



Ymchwil Iechyd
a Gofal **Cymru**
Health and Care
Research **Wales**

ANNUAL REPORT

2019/2020



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the annual report for Health and Care Research Wales for 2019/20. It provides an overview of health and social care research in Wales and a summary of how we used our resources from Welsh Government.

Health and Care Research Wales is supported by Welsh Government and exists to ensure that today's research makes a real difference to tomorrow's care. Our overall mission is to promote, support and provide collective oversight of health and social care research in Wales to ensure it is of the highest international scientific quality, is relevant to the needs and challenges of health and care in Wales, and makes a difference to policy and practice in ways that improve the lives of patients, people and communities in Wales.

Health and Care Research Wales is a networked organisation, supported by Welsh Government, which brings together a wide range of partners across the NHS in Wales, universities and research institutions, local authorities, and others. We work in close partnership with other government agencies and research funders (both in Wales and across the UK), industry partners, patients, public and other stakeholders.

We are publishing this annual report alongside two other reports which focus on the impact of health and care research in Wales and the value it provides for Welsh Government, the NHS in Wales and our stakeholders.

- [Making a difference: the impact of health and care research in Wales](#) (October 2020) showcases the impact of research for patients living with conditions such as Huntington's, post-traumatic stress disorder and breast cancer as a result of major collaborations in Wales. The report also highlights the progress made for cardiac patients in critical care, as well as the role Welsh researchers continue to play in the search for treatments and a vaccine for COVID-19.

- [Impact and value of research supported by NHS organisations in Wales: a KPMG report commissioned by Health and Care Research Wales](#) (September 2020) shows the economic impact and value generated through health research during 2018/19, indicating that the economic contribution of health research activity supported by NHS organisations in Wales was an estimated £93 million in gross value added with approximately 1,600 jobs created by NHS organisations.

This report covers the financial year 2019/20, but of course in February 2020 the developing COVID-19 pandemic brought rapid and radical change to the NHS and the care system, and to the world of health and care research. Never has research been more important and more central to public policy, and the health and care system has responded magnificently by delivering research on treatments for COVID-19, vaccine development, and the effective management of the pandemic at a pace and scale which is truly unprecedented. The closing section of this report outlines the way forward for Health and Care Research Wales, and some early reflections on the lessons to be learned from the pandemic.



Professor Kieran Walshe
Director, Health and Care Research Wales

OUR RESEARCH CENTRES

Our research centres create a platform to support the production of world-class research. Supporting research excellence and underpinning integration between research institutions and health and social care systems helps the centres to develop high-quality research portfolios addressing issues of need.

2019/20 saw the end of a five-year term of investment that enabled centres to win more than 900 new research awards totalling £267m, with many of the projects addressing issues of practical importance to health and social care. The following examples illustrate the value of applied research taking place.



The [Wales Centre for Primary and Emergency Care Research \(PRIME\)](#) assessed whether a finger-prick test can support decision-making for antibiotic treatment in people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a progressive lung disease that makes it hard to breathe. Using the C-reactive protein (CRP) test resulted in 20% fewer people using antibiotics for COPD flare-ups. Importantly, this reduction in antibiotic use did not have a negative effect on patients' recovery, or on their wellbeing or use of health care services over the following six months.

The [Health and Care Economics Cymru \(HCEC\)](#) (formerly Welsh Health Economics Support Service) evaluated the impact of the Health Precinct, a joint health and social care initiative, to promote independence for people with chronic conditions. They explored the factors that lead to successful implementation of the programme,

and its impact on wellbeing and social participation. They found the scheme created a social return on the investment made, meaning that for every £1 invested in the scheme, it generated £5.07 of social value. Over half of the clients lowered their body mass index, a third improved their blood pressure and their quality of life improved after 16 weeks.

Such work is shaped and greatly enhanced by the partnerships the centres have established with the public over the last five years.

