



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



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Health and Care Research Wales

**Research matters: our
plan for improving health
and care research in
Wales**

2022 - 2025

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg

Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	About Health and Care Research Wales	3
3.	Health and social care research in Wales: where we are now	7
4.	Health and social care research in the UK: the wider context	8
5.	Setting the agenda for health and social care research	11
5.1	Developing research strategies for Wales and the UK.....	11
5.2	Identifying the needs and priorities for health and social care research.....	13
6.	Funding and organising research.....	14
6.1	The function and organisation of our own funding schemes	14
6.2	Partnerships with NIHR programmes and other funders' programmes	15
6.3	Infrastructure funding for research centres and units.....	16
7.	Building capacity and capability in health and social care research	18
7.1	Research careers and the Health and Care Research Wales Faculty	18
7.2	Leading and supporting research in the NHS in Wales.....	20
7.4	Using data for health and social care research	25
8.	Using research to improve health and social care.....	26
9.	Cross-cutting themes.....	27
9.1	Communications, engagement, and involvement	27
9.2	Involving the public in health and care research	29
9.3	Equality, diversity and inclusion in health and care research	30
10.	Conclusion: research matters when research works.....	31

1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Health and Care Research Wales and its partners set up and delivered 125 COVID-19 studies across Wales as part of the UK-wide research effort. Over 60,000 people in Wales took part in COVID-19 research, including ten international vaccine trials. Never before has research been so visible and its impact so profound.

Our plan for 2022 - 2025 sets out how Health and Care Research Wales intends to build on this legacy to improve all health and social care research, to drive improvements in health and social care services and to lay the foundations for better outcomes for people and communities across Wales.

The plan provides a concise and clear-eyed assessment of the current state of health and social care research in Wales and sets out our ambitions and the actions we will take over the next three years to achieve these. It first outlines the role and function of Health and Care Research Wales against the backdrop of the health and social care research landscape in Wales, highlighting the importance of research, explaining the complex landscape of funding and provision, and summarising key developments at both a Welsh and a UK level. It then focuses on the current status, and future delivery of the four key aims which underpin our mission. For each key aim it sets out recent and current developments and outlines our ambitions and planned actions. It concludes by describing how three cross-cutting areas underpin all our activities – communications and engagement; patient and public involvement; and equality, diversity and inclusion.

2. About Health and Care Research Wales

Health and Care Research Wales' 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 social care in Wales, and makes a difference to policy and practice in ways that improve the lives of people and communities in Wales.

To fulfil this mission, we have set ourselves four key aims:

1. **Setting the agenda for health and social care research.** We work with all stakeholders including 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 social care.

2. **Funding and organising research.** We 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. We run our own funding schemes and engage in cross-funder and partnership schemes with others.
3. **Building capacity and capability in health and social care research.** We 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.
4. **Using research to improve health and social care.** We work with health and social 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 cannot achieve these aims without working closely and collaboratively in partnership with a range of other organisations, both within Wales and across the UK. Like our equivalent organisations in the other three countries of the United Kingdom, our primary focus as a funder is on health and social care research which is clinical, applied or translational in nature, and often takes place in health or social care settings. The lead for funding basic science research in this field across the UK sits with UK Research and Innovation and particularly the Medical Research Council, with which we work closely¹.

It is very important that although the landscape of research, development and innovation in Wales and the wider United Kingdom is complex, we seek to work together with other organisations across organisational, sectoral and geographic boundaries to build a common purpose. In this, our mission and four aims are central to developing and sustaining the kind of shared understanding and collaborative approach we want and need. Our philosophy is simple. We want to see great research done which has an important and meaningful impact on health and care services and the health and wellbeing of people in Wales.

This plan is aligned to Welsh Government's A healthier Wales² (long term plan for health and social care) and embodies the five ways of working outlined in the Future Generations Act 2015. It also aligns with the forthcoming Welsh Government

1

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228984/0118404881.pdf

² <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-09/a-healthier-wales-our-plan-for-health-and-social-care.pdf>

Innovation strategy to be published in 2023 and this is vital if we want to make our health and care services more effective, efficient and productive, which improves care and can lead to saving and reinvesting resources.

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, local authorities, universities, research institutions, the life sciences, pharmaceuticals and medical technology industries, third sector/voluntary organisations, community groups and many others.

Health and Care Research Wales has a small team of civil servants working in the Research and Development Division, Health and Social Services Group in Welsh Government; and is supported by a larger team of NHS-employed staff working in our Support and Delivery Centre which is hosted by Powys Teaching Health Board, as well as a wider workforce across the NHS, social care and the university sector.

We have an annual budget of £47 million (in 2022/23) allocated by Welsh Government, and the table below shows broadly how that investment is currently deployed. More details of our research centres, programmes, awards and other funded activities can be found on our [website](#).

Health and Care Research Wales annual budget summary for 2022/23

Area	Description	Spending
Research centres and units	Core funding provided to approximately 15 research centres or units based in Welsh higher education institutions (HEIs)	£10.7m
Research programmes	Funding for research projects commissioned by Health and Care Research Wales through regular calls for proposals, and for our contribution to research programmes led by NIHR which are open to Welsh researchers	£10.1m
Research in NHS health boards and trusts	Funding to support the delivery of clinical research in NHS health boards and trusts and for research infrastructure and staffing	£16m
Support and Delivery Centre	Funding to provide central services such as coordination and national support services for research delivery, performance and business intelligence, information systems, training services, Faculty administration, communications, engagement and public involvement services, and hosting the approvals service for Wales	£3.6m
Research capacity and capability building	Funding for personal award schemes and researcher development activities coordinated by the Health and Care Research Wales Faculty	£4.9m
Evidence and knowledge mobilisation	Funding for the Health and Care Research Wales Evidence Centre to provide rapid evidence synthesis and knowledge mobilisation	£1.7m

Health and Care Research Wales is supported by our Advisory Board, which exists to advise us on all aspects of our mission, including advising on the strategic direction of research and development in health and social care in Wales; reviewing and commenting on Health and Care Research Wales' plans, programmes of work, reports and publications; offering views and advice on the funding and organisation of health and social care research in Wales; and forming a view on the contribution of Wales at a UK level to health and social care research. The board is chaired by the Chief Medical Officer, Welsh Government, and involves individuals from a range of organisations across the health and social care sector and the health and care research community. The terms of reference and membership can be found on [our](#)

[website](#), along with information on all our areas of activity set out in the table above and all our reports and publications.

