity and inclusion
 - Addressing administrative barriers to public involvement
 - Sharing involvement stories and other activities to demonstrate impact

Forum concept

There was strong support for the establishment of a Public Engagement and Involvement Forum. However, many attendees also commented the biggest risk to establishing the Forum would be that it just becomes a 'talking shop' with little forward progress or tangible actions.

Attendees also highlighted the forum should add value to the existing public involvement groups by networking them together, not replace existing groups or initiatives, and there was suggestion for a Public Involvement Leads Group to be established too.

Some attendees encouraged Health and Care Research Wales to consider a co-production approach in the future development of this area of work.

Scope, content & audience of forum

Whilst there was support for the concept of a Forum, several attendees highlighted the need to have a clearer purpose, or more defined scope, for the events. There are several audiences that should be considered in the engagement and involvement work, but they will have varying levels of starting knowledge, interest and motivations for engaging.

Broadly the audiences that attendees discussed, included:

- The public at large (with assumption that starting knowledge/interest in research is very low in this group)
- The 'informed' public (those that are already aware and/or involved in research in Wales in some capacity)

- Public Involvement leads and researchers who are actively engaged in public involvement activities
- Researchers who do little/limited public involvement at present
- Health and care professionals

Health and Care Research Wales needs to be clearer on which audiences the Forum is best placed to serve, and how this fits with other work that may be better suited for engaging other specific audiences. For example, there was consensus that a purposeful engagement plan (Focus Area 3 in the Action Plan) should be a priority and this may be the most suitable approach for engaging the public at large and health and care professionals.

Regardless of the approach taken, there was strong support from attendees that engagement and involvement activity should be open to a diverse set of perspectives and experience, and to ensure models of working and opportunities are inclusive. It was suggested further work is needed, and building trust through engagement at grassroots and community level might be the most suitable method to begin addressing this.

Attendees made several suggestions on the content of the forum events (subject to clearer scope being defined), including:

- Updates from working parties on progress addressing key issues
- Opportunities to profile positive public involvement activities, to celebrate the achievements and share knowledge on how things were achieved
- Learn about new developments at local, national, and UK level related to public involvement, and opportunity to discuss and debate the implications for Wales. For example: research transparency; research prioritisation; diversity and inclusion; learning from COVID-19 pandemic research response; working virtually and digital exclusion challenge, were all mentioned as topics of interest.
- Hear from different voices, including public contributors and researchers, about their experiences of public involvement, with aim to demystify research involvement and encourage others

Forum logistics

There was general support from attendees for the idea of three Forum events per year, considering it offers a good balance of providing enough momentum and continued engagement whilst not over-saturating people.

The open membership approach was considered to be a positive step, enabling new individuals to get involved, but need to be clear on the purpose of the forum to ensure people understand what to expect.

Ensuring that people are not excluded from participating because of the methods or tools we use to run the forum was a recurring theme in the workshop discussion. Attendees favoured a mixed method approach, with virtual and face-to-face events (when possible). Further work is required to ensure that virtual meetings can support those who may not be able to access or use digital tools to participate. Similarly, when face-to-face events are possible, they need to be accessible and a budget available to cover appropriate expenses.

There was also agreement that the events do not need to be held in normal business hours, and could be modular - spread out across a number of days rather than a single, conference-style day. Several attendees also suggested it would be important to support a model where people can contribute without having to be at a 'live' event, and the opportunity to engage with peers outside of the events and in-between events via appropriately moderated tools and platforms.

A number of attendees recommended that the agenda for upcoming Forum events need to be publicised well in advance of the event, and there may be a need for meeting etiquette/ conduct document to ensure it is a safe and positive experience for those participating.

Forum Working Parties

A number of attendees indicated they would be keen to get involved in specific working parties on topics that interested them.

Whilst attendees thought that shared leadership of the working parties was a positive aspect of the model, it was considered that Welsh Government support and endorsement of the working parties is important to lend 'weight' to the discussions.

There was support for running working parties on more than one priority in parallel, although some attendees also stressed it will be important not to try to do too much at once, and would be better to focus on doing a few things well, with effective support, and apply what we learn to future working parties.

The Working Parties need to have a clear agreed task and scope from the outset. There was also a suggestion that each working party could have the same template terms of reference, to promote consistency of working and for people to know what is expected, with just the task and timescale being specific for each working party.

Based on discussions at the workshop, we can have confidence to establish some key working parties ahead of the first Forum event – to begin focusing on the actions needed to tackle key issues.

Priority topics

When considering the priority issues, feedback from attendees touched on the importance of all the proposed focus areas in the Action Plan. Some activities were raised consistently as priorities across multiple break-out room groups, including:

- Develop a purposeful research engagement strategy (Action Plan focus area 3)
- Tackle administrative barriers to public involvement (Action Plan focus area 5)
- Provide effective training and support to researchers to enable them to do public involvement well (Action Plan focus area 6)
- The need for case studies and stories to bring the impact of public involvement 'to life' (Action Plan focus area 7)

The need for representative and diverse involvement was a recurring theme throughout the workshop. There is no single action to address this, but needs to be a key aspect of all the proposed work and activities.

Other issues

A few attendees raised questions that are not specifically covered by the summary of discussion and are captured here.

Question: Will the Forum events be open to those outside Wales?

Answer: The scope of the forum events will be about research engagement and involvement in Wales. However, we would not actively exclude those from outside Wales who might wish to hear about all the great things happening here! It is expected that we will be inviting both UK and International colleagues to join some forum events, to update us on their developments or learning, and initiate discussions about the implications and opportunities for engagement and involvement activities in Wales.

Question: How will the Action Plan be evaluated?

Answer: Many of the activities proposed in the action plan are focused on influencing a change to systems and research culture. Whilst some activities will be evaluated based on whether the identified outcome has been achieved, the success of the action plan must also consider whether the process is more participatory and perspectives from the community on whether positive progress is being made year on year. This will require capturing qualitative data as well as quantitative data, and Health and Care Research Wales is keen to collaborate further with the research community to agree measures of success and most suitable methods.

Next steps

1. Health and Care Research Wales will now focus on refining the Forum concept to take account of the feedback received at the workshop.
2. A survey will be launched in March 2021 to allow both those who attended the workshop and those who were unable to attend to reflect on the priorities that should be the focus of attention immediately.
3. We expect to announce the date for the first Forum event in the coming weeks, and outline the agenda based on suggestions from the workshop.
4. Individuals can still share their views on the key issues for research engagement and involvement with the team via Research-involvement@wales.nhs.uk