We continue to see the benefits that coproduction can have on the development of grants and outcomes of research. This year the [Centre for Ageing and Dementia Research \(CADR\)](#) won £3.85m for a new research institute, the Institute of Creative Ageing Industries (ICAI). Utilising the public involvement partnerships developed by CADR, ICAI will be able to place older people at the centre of innovation, identifying their needs to ensure products, experiences, environments and services are codeveloped with, not just for, older people.

Recent months have seen the NHS, health and social care workers and research communities support each other in their efforts to help control the coronavirus outbreak. This response has yet again highlighted the critical role research has to play in discovering new treatments, preventing ill health and improving health services.

The [Centre for Trials Research \(CTR\)](#) has played a major role in these efforts, working with national partners and enabling people in Wales to take part in world-leading research. The [Secure Anonymised Information Linkage \(SAIL\) Databank](#) has been instrumental in assisting the Government and the NHS in the effort to tackle the outbreak, providing crucial intelligence which has helped inform decision-making.

Having a broad and adaptive research infrastructure has enabled many of our centres to begin investigating the impact on non-COVID conditions, from launching online surveys for people with mental health conditions (led by [National Centre for Mental Health](#)) to the development of a global registry to better understand how coronavirus affects pregnancy and outcomes (led by [CTR](#)).

Following an open, competitive funding call, the next five years of investment will see ongoing funding for many areas, including population health and cancer, as well as some new areas including children's social care, social prescribing and gambling. We look forward to working with our research centres to continue to maximise the research capacity and capability in Wales.

RESEARCH GRANTS & AWARDS

Health and Care Research Wales **grant schemes** fund projects with public, practice and policy relevance while supporting the development of researchers across Wales. In 2019/20, the Health and Care Research Wales grants team ran calls that resulted in **30 new funding awards** with a combined lifetime value of over **£5.16m**.

This included Social Care Research Grants, Research for Patient and Public Benefit (RfPPB) Wales projects, Health Fellowships, Health PhD Studentships, along with NHS Research Time Awards (NHS RTAs).

All awards were expected to be active by **1 October 2020** subject to any delays caused by the impact of COVID-19 or any agreed variations to start dates.

We were also pleased to fund an Advanced Fellowship award following a successful application from a Wales-based researcher and GP, Dr Harry Ahmed, to the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Fellowship Programme.

Health Fellowships

Providing talented individuals with the support they need to become independent researchers while undertaking high-quality research projects benefiting healthcare in Wales.

Research Funding Scheme: Social Care Grants

Supporting high-quality research projects with clear relevance to health and wellbeing need and/or the organisation and delivery of social care services in Wales.

Research for Patient and Public Benefit (RfPPB) Wales

Funding research related to the day-to-day practice of the health service, with clearly defined patient and public benefit.

NHS Research Time Awards (RTAs)

Funding sessional time for talented NHS staff to engage in research and development activity.

Health and Care Research Wales NIHR Advanced Fellowship

Supporting individuals on their trajectory to becoming future leaders in research. Health and Care Research Wales takes on the funding and management of successful applications to the NIHR Fellowship Programme.

Health PhD Studentships

Supporting capacity building in health and social care research by funding high quality research projects, the studentship offers individuals the opportunity to undertake research and study leading to a PhD. Applications come from proposed PhD supervisors.

Research Capacity Building Collaboration (RCBC)

RCBC is a partnership between six universities in Wales, which provides an opportunity for new and experienced researchers in nursing, midwifery, pharmacy, clinical science and allied health professions, to obtain funding to conduct research.

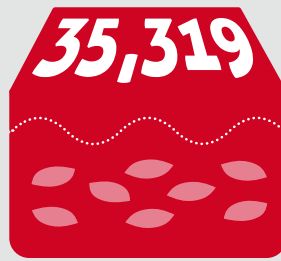
It offers a range of awards, from First into Research Fellowships, to PhDs, through to support for those wishing to undertake postdoctoral studies.