3. Health and social care research in Wales: where we are now

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated vividly the value of health and social care research and its importance to good decision-making by policymakers, health and social care leaders, and people and communities. The UK health research effort produced therapeutics, vaccines and evidence on infection epidemiology and control which was central to dealing with the pandemic and its consequences for society. There is huge public support for health and social care research in Wales – a recent Ipsos Mori poll found that 86% of respondents feel the UK has played a significant role in finding COVID-19 treatments; 87% are proud of the UK researchers and NHS staff who identified some of the first effective treatments and vaccines; 91% feel grateful to the people who have taken part in the research for vaccines, tests and treatments; and 78% are keen for health research to be part of routine care offered by the NHS.

Welsh Government has recognised the strategic importance of health and social care research to the Welsh economy and to society, identifying it as one of five key priorities for research and innovation in a key written statement from the First Minister in 2021 which said we must “build our research, development and innovation capacity in health and life sciences while ensuring Wales is a full partner in delivering the UK Life Sciences Vision”³.

Health and social care research is the largest sector for research investment by both government/public funding and by industry in the UK – about £8.6 billion pa, or over a quarter of all UK R&D spending – and is a key strength of the UK economy. That funding comes from industry (about half) and from government and charitable funders (the other half). The latter consists of four main funding streams which are partly devolved and partly held at a UK level – health departments; education/science departments; UK Research and Innovation (research councils); and medical charities.

But public investment in health and social care research remains focussed in London, and the south east of England (56% of all funding goes to institutions in London, Oxford and Cambridge). Wales secures about 2.4% or half of what would be its population proportionate share of government/public funding for health and social care research. At the same time, Welsh Government funding for health and social care research and development is substantially lower, proportionately, than funding in England. Overall, the Welsh health and social care research sector has

³ <https://gov.wales/written-statement-five-priorities-research-development-and-innovation>

seen a long period of sustained under-investment with profound consequences for its capacity and capability.

The Senedd Cross Parliamentary Group on medical research published a report in 2021 based on hearings held over several months which made five main recommendations:

1. Funding – match UK levels of funding in the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales research grant to universities and in the budget of Health and Care Research Wales
2. Collaboration – support and incentivise academic and industry partnership across and outside Wales, and engagement with research in the NHS in Wales
3. Careers – provide long term funding and opportunities for research careers, including protected time for clinical academics and clinicians, and continuing support for the Ser Cymru scheme to foster talent
4. Patients and the public – ensure people have the opportunity to take part in research and have equitable access to clinical trials
5. Research impact – create effective forums for knowledge transfer between researchers and policymakers, increasing the utilisation of new evidence into Welsh Government policy

4. Health and social care research in the UK: the wider context

This plan should be set in the wider context of a range of UK government policies and UK strategies related to health and social care research. Much health and social care research is funded and undertaken at a UK level, and it is essential that we take account of this wider context, are proactive in seeking to engage with other stakeholders and make the most of the opportunities the UK landscape offers for Wales.

Health and Care Research Wales represents Welsh Government and the health and social care research community in a number of key UK forums – such as the [Office for the Strategic Coordination of Health Research](#) and the [UK Clinical Research Collaboration](#) – and in four nation discussions with our equivalent organisations in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Key recent developments include:

- In 2020, the UK government published a research and development roadmap for the UK⁴ which articulated the ambitions for the UK as a whole and recognised the need to “take greater account of place-based outcomes in how we make decisions on R&D in the UK, ensuring that our R&D systems make their fullest contribution to our levelling up agenda”. It said UK government

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-research-and-development-roadmap>

would “work collaboratively across the UK, fostering greater collaboration and networks between funders, researchers, practitioners and civic leaders to embed a system that delivers stronger local economic benefit and improved quality of life outcomes from R&D”.

- In the three-year Comprehensive Spending Review published in October 2021, UK government announced it would increase public funding for R&D to £20 billion pa by 2024/25 – an increase of about a quarter in real terms, and close to the previously announced target of £22 billion⁵. This settlement provides substantial headroom for growth and redistribution. The CSR stated: “The government will ensure that an increased share of the record increase in government spending on R&D over the SR21 period is invested outside the Greater South East”.

The CSR also provided a substantial uplift in research funding for DHSC in England (and resultant consequential for devolved governments under the Barnett formula). “The settlement provides £5 billion over the SR21 period for health-related research and development (R&D). This includes the largest ever cash uplift for health R&D, with an increase of £605 million on 2021-22 funding by 2024-25 which means the investment will rise to £2 billion pa by the end of the SR21 period.” Within that DHSC R&D budget a number of priorities were highlighted including: £40 million new investment in social care research; £30 million to support investment in research skills and training to level up opportunities for underrepresented groups, particularly in nursing, midwifery, and the allied health professions; £95 million for the Office for Life Sciences for delivery of the government’s Life Sciences Vision; funding for Genomics England projects including Generation Genome, a new pioneering newborn screening programme to detect over 200 rare diseases, and ‘Diverse Data’, to increase representation of minority groups in genomic research; and research for cutting-edge COVID-19 treatments.

- UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) which brings together all the research councils with Innovate UK and Research England, published its first five-year strategy in 2022⁶. It sets out ambitious plans to improve the research and innovation capacity of the UK and to maintain its position globally and commits to “supporting thriving research and innovation clusters across the UK, creating diverse high value jobs and local economic growth”.
- The UK government published its life sciences vision in 2021⁷ which set out a ten-year strategy to accelerate research and the delivery of innovations to

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/autumn-budget-and-spending-review-2021-documents>

⁶ <https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukri-strategy-2022-to-2027/>

⁷ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1013597/life-sciences-vision-2021.pdf

patients. This included mission-led approaches driven by government, industry, the NHS, academia and medical research charities to solve some of the biggest healthcare problems of our generation, including cancer, dementia, mental health and obesity.

- All four nations of the UK have set out a bold and ambitious vision for the future of clinical research delivery⁸, which seeks to capitalise on innovation, is resilient in the face of future healthcare challenges and aims to improve the lives of patients all over the UK and around the world. This means embedding clinical research at the heart of patient care across the NHS, making participation as easy as possible and ensuring all health and care staff feel empowered to support research. And the vision also means capitalising on our strengths in health data and creating new digital infrastructure to make study set-up and delivery faster, more efficient and more innovative, so that the UK remains one of the best places in the world to deliver cutting-edge research.

UK funders are also increasingly developing strategies and incorporating environmental sustainability as part of our normal working practice and culture and outlining their intentions in driving and promoting 'net zero'. The research and innovation endeavour also has a vital part to help deliver low carbon, sustainable and resilient health and care systems through strategically investing to support these goals.

As this long list of recent developments shows, this is a time of rapid and fundamental change in the health and social care research landscape in the UK. This means there are both opportunities to improve research and innovation in Wales and risks that the Welsh research community and Welsh NHS and social care system do not benefit as they should from these and other new investments in health and social care research and from the advances in care and treatment that they produce.