RESEARCH CENTRES 2015-2020



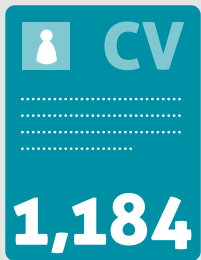
direct funding awarded



tissue samples issued



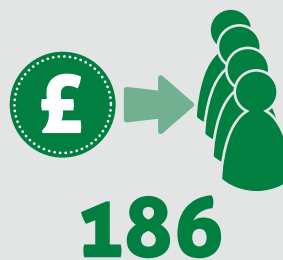
value of grants won



jobs created through grants won



number of grants won



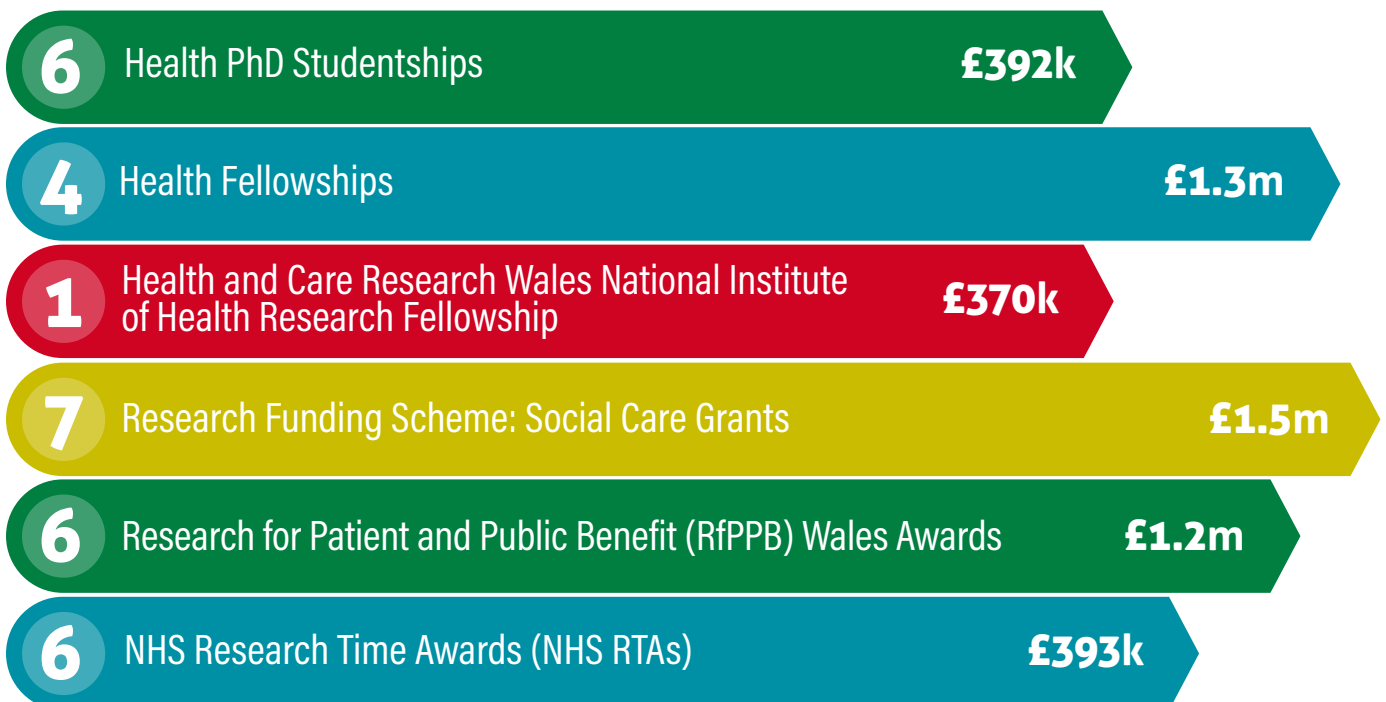
jobs created through direct funding



research publications

OUR FUNDING

Total **£5.2m**



SUPPORT & DELIVERY 2019/20



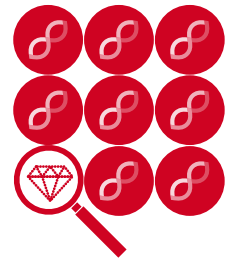
14,970

participants recruited into high-quality research studies



219

active commercial studies



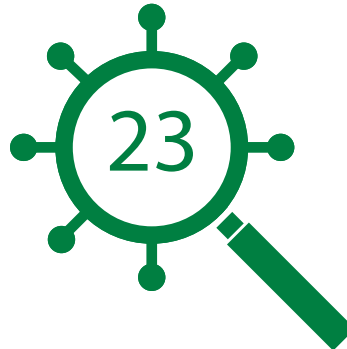
616

active non-commercial high-quality research studies

COVID-19 RESEARCH (up until 20/10/20)



total number of COVID-19 studies



number of Urgent Public Health (UPH) COVID-19 studies (of which 12 were interventional)



recruitment to UPH COVID-19 studies (of which 1,010 were to interventional studies)

15



days to open to recruitment (UPH studies only)

7.5



days (median) from opening to recruitment of 1st patient (UPH studies only)

RESEARCH IN NHS BOARDS & TRUSTS

Research is a core function of NHS Wales and the need for research to deliver solutions to diagnosis, treatment and prevention has never been so apparent. The Health and Care Research Wales Support and Delivery Service provides sponsors, researchers and the public with a range of services throughout the whole research delivery pathway.

This year, 835 high-quality studies actively recruited across health and social care in Wales. The range of studies delivered through NHS organisations, across a broad range of conditions affecting health and wellbeing in Wales, enables access to new treatments for NHS patients - just under 15,000 Welsh participants were recruited this year, providing evidence-based improved treatment and care options.

“ We continue to develop systems and processes to improve the speed and efficiency of study set-up and oversight - to realise a One Wales seamless service.”

Dr Nicola Williams,
Director of Support and Delivery, Health and Care Research Wales





Key developments this year include:

- A [One Wales costing and contracts process](#) - delivering significant improvements through a single, consistent contracting approach to reduce duplication; the adoption of UK tariffs; and mutual acceptance of the cost negotiation process carried out by accredited national coordinators in England and Wales for commercial studies.