The rest of this plan intends to set out how we aim to respond to the pace of change and make the most of opportunities to improve health and social care research in Wales. For each of the four aims articulated in section 2, we provide an assessment of the current position and a summary of recent developments, and we outline a number of planned actions in sections 5-8 below. We then conclude in section 9 with a number of cross-cutting areas of work which relate to all four of our main aims.

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-future-of-uk-clinical-research-delivery/saving-and-improving-lives-the-future-of-uk-clinical-research-delivery>

5. Setting the agenda for health and social care research

We work with all stakeholders including patients, service users, professionals 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 social care.

5.1 Developing research strategies for Wales and the UK

We think that every health and social care organisation in Wales should have – or be part of – a strategy for research and innovation and should have clear arrangements for leadership for research and innovation at a board or senior management team level. Our role is to work with organisations to help them develop and deliver their research strategies and plans, offering our wider knowledge of the research landscape and ecosystem and providing support and constructive engagement. Some examples include:

- **Social care.** In February 2018, Social Care Wales published the *Social care research and development strategy for Wales 2018-2023*⁹ in partnership with Health and Care Research Wales. The implementation of the strategy has been pivotal in taking social care research forward especially in areas such as use of existing and routinely collected data, public involvement, setting priorities for funding calls as well as range of initiatives to improve access research evidence and adoption into practice. While we have made good progress on implementing elements of the strategy, there are gaps in policy evaluation and research skills across both adults and children's social care, as well as in the infrastructure, capacity and capability for doing research and using it to enrich policy and practice. Work has begun to shape the next steps working in partnership with Welsh Government policy teams and Social Care Wales namely around developing our future researcher workforce through the Health and Care Research Wales Faculty and strengthening adult social care leadership and is reflected in this plan.
- **Cancer.** In July 2022, we published the first coordinated cancer research strategy for Wales (CReSt)¹⁰. Developed in partnership with the Wales Cancer Network and the Wales Cancer Research Centre, with input from patients, members of the public and other cancer researchers, the strategy focuses on six priority research themes where there is already a track record of excellence in Wales that can be developed further to be internationally leading. The aim is to develop critical mass and a sustainable platform for

⁹ <https://socialcare.wales/cms-assets/documents/Research-and-development-strategy-2018-23-English.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://walescancerresearchcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/CReSt-English-FINAL.pdf>

cancer research for the priority themes from which other strengths can then emerge. The recommended themes align well with Wales and UK-wide national initiatives and programmes. They also offer opportunities for cross theme research collaboration in cancer and with non-cancer research as well as with third sector and industry partners.

- **Genomics.** We are currently working with policy colleagues who are leading on the Welsh genomic healthcare plans in response to the UK government's genomics strategy¹¹, to ensure Welsh research excellence and expertise is reflected in national and UK implementation plans and that Welsh researchers are able to lead and contribute to the opportunities arising from the shared UK-level commitments (such as *Our Future Health* and the MRC UK Functional Genomics Initiative). Working in collaboration with researchers, patients and key organisations, including the Wales Gene Park, Genomics Partnership Wales and the All-Wales Medical Genetics Service, we are currently undertaking a scoping exercise to assess areas of strength, priorities and emerging areas of excellence and to support the development of a genomics research strategy.
- **Rare diseases.** The recently published Wales rare diseases action plan for 2022-26¹² outlines a number of actions to raise the profile of rare diseases research and articulates the importance of access to diagnostics and treatments for rare diseases and of participation in research studies.

We will continue to seek opportunities to work with colleagues in Welsh Government, the NHS and in social care in developing effective and deliverable strategies for research which are well aligned with and integrated into wider organisational strategies and plans. Specific actions are:

- We will work with NHS health boards and trusts to promote the development of their research and innovation strategies, and to co-produce a shared framework for embedding research in the NHS, whilst assessing research capacity, engagement and delivery
- We are currently engaged in early discussions with stakeholders about future collaborations on research strategies and plans in public health and in nursing and allied health professions research for Wales – similar to the work outlined above in relation to cancer, genomics and social care.
- We will establish regular meetings with key UK health and social care research funders to promote greater engagement with Welsh Government and other stakeholders

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/genome-uk-the-future-of-healthcare>

¹² <https://collaborative.nhs.wales/implementation-groups/rare-diseases/wales-rare-diseases-action-plan-2022-2026/>

- We will seek maximum engagement in UK level forums and discussions at the earliest stage in relation to research strategies – examples include the recently published UKRI strategy, the strategies and plans which will follow from research councils, particularly the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Innovate UK; and the strategies of key charitable funders such as the Wellcome Trust, Cancer Research UK and the British Heart Foundation.

5.2 Identifying the needs and priorities for health and social care research

Ensuring that the research we and other funders commission addresses questions which reflect public, policy and practice need is essential to maximising the likelihood that research will have real impact and value. Such need identification and priority setting is most effective when it is done with the involvement of those who will use and be affected by the research findings.

Over the last two years we have developed and piloted our research prioritisation process, taking the principles of the James Lind Alliance Priority Setting Partnerships (JLA PSPs), but adapting and applying them in a streamlined manner to identify the “top ten” priority research questions in areas of pressing public, policy and practice need. Our approach was designed to be more rapid than a traditional JLA PSP and it was created in partnership with the James Lind Alliance, and with colleagues in Social Care Wales with whom it was piloted.

The process involves – seeking views on the questions and issues that matter from a wide range of stakeholders including practitioners and those in need of, or receiving, services and/or support; grouping initial responses into themes; identifying and ranking the most important questions within those themes; converting the ranked list of concerns and questions into research questions set in the context of the existing evidence; and then seeking to place those research questions in funding calls run by either Health and Care Research Wales or other research funders such as the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), MRC or ESRC.

The first such exercise addressed the topic of how we can best provide sustainable care and support to help older people live happier and more fulfilling lives. A report on the exercise which described the top ten research priorities was published¹³ on the Health and Care Research Wales website, and the priorities have been shared with other UK funders. A second exercise, focused on what matters most in developing family support services in Wales is underway, again in partnership with Social Care Wales.

¹³ <https://healthandcareresearchwales.org/new-research-priorities-aim-help-older-people-live-happier-and-more-fulfilling-lives>

From April 2023, Health and Care Research Wales will fund an Evidence Centre providing capacity for rapid evidence synthesis and primary research to address policy, practice and public stakeholder need. Through engagement with stakeholders, the Evidence Centre will also provide structures and processes for the identification and prioritisation of research questions requiring answers either through evidence synthesis or new primary research.

Key actions are:

- We will run further priority setting exercises – probably two a year – addressing the priorities of Welsh Ministers and their *Programme for Government* and priorities or topics which arise from our engagement with other stakeholder organisations in Wales. Topics that may be explored in 2023 include women's health and gender inequalities in research, and the integration of mental health services for children and young people.
- We will use these priority-setting processes more actively and explicitly to feed our own research commissioning programmes (see section 6 below) and to provide ideas and priorities for research to other funders.
- We will continue to engage with the funding committees and boards of NIHR programmes with which we partner and with the NIHR ideas identification and prioritisation team based at NETSCC at Southampton, to share research needs and priorities and increase the number of research questions from Wales considered for commissioned calls in these programmes.

6. Funding and organising research

We co-ordinate 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. We run our own funding schemes and engage in cross-funder and partnership schemes with others.

6.1 The function and organisation of our own funding schemes

Health and Care Research Wales has a range of project-based research funding opportunities through a suite of schemes and awards. These currently include the NHS-facing Research for Patient and Public Benefit (RfPPB) Wales programme, and separate health and social care research grant calls as distinct arms of our Research Funding Scheme. These schemes have operated annual (or biennial) calls with a two-stage application process.

A range of benefits can accrue from these schemes including: the funding of impactful projects directly addressing policy and practice needs in Wales and

beyond; contributions to the development of a general evidence-base to support decision-making in health and social care; capacity and capability enhancement, often allowing individuals the opportunity to build a portfolio or lead a research team for the first time; support for preliminary, pilot or feasibility work that leads to larger, more ambitious funding applications, especially to major UK funders.

To maximise the use of our research funding and the likely impact of the research we fund, we will take the following actions:

- Review and streamline the existing separate Health and Care Research Wales funding schemes, to improve the efficiency of our processes and increase the frequency of our funding calls and opportunities, while ensuring that research in areas where capacity building is crucial, such as social care, continue to be adequately protected and supported.
- Seek to add a commissioned arm to the new arrangements which can link to the priority setting processes outlined above and will ensure that we are both proactive and agile in funding research that addresses important and urgent needs from Welsh Government and the NHS and social care system in Wales.

6.2 Partnerships with NIHR programmes and other funders' programmes

In addition to running our own research funding schemes, Health and Care Research Wales makes funding contributions to a range of NIHR programmes which offer significant funding streams for larger and more ambitious projects. Health and Care Research Wales participation enables us to contribute to setting the funding priorities and call topics for these programmes and gives researchers from Welsh institutions the opportunity to submit applications to them. The NIHR programmes we partner with and contribute to are:

- Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation (EME) (co-funded with the MRC);
- Health Technology Assessment (HTA);
- Health Service and Delivery Research (HSDR); and
- Public Health Research (PHR)

In addition, NIHR administers the global health research programme with Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) funding on behalf of UK government, and this programme is open to all researchers across the UK.

Access to these schemes enables our researchers to compete at a UK-level and provides the opportunity to generate significant research income for Wales through leading or collaborating on projects likely to have strong impact.

Health and Care Research Wales works also with other funders, including our equivalent teams in the other UK health departments, the UKRI research councils and charitable research funders, to create new funding opportunities in areas of mutual interest and perceived need.

We provide co-funding within partnership arrangements with some other funders including participation in the £50m cross-funder UK Prevention Research Partnership; co-funding of a portfolio of projects through the Joint Programme for Neurodegenerative Disease research (JPND) with DHSC, HSCNI and the Alzheimer's Society; investment in a programme of scarring and reconstructive surgery research at Swansea University with the Scar Free Foundation; and joint funding of eye research projects in conjunction with Fight For Sight and the Welsh Government's Chief Optometric Adviser.

We are a member of the [Ensuring Value in Research \(EViR\) international funders forum](#), and work with other funders, including NIHR (England), the Patient-Centred Outcomes Research Institute (USA), ZonMW (the Netherlands), Health Research Board (Ireland), Forte (Sweden) and others, to improve research funding practice to maximise the impact of the research we fund.

We will take the following actions:

- Continue to maximise our engagement (alongside equivalent departments from Scotland and Northern Ireland) with funding schemes led by NIHR in England and strongly encourage (through, for example, our core funding for research centres and units) Welsh institutions to improve their performance in securing funding from these and other UK funding sources
- Seek further opportunities for co-funding partnerships with other funders particularly where they will both meet Welsh research needs and stimulate and support the development of research capacity and capability in Wales

6.3 Infrastructure funding for research centres and units

Health and Care Research Wales provides core funding for a range [of research centres, units or groups](#) based in higher education institutions in Wales. The purpose of our core funding is to support, sustain and grow research capacity and capability in Wales in areas relevant to Welsh research need and where there is a critical mass of research which is excellent at a UK and international level. This is evidenced by such centres' academic leadership, strategy, research grant income and performance, publications, partnerships, evidence of esteem and impact, sustainability and institutional support.

The core remit of all groups is to develop, support and sustain a high-quality research portfolio in areas of established research need. Portfolios include the

capture of large grants from UK funders including the UK research councils, such as the MRC, the ESRC and NIHR. We generally expect at least a five-fold return on investment. In other words, our core funding to a centre or unit should enable them to attract, over time, at least five times as much research funding from other funders.

We expect Health and Care Research Wales infrastructure grants to fund activities which cannot usually be funded from external research income/grants – so grants would not normally directly fund research projects but centres may use them for a variety of purposes, such as:

- Maintaining networks of interested and associated researchers;
- Funding research development groups and research prioritisation activities;
- Supporting specialist public involvement groups;
- Providing some core and bridge funding for researchers to reduce precarity and provide sustainable career opportunities
- Developing, maintaining and releasing biological samples for research;
- Providing some core capacity and expertise for anonymised and secure data linkage;
- Funding some laboratory technicians, bioinformaticians and other technical posts;
- Providing some core, non-project specific methodological, trial management or statistical capacity;
- Funding knowledge mobilisation professionals and activities;
- Providing capacity for horizon scanning, research bid development and paper writing for academic publication;
- Providing support for promotional, engagement and communication activities;
- Bringing such activities together to support the work of a coherent Research Centre.

While annually reported metrics suggest that the provision of this sort of funding is a highly effective way of supporting grant capture, it is difficult to measure the direct impact. We collect a range of research metrics and require an annual narrative report from each centre, and we undertake an annual review with each centre's leadership team and provide feedback on performance. We last held a funding round for centres and units in 2019 and most of the current awards run for a five-year period finishing in March 2025 and so they have had two annual reviews in the current funding round to date.

We will take the following actions:

- We will continue to actively performance manage all current centres and units to ensure shared expectations in relation to good practice and performance, and to provide a further round (end of year 3) of feedback.