- A new [all Wales research delivery funding approach](#) - ensuring support funding is allocated to where the research is taking place and is in proportion to the level of costs incurred at different stages of delivery of the study.
- Piloting a [One Wales study set up service](#) - demonstrating the benefits of taking a national, coordinated approach to identifying sites, study set up and ongoing oversight of studies.
- Set up of an [integrated approvals service](#) - bringing together the teams and processes that provide regulatory and ethical review and approvals; aligning in partnership with the Health Research Authority in England, reducing duplication and streamlining processes for the benefit of researchers; and introducing a consistent approach to assessing, arranging and confirming of capacity and capability at a local level.
- Enhancing [site identification processes](#) - reducing the burden on clinicians in the NHS and sponsors.
- Increasing [public awareness of research](#) in Wales - including through new Let's talk research events.
- Providing a [high-quality training programme](#) - addressing core competencies for researchers through a series of sessions.
- Improving [access to research information](#) - making changes to how information is recorded and reported to support study oversight.

These One Wales initiatives have required all NHS organisations to work together to increase consistency, and national coordination has been provided by the Health and Care Research Wales Support and Delivery Centre. Working with colleagues from all four nations, as part of a coordinated approach in support of a UK-wide research effort, has also been vital. Together, we have made many developments that have helped to streamline research processes and make it easier to do research that crosses boundaries.

As we progress into 2020/21, we have implemented many changes at pace in response to the COVID-19 pandemic - a national coordinated effort to ensure the rapid set up and delivery of research at the scale and pace required, with studies being set up and patients recruited within hours or days of regulatory approval. As a result, Wales is playing a key role in studies to find treatments (vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics) for COVID-19 patients through research.