- We will develop a clear framework for assessment which we will share with all current centres and units and make available to others to inform our future funding strategy.
- We will develop our plans for the next funding round, taking into consideration both the performance of currently funded centres and units and the case for investment in other areas. In so doing, we will engage with Welsh higher education institutions to understand their strategic priorities and areas of planned investment.
- We will then develop and run a new strategically-focused infrastructure funding call that will give existing and emerging groups the opportunity to apply for support beyond March 2025. That funding call is likely to take place in late 2023/early 2024 to allow adequate time for transitions in funding.

7. Building capacity and capability in health and social care research

We work together as a network of Welsh universities, NHS health 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.

7.1 Research careers and the Health and Care Research Wales Faculty

In 2020/21, Health and Care Research Wales, Social Care Wales and Health Education and Improvement Wales initiated a joint review of the career and training/development pathways for health and social care researchers with a view to enabling capacity and capability in health and social care research in Wales. The report from the “*Making Research Careers Work*” review of career pathways in health and social care in Wales¹⁴, published in February 2022, set out seventeen recommendations with a view to improving opportunities across research career pathways for health and social care researchers in Wales. The review specifically highlighted the critical role that support, guidance, mentoring schemes and role models can have in the creation of a nationwide research culture and identified the need for more inclusive funding opportunities across the research career pathways, including for example a salary replacement scheme for doctoral level studies and enhanced pre-doctoral support which will allow Welsh applicants to submit competitive applications to UK-wide funders (government, research council and charitable funding agencies as well as other types of funders).

¹⁴ <https://healthandcareresearchwales.org/about/news/report-recommendations-support-workers-wales>

A joint Health and Care Research Wales, Social Care Wales and Health Education and Improvement Wales Research Careers Pathway Implementation Group has been tasked with overall responsibility for directing the overarching strategic and organisational responses across (a) strategy, funding, and leadership; (b) infrastructure; (c) culture and ecosystem and (d) communications, to progress high quality health and social care research capacity and capability development in Wales. In partnership, we will seek an approach that raises the profile of research careers in Wales and redresses longstanding disparities in researcher development opportunities particularly for non-medical staff, and promote a shared responsibility for development of research careers through enhanced collaboration amongst key stakeholders and infrastructure groups.

We will work to promote opportunities for integrating research into professional training from an early stage, encourage NHS organisations and local authorities to prioritise research skills excellence in their workforce, invest in academic, clinical academic and other research opportunities within their organisations, and raise awareness of research across the spectrum of health and social care professionals, their employing organisations and regulators.

We will receive advisory input and ensure comprehensive stakeholder engagement via an associated UK wide Research Careers Pathway Advisory Group. Where there is a specific identified need, related Task and Finish Groups will be initiated and will report to the Research Careers Pathway Implementation Group. Over time, the collaborative and coordinated commitment to developing researcher career development and capacity building across the broad domains, as set out in the recommendations emerging from the “*Making Research Careers Work*” review of career pathways in health and social care in Wales, will ensure that our future generations of health and social care researchers are better equipped and supported to lead and deliver excellent health and social care research.

As a key step in addressing the recommendations, the [Health and Care Research Wales Faculty](#) has been established as a core pillar of a national research career pathway providing support, guidance and training for all researchers, at all stages and across all professions, with a view to progressing a collective health and social care researcher community who are assured of a supportive environment that enables them to conduct their research with impact and progress along their individual research career pathways.

The Health and Care Research Wales Faculty will:

- Coordinate and oversee a range of widely accessible (and targeted where needed) personal research award schemes for health and social care researchers across professions and at different stages of their careers

- Publish researcher equality, diversity and inclusion data and develop action plans to help facilitate the equal representation of all groups, across career stages and professions, in the Welsh researcher population
- Progress the individualised and peer learning and development and mentorship that our health and social care personal award holders need to advance their research careers
- Foster interdisciplinary interactions and networking across the faculty community of health and social care personal award holders from all backgrounds and all areas of Wales
- Enable opportunities for the sharing of high-quality faculty research with relevant UK and international communities with a view to raising the awareness of profile of Welsh research and promoting the research career opportunities of the researchers themselves.

7.2 Leading and supporting research in the NHS in Wales

Research taking place in the NHS in Wales through our health boards and NHS trusts supports the global understanding of health, disease and treatments and outcomes, and offers access to new treatment options for Welsh patients, which can be especially important for conditions where all other options have been exhausted. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the ability of the NHS – in Wales and right across the UK – to work together to deliver ground-breaking research at scale – most notably in platform trials for therapeutics and in the trials for COVID-19 vaccines. This research was largely delivered, not in academic centres, but in many hospitals and healthcare settings all over Wales and the UK.

We also know that NHS organisations that are actively involved in clinical research see improved health outcomes and lower mortality rates, not just for those patients participating in research, but for all patients¹⁵. In addition, investment in clinical research leads to economic benefits for the NHS that can support frontline services including the development and retention of the clinical workforce¹⁶.

The health departments of all four nations of the UK have agreed a joint approach to the future of clinical research delivery and are now engaged in its implementation¹⁷. With ministerial commitments from government, the aim is to ensure our research delivery services are people-centred; streamlined and efficient; enabled by data and digital tools; supported via a sustainable research workforce and that research is embedded within the NHS.

¹⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4342017/>

¹⁶ http://www.healthandcarereseearchwales.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/impact_value_research_supported_NHS_organisations_Wales_2020.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-future-of-uk-clinical-research-delivery>

A significant range of activities are already underway where we are working with our UK partners, for example in resetting the NHS research portfolio - carrying out a comprehensive and detailed review of all current studies to assess progress and work with study funders and sponsors to decide whether studies are on track and can be completed¹⁸. We have also been working closely with UK partners to improve the speed and efficiency of study set-up for example in the development of the Health Research Authority and Health and Care Research Wales Approval (the combined process for the NHS in England and Wales that combines the assessment of governance and legal compliance with the independent research ethics committee opinion) and the introduction of the National Contract Value Review which is a standardised, national approach to costing for commercial contract research.

We also recognise from the recent ABPI report that patient access to industry research has fallen dramatically in the UK and we need to play our part working to improve set-up processes for industry clinical trials as well as leverage commercial research and collaborative commercial research to boost NHS research capacity and culture¹⁹. There is a real opportunity for Wales to organise itself more effectively and be more agile and responsive in its offer to industry.

We now need to raise our game in Wales, building on what we have learned during the pandemic response. We have demonstrated the power of collaboration across NHS organisational boundaries, most notably through a One Wales approach to research delivery. We now need to make working as 'One Wales' the default whenever possible. This has potential to provide step-change to create a more streamlined service to researchers and sponsors, reducing duplication and increasing access to research for people in Wales. But it also means changing the way we work across NHS boards and trusts, and having a more collective approach to prioritising, planning and organising research delivery.

Key recommendations emerging from the "*Making Research Careers Work*" review of career pathways in health and social care in Wales highlighted the importance of promoting the research culture and ecosystem in the NHS. Although every NHS organisation in Wales is research active, it continues to involve only a small proportion our NHS workforce, even in our most research active organisations.

We believe all NHS organisations and all staff have a more significant part to play in facilitating a supportive and person-centred research environment and that increasing awareness of the importance of research among the wider workforce will ensure more people in Wales are given an opportunity to be involved in research. We recognise the benefits of embedding research in care pathways, lifting research

¹⁸ <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/researchers/managing-research-recovery.htm>

¹⁹ [rescuing-patient-access-to-industry-clinical-trials-in-the-uk.pdf \(abpi.org.uk\)](https://www.abpi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/rescuing-patient-access-to-industry-clinical-trials-in-the-uk.pdf)

delivery out of the frontline service, reducing the burden on the NHS and making best use of clinical research facilities and remote delivery models.

Reports from bodies such as the Academy of Medical Sciences²⁰ and the Royal College of Physicians²¹ have emphasised the value of research to the NHS. Ensuring real and sustained engagement in research is part of key Welsh Government strategies, frameworks and planning processes and is integrated into NHS Wales planning and delivery frameworks. Work is needed to ensure research features in new developments such as the NHS Executive and is embedded within national clinical plans and networks. Research is one of the three pillars within the university designation status work programme to ensure clear synergies are developed with innovation and training and education. The development of a nurturing research environment for health and social care professionals should be prioritised within the NHS organisations who should work to embed research into their strategies for staff recruitment and retention, and workforce development. NHS organisations should invest in support for research careers and researcher development, work to ensure protected time for their researchers, develop research leadership posts and explore opportunities to secure more clinical academic posts. In order to update and improve the existing NHS R&D delivery framework, a new programme of work has begun to produce a new assessment framework for research in NHS Wales which will support NHS organisations to embed research in core healthcare services and complement wider UK work on the clinical research delivery agenda. Health Education and Improvement Wales, working closely with Welsh Government and the NHS, have also committed to developing plans to support and facilitate the nursing, midwifery, allied health professionals and health sciences professions in embracing research as part of their roles and career pathways. Greater visibility at board level and with senior managerial and clinical leaders is crucial and each NHS organisation has an identified board research champion through an independent member.

In 2022, a new NHS R&D leadership group was formed with membership from all NHS boards and trusts and from Health and Care Research Wales. It is chaired by one of the NHS R&D Directors and its purpose is to drive forward research in the NHS in Wales and to provide advice to Health and Care Research Wales. The chair of the NHS R&D leadership group is a member of the Health and Care Research Wales Advisory Board.

We will take the following actions:

- We will work with Welsh Government colleagues who lead the university designation process (and its periodic renewal) for NHS boards and trusts to

²⁰ <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/policy/policy-projects/nhs-academia-interface>

²¹ <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/research-all-developing-delivering-and-driving-better-research>

ensure that it incorporates a meaningful and ambitious set of commitments to research and innovation.

- We will co-produce, with NHS organisations and other stakeholders, a new assessment framework for research in the NHS in Wales and use it in our annual reviews of all NHS boards and trusts to support them to find an appropriate balance of embedding research in core healthcare services and reducing the burden on frontline services through different delivery models
- We will make working as 'One Wales' for research delivery the default whenever possible, focusing our research delivery investment in areas of greatest benefit and added value to Wales and working to establish a collective and planned approach to prioritising and delivering research.
- We will set out our industry engagement plans and will work to provide a coherent and high-quality service to industry partners wanting to undertake commercial research in Wales, so increasing the profile of Wales globally as a site that delivers reliably and effectively. We will promote and support growing collaborative NHS, academic and industry research partnerships across the UK.
- We will reduce or remove duplication and increase speed and efficiency of study set-up and delivery processes and will monitor and review study performance metrics.
- We will work to develop opportunities for NHS staff to develop their research careers through the Health and Care Research Faculty and other routes, and to ensure opportunities are available to professional groups such as nurses, allied health professionals and clinical scientists who in the past have tended to have poor access to existing programmes and limited protected time for research.
- We will work with our partners to provide development opportunities and stable careers for those working in NHS R&D offices and in research delivery.

7.3 Leading and supporting research in social care in Wales

In the past, research in social care in the UK has been profoundly disadvantaged in comparison to research in healthcare, and while Health and Care Research Wales has made good progress in supporting and developing social care research, there is still a large gap in capacity and provision, and investments in research delivery are still largely focused on the NHS.

We have supported a range of capacity building activities in social care, aimed at developing research engagement and receptivity in local authorities for example through the Developing Evidence Enriched Practice (DEEP) initiative²², supporting research careers in social care through the Research Capacity Building Programme and the ESRC Wales Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) and supporting research

²² <https://www.deepcymru.org/en/>

in care homes through the Enabling Research in Care Homes (ENRICH Cymru) network²³. We have provided core funding to CASCADE which is a well-regarded and successful centre focused on children's social care and have recently appointed specialty leads for social care.

We have work to do however in filling gaps in policy evaluation and research skills across both adult and children's social care, and in building capacity and capability for both undertaking research and using it to evidence policy and practice.

Navigating the social care environment to set up studies and understanding the regulatory environment remains problematic and there are no local research infrastructures akin to those in the NHS to facilitate the growth of research activity and provide 'on the ground' support which restricts research being embedded in the social care sector.

Children's social care research has been an area of strength in Wales. However, much less success has been made in nurturing research into adult social care, with few researchers active in this area in Wales. Some prominent adult social care researchers have left Wales to pursue their careers elsewhere. At a UK level there is increasing investment in social care research from UKRI and NIHR, and there is a growing network of social care research centres in England.

Our strong partnership with Social Care Wales (the social care regulator with the responsibility for workforce development of the social care and early years sector as well as supporting social care research, innovation and service improvement) will remain vital as we develop the research skills and capacity of both research professional and the social care workforce and promote a culture of research mindedness and evidence use if we are to see the transformational change required.

We will take the following actions:

- We will provide funding for a new adult social care research centre in collaboration and partnership with one of the Welsh higher education institutions active in this area, with a particular focus on senior research leadership capacity.
- We will continue to include social care topics in our needs assessment and prioritisation processes and to invest in commissioned research on social care (see section 6)
- We will build research capacity and capability in social care through the Health and Care Research Wales Faculty
- We will work closely with local authorities and Social Care Wales to explore research infrastructure support and sector specific research capacity building models that are fit for purpose.