LOOKING FORWARD: THE FUTURE FOR HEALTH AND CARE RESEARCH IN WALES

This year will be remembered for a long time to come, for the arrival of COVID-19 and the ensuing pandemic and the grave and often tragic consequences it has had for our health and social care system, our economy, and our society. As we develop our plans for the future in Health and Care Research Wales, it is worth reflecting on the emerging wider lessons of the pandemic.



We think there are four key points:

The pandemic has illustrated vividly the centrality of research and evidence to health and care in Wales, and their importance to decision-making at every level in the health and social care system. Bluntly, ending the pandemic relies fundamentally on research delivering solutions to diagnosis, treatment and prevention. The lesson is that key decisions about health and social care in Wales need to be informed by robust evidence, even though that is not always currently available.

We have seen that having research capacity and capability available and ready to respond has been incredibly valuable. At a UK level the investments in pandemic research capacity modelling and therapeutics research have been crucial to getting research started quickly. In Wales, our funded infrastructure of centres and units for health and care research has been equally important - for example the SAIL databank using linked anonymised data to provide COVID monitoring in near real time, and the Wales Gene Park's involvement in researching the genetics of COVID-19. We need to invest in future research capacity and capability to ensure we can respond to the future evidence needs in Wales.

To be useful, research has to be timely, and has to move at least at the same pace as the pandemic.

Normal timescales for commissioning, setting up, doing, reporting and then using COVID-19 research have been transformed - with rapid review processes for funding research at a UK level, studies being set up in a matter of days, and research proceeding at a pace which will produce results in a matter of weeks or months. We need to transform our approach to health and social care research to make it more rapid, agile and responsive.

The challenges of keeping up to date with the growing body of evidence on COVID-19 have been formidable, and there is a need for support for knowledge mobilisation/evidence use.

There has been a global explosion of research in response to the pandemic with substantial duplication in this huge research despite the efforts of research funders and research teams to coordinate and collaborate. Keeping up to date and critically assessing the quality of research has been very difficult. We need to invest in effective ways to gather and synthesise existing research, and to find and use appropriately evidence syntheses already created by others, to inform policy and practice in Wales.

The mission of Health and Care Research Wales is to promote, support and provide collective oversight of health and social care research in Wales to ensure it is of the highest international scientific quality, is relevant to the needs and challenges of health and care in Wales, and makes a difference to policy and practice in ways that improve the lives of patients, people and communities in Wales.

This has to be a collective endeavour in which the strengths and assets of a wide range of stakeholders are deployed.

In particular it relies on strong engagement from patients and the public and other stakeholders in setting the agenda for research; on an effective collaboration across funders (both in Wales and at a UK level) in planning and funding research; on the capability and capacity in universities and the NHS to lead, undertake and support research; and on the capability and capacity of health and care leaders and their organisations, health and care professionals, and other stakeholders to use research effectively to change policy and practice and produce innovations and improvements.