²³ [ENRICH Cymru | Health Care Research Wales \(healthandcareresearchwales.org\)](https://healthandcareresearchwales.org)

- We will work with social care settings to develop and embed research systems and processes to support and deliver research.

7.4 Using data for health and social care research

The use of routine data for research purposes is a strength in Wales – our longstanding investment in the SAIL Databank has made a huge contribution to supporting research in Wales and is at the forefront of UK and international developments around the safe and secure use of data for research purposes. The collation of health and non-health data into a common platform for use is a particular advantage, allowing consideration of the multi-faceted nature of people’s lives, rather than understanding through a single lens of experience as a patient or service user.

The large-scale UK investment that has been leveraged on the back of our core funding to SAIL has seen the establishment of major data-enabled initiatives, including: the Administrative Data Unit Wales; Family Justice Data Platform; and data hubs in mental health and dementia. This growing ecosystem has enhanced the research capabilities in Wales and facilitated greater collaboration between academics and Welsh Government policymakers.

SAIL continues to play a key role in Health Data Research (HDR) UK, and we will continue to influence and draw benefit from the significant role they can play in facilitating data for research purposes.

Harnessing the power of routine data to support research is not without its challenges, and the recent ‘Better, Broader, Safer: Using Health Data for Research and Analysis’²⁴ report provides a detailed account of the problems and potential solutions. We will work with HDR UK and our Government counterparts across the UK to collaborate on addressing these issues. In particular, there is an opportunity to take a more deliberate approach to public and stakeholder engagement, working together to transform how routine data can be used to support research delivery in line with expectations of appropriate use, and to iterate the information governance requirements to enable a supportive and understandable environment to operate in.

The UK Clinical Research Vision and the UK Life Sciences Vision provide the strategic steer for our activities to create a digitally enabled and future-ready research environment in Wales, in particular: the expansion of the model of Trusted Research Environments for the linkage and use of data for research purposes; and, building a suite of data-driven services that can support research trial recruitment and delivery. We will work with Digital Health and Care Wales (DHCW) and the NHS Wales National Data Resource Programme as strategic partners to make real the ambitions for greater digital research support and delivery.

²⁴ [Better, broader, safer: using health data for research and analysis - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674443/better-broader-safer-using-health-data-for-research-and-analysis.pdf)

We will take the following actions:

- We will work with HDR UK, NHS England and other partners on the further development of expectations and standards of Trusted Research Environments, and apply these to Welsh setting
- We will build on the strengths of SAIL as a Trusted Research Environment and facilitate an effective partnership with the new NHS Wales National Data Resource programme to improve access to health and care data for research purposes
- We will work with DHCW as a strategic partner to support the closer integration of research and clinical systems
- We will maximise our digital potential to support study set-up, delivery and access to research, by establishing a programme of work that enables the use of routine data to support research trial recruitment and delivery, shaped by public deliberation work to set expectations and approach

8. Using research to improve health and social care

We work with health and social 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.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Health and Care Research Wales funded a [Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre \(WCEC\)](#) to undertake rapid but rigorous evidence syntheses and rapid primary research to support the decision-making needs of Welsh Government and other stakeholders that were not being addressed by the broader UK and international research effort. WCEC quickly developed a broad network of collaborators and stakeholders including existing expertise in evidence review and synthesis such as Health Technology Wales and Public Health Wales to support the identification of questions requiring urgent answers and worked with the Welsh Government's Technical Advisory Cell (TAC) to refine and prioritise those needs.

Drawing on expertise in public health, health informatics, evidence synthesis including systematic reviews, health and care economics and health technology assessment, WCEC developed a stakeholder-driven work programme at pace, ensuring the use of research in evidence both in managing the pandemic and supporting recovery and regeneration²⁵.

It became clear very quickly that capacity for rapid review, evidence synthesis and rapid primary research to inform decision making in policy and practice was a central and enduring need, with ongoing value beyond the immediate pandemic.

²⁵ <https://healthandcareresearchwales.org/about-research-community/wales-covid-19-evidence-centre>

Until the pandemic, Health and Care Research Wales had made relatively little investment in evidence synthesis and knowledge mobilisation, though we do make a financial contribution to the dissemination and knowledge mobilisation activities of the NIHR Centre for Engagement and Dissemination (NCED). The Alerts, Collections and Themed Reviews published by NCEC cover not only projects funded by our own funding schemes and those funded through the NIHR programmes in which Health and Care Research Wales invests but extend to significant projects funded across NIHR and beyond.

We will take the following actions:

- We will establish a new Health and Care Research Wales Evidence Centre that builds on and mainstreams the achievements of the WCEC. The new Evidence Centre will work across the full Health and Care Research Wales remit, addressing key priority issues in health, public health and social care. It will work closely with other centres providing evidence review and synthesis to Welsh Government and other agencies. It will be funded following an open and competitive call for applications and will be operational from April 2023.
- We will review our ongoing investment in and partnership with the NIHR Centre for Engagement and Dissemination in the light of the development of the Health and Care Research Wales Evidence Centre.
- We will engage with other funders, for example through the Ensuring Value in Research forum to identify and learn from best practice that might inform our dissemination and knowledge mobilisation activities.

9. Cross-cutting themes

9.1 Communications, engagement, and involvement

To achieve the objectives in this plan it is vital that we continue to raise the profile of Health and Care Research Wales by showcasing the impact of research, working in partnership across sectors, and involving more of our communities to help shape and take part in studies.

With so many organisations involved in funding and delivering research including health boards, local authorities, universities, charities, industry and other funded organisations, it has been challenging in the past to communicate and demonstrate its collective impact, and importance in improving care and services.

National vaccine and treatment trials during COVID-19 highlighted Wales' significant contribution to the UK research effort, which we were able to amplify through a coordinated, 'OneWales' communications strategy. Working in partnership with Public Health Wales, health boards, universities and trial sponsors also boosted recruitment to studies, as well as developing a greater public understanding of the importance of research. Our plan is to build on this legacy with a 'OneWales'

approach to communications for **all** health and social care research that is funded or part-funded by Health and Care Research Wales, which will underpin the three-year plan.

We will further build the Health and Care Research Wales brand amongst our stakeholders and the public by being clear about who we are and what we do, provide a cohesive framework of consistent tone and messaging, and support the communication, engagement and involvement leads of our funded infrastructure and other partners delivering research.

Our communications, engagement and involvement activity will have a strong Welsh identity whilst aligning with wider Welsh Government communications and UK research strategies such as the *RRG - The Future of UK Clinical Research Delivery*²⁶ and [Be Part of Research](#). We will also work with the communication leads of the devolved nations on UK wide activity to ensure Wales's contribution to research is acknowledged and promoted.

Over the next three years our communications, engagement and involvement strategy will raise awareness of the impact of research in Wales through media coverage, public engagement events, conferences and social media. We will facilitate cross-promotion with our partners by developing our successful Communications and Public Involvement Alliances, sharing best practice, collaborating on key programmes of funded work as well as supporting national study recruitment.

We will take the following actions:

- We will support new and existing researchers, academics and the NHS research community to communicate the impact of their work and involve the public in their research. This will include raising the profile of their research on Health and Care Research Wales communication channels, providing a bespoke media training programme, and developing our Ambassador programme for senior research leaders so they can be more effective brand ambassadors for Health and Care Research Wales
- We will provide opportunities for more communities and under-represented groups across Wales to engage with research, including helping to design and take part in research studies. This will involve promoting public involvement opportunities, providing training, and facilitating outreach work with community influencers. We will also build on the first phase of our public engagement campaign '[Where would we be without research?](#)' to bring researchers, the

²⁶ <https://healthandcareresearchwales.org/health-and-care-professionals/future-uk-clinical-research-delivery>

wider NHS and the public together which is part of our 3 year public engagement strategy²⁷

9.2 Involving the public in health and care research

Health and Care Research Wales is committed to improving the extent and quality of public involvement across health and social care research in Wales so that it is consistently excellent. Embedding public involvement in research requires time and resources, not only in the individual research projects, but throughout the structures and processes of the whole research environment. This is a priority for Health and Care Research Wales and we expect it from those we fund and support.

We are proud of the activities, innovation and leadership on the public involvement agenda that has come from the Health and Care Research Wales community, drawing on the commitment, experiences and energy of public contributors, researchers and public involvement leads. These efforts have not only been effective at facilitating high quality public involvement activity, across all research development, funding and delivery activities within Wales, but increasingly is being demonstrated by public involvement staff and public contributors from Wales taking a leadership role in UK discussions and initiatives. We have been at the heart of developments around the UK Standards for Public Involvement²⁸ and the work on public contributor payments guidance and are proud to be part of the group shaping the UK Shared Commitment to Public Involvement.

However, the task of undertaking meaningful public involvement is one of continuous improvement, and there is always more we can do.

The recent Recovery, Resilience and Growth Implementation Plan²⁹ includes ‘people centred research’ as a key theme, emphasising the need for public to be able to influence the design of research to make it relevant, as well as be able to access research opportunities more easily. Our contributions to achieving this will build on the ‘Discover your Role in Health and Social Care Research’³⁰ plan that was co-designed with members of the public and the research community, which remains the focus of our activity to support the public involvement agenda through strategic direction and practical actions.

²⁷ https://healthandcareresearchwales.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/health_and_care_research_wales_public_engagement_strategy_2021.pdf

²⁸ <https://healthandcareresearchwales.org/public-help-research/uk-standards-public-involvement>

²⁹ [The Future of Clinical Research Delivery: 2022 to 2025 implementation plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

³⁰ https://healthandcareresearchwales.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Discover_Your_Role_in_Health_and_Social_Care_Research_Dec_2020_Eng_0.pdf

Our key actions include:

- We will work as part of the Five Nations Public Involvement Group to lead and collaborate on projects that tackle administrative and system barriers to meaningful public involvement
- We will create tools and resources to support researchers to incorporate meaningful public involvement in their work, drawing on the UK Standards as the framework for good practice
- We will expand the opportunities for more diverse population of Wales to get involved in shaping, informing, reviewing and delivering high quality research, working with local community groups and national organisations
- We will continue to implement the three year public engagement strategy we published in 2021, to promote the vital role the public play in enabling research to happen, and how they can get involved.

9.3 Equality, diversity and inclusion in health and care research

Whilst equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in our work has always been important to us, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other world-wide developments have highlighted the importance of EDI like never before. Health and Care Research Wales is fully committed to this agenda and is committed to health and social care research playing a fundamental role in improving the lives of all people and communities in Wales. The events in 2020 have brought issues of inequality into sharp focus for all. For research to be meaningful and impactful, we need to recognise diversity in our population and ensure that all our activities and practices are inclusive, celebrating and welcoming of all people regardless of geography, socio-economic status, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief and access to health and social care.

There have been positive developments across Health and Care Research Wales to date and in particular we have seen improvements in the way we monitor data across funding programmes and public involvement opportunities, targeted recruitment into studies, enhanced public engagement campaigns and there has been increased focus in our work programmes on the inclusion of people with lived experiences in shaping research.

Health and Care Research Wales has a clear responsibility to ensure that EDI is addressed in all our activities and embedded in everything we do, so that we are serving the population of Wales, with the mission being to improve the lives of *all* people and communities in Wales. We will therefore set out a more defined and systematic action plan that will result in more inclusivity across all our activities, taking a co-creation approach in consultation with the community.

We will take the following actions:

- We will develop an action plan that will result in more inclusivity across all our activities, taking a co-creation approach in consultation with the community.
- We will create greater leadership for EDI across our work programmes and ensure it is fully embedded at policy and delivery level through our funded activities.
- We will address under-representation in our own practices e.g. on funding panels, in public involvement, in governance processes (such as advisory boards), and in the individuals and communities who participate in the research we fund or support
- We will work with other funders to learn from good working practices and ensure issues relevant to minority groups are part of research portfolios and are well embedded in the research we fund.
- We will work with partners organisations including Health Education and Improvement Wales, Social Care Wales and wider public sector partners (NHS, HEIs and Local Authorities) to improve representation within the workforce and develop initiatives, working practices and training to attract a more diverse range of people into research careers and wider research workforce.
- We will commit to publishing diversity data across the range of Health and Care Research Wales activities and monitor this on an ongoing basis to identify areas for improvement.

10. Conclusion: research matters when research works

This plan is intentionally titled “Research matters” – to reflect how much we have learned over the last two to three years about how central research can and should be to decision making by people and organisations in health and social care. Fundamentally, research can and does improve health and social care in ways that make a real and tangible difference to the lives of people and communities in Wales. But – to do that well, we have a shared responsibility to ensure that we use the investment in health and social care research as effectively and efficiently as possible – to deliver great research, and see it used in policy and practice.

We had many really useful comments and suggestions for improvements to this plan and have tried to incorporate them into this revised version. One common point we will take on board during 2023 is that many people would like to see us attach timescales and deadlines to the actions we have spelt out. We will also review and update the plan annually both to map and measure progress (and recognise and tackle problems or difficulties when they arise) and to update the narrative and planned actions to take account of the progress we have made and the changing context for health and social care research, both in Wales and across the UK.