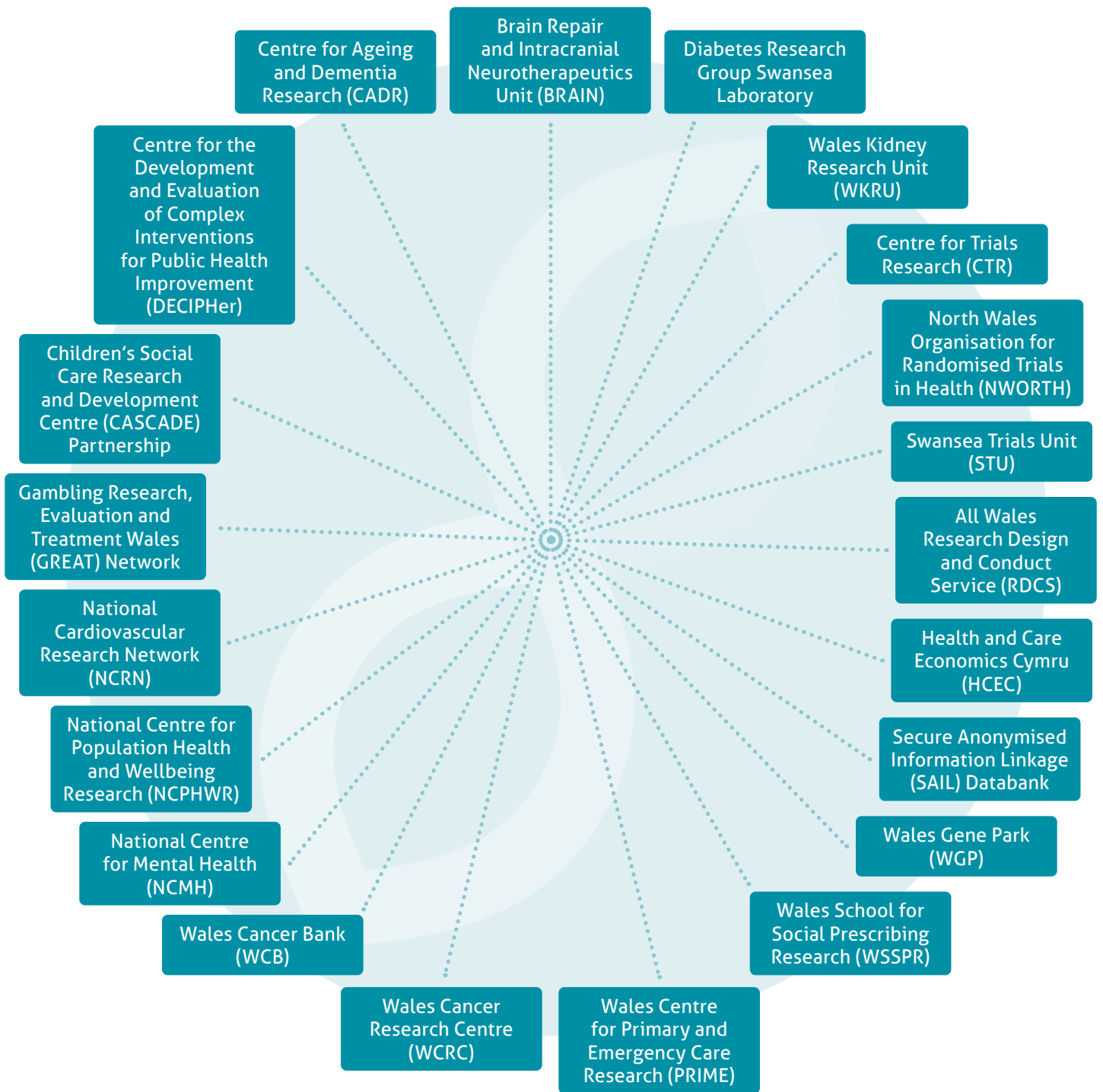
This, quite straightforwardly, leads to four aims which will shape our work in 2020/21 and beyond:

- **Setting the agenda for health and social care research in Wales**
We will work with all stakeholders including patients and the public to set the agenda for health and social care research and development in Wales, promoting research as a driver of innovation and improvement in health and care.
- **Funding and organising research**
We will coordinate and liaise with research funding agencies in Wales and at a UK level to plan and fund health and social care research. We aim to make the most efficient use of resources and to maximise Welsh engagement in UK and international research funding.
- **Securing capacity and capability to deliver health and care research**
We will work together as a network of Welsh universities, NHS boards and trusts, local authorities and care providers to create and sustain capability and capacity in research and to support organisations to lead, undertake and support health and social care research.
- **Using research to improve health and social care**
We will work with health and care system leaders and their organisations to promote the effective use of research in innovation and improvement, leading to the spread and scale of those improvements.

“ We must not underestimate the scale of the challenge, nor the potential rewards. Working together, we can make a reality of the idea that today’s research leads to tomorrow’s care.”

Professor Kieran Walshe, Director, Health and Care Research Wales

OUR RESEARCH CENTRES 2020



Today's research; tomorrow's care.



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