



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

# Annual Report **2022/2023**



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg



# Contents

Foreword	3
Our Year in Research	4
Research Achievements	5
People in Research: involving and engaging the public, patients and staff	7
Looking ahead	10



+44 (0) 2920 230 457



healthandcareresearch@wales.nhs.uk



Www.HealthAndCareResearchWales.org



@ResearchWales

# Foreword

**Every day, research into health and social care makes a difference to the lives of people and to communities across Wales. The crucial role of good research in improving health and care services and outcomes is well established, and Health and Care Research Wales exists 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 across the sector in Wales, and makes a difference to policy and practice in ways that improves the lives of patients, people and communities.**

I was delighted earlier this year to endorse the Health and Care Research Wales plan for 2022-2025, which sets out a clear and challenging agenda for improving health and care research, and ensures that Wales plays a full part in the research agenda across the UK and internationally.



**Eluned Morgan AS**  
Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau  
Cymdeithasol, Llywodraeth Cymru

While the last few years have been immensely challenging, due to the pressures on health and care systems during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, they have also been incredibly rewarding, as we have seen the contribution of research to our ability to respond to those pressures with new and improved diagnostics, treatments, care pathways and services.

Without talented people dedicating their time and effort to research throughout Wales, the gains that we have made across the health and social care field could never have been realised. I am so grateful to every single person that has contributed to Welsh research over the past year – from the researchers working in universities and health boards, to practicing clinicians of all professions, to managers and senior leaders including health board members, research nurses, social care practitioners and support and delivery staff making research happen – you have all played, and continue to play, a vital role in our research success.

# Our Year in Research

**For the first two years of my time as Director of Health and Care Research Wales, the COVID-19 pandemic rightly monopolised our attention and resources as we sought to contribute to the UK-wide research effort. We can be proud of the part that Welsh researchers and health and care providers played in the world-leading development of evidence to tackle the disease itself and to deal with its wider effects on our society.**

However, in the last year we have been able to shift back to thinking about how we can improve health and care research in Wales, and how our experiences during the pandemic - where we were able to coordinate research efforts, break down traditional barriers to collaboration, transform expectations of research delivery and deliver research results with unprecedented speed- could be brought to bear in the post-pandemic world.

We consulted on, drafted and published [Research matters: our plan for improving health and care research in Wales](#), which sets out a three year action plan – and now we are focused on delivering what that plan promised.

We made a good start in 2022/23, and it is worth reminding ourselves of just how far we have come already.



*Kieran Walshe*

**Professor Kieran Walshe**  
Director of Health and Care Research Wales

We launched the Health and Care Research Wales Faculty, led by its director Professor Monica Busse – a result of our work on research careers, which highlighted the need for a more co-ordinated approach to career development and support at every level. The report, [Making research careers work: a review of career pathways in health and social care in Wales](#), published in early 2022, set out an ambitious agenda and the new Faculty held its first meeting for members (current and past holders of a variety of personal research career awards such as fellowships) in September 2022. Since then the number and range of personal awards available has significantly increased, and Welsh links into UK funders of such awards have been strengthened.

We built on the success of the Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre, whose [legacy report](#) provides a great account of the way it supported decision making during the pandemic, and committed to invest more than £7 million over the next five years in the [Health and Care Research Wales Evidence Centre](#), launched in the spring of 2023 under the direction of Professor Adrian Edwards. The Centre – whose mantra is “good questions answered quickly” – is already providing Ministers and other decision-makers in Welsh Government and leaders in the NHS and the social care system in Wales with vital research evidence to tackle health and social care challenges.



# Our Year in Research

We published the first-ever coordinated **Cancer Research Strategy for Wales (CRest)** in collaboration with the Wales Cancer Network and the Wales Cancer Research Centre, as well as patients and other interested groups, bringing together the research community to focus on six key areas where Welsh research has a track record of excellence, and where we can truly contribute at a UK and international standard. They are precision and mechanistic oncology, immune-oncology, radiotherapy, cancer clinical trials, palliative and supportive oncology, and population-based studies of prevention, early diagnosis, primary care and health services research. We are investing an additional £1 million through the Wales Cancer Research Centre in the implementation of this strategy.



We identified a very important gap in research into adult social care in Wales, which we have addressed by establishing a new **Centre for Adult Social Care Research (CARE)** with funding from Health and Care Research Wales alongside co-investment and support from Cardiff university. The new centre is designed to be both a key resource for social care policymakers and leaders and to become a centre of excellence in adult social care research at a UK and international level.

We worked with partners across the NHS, higher education, patient and public involvement and engagement partners, funders and others to develop and co-produce a **new framework for research and development in the NHS**. It is designed to outline what 'research excellence looks like' within NHS organisations in Wales, where research is embraced and integrated into services and forms a core part of organisational culture. Research provides the opportunity for patients and service users to access new treatments and services that will improve their health and wellbeing, and contribute to reducing health inequalities in the general population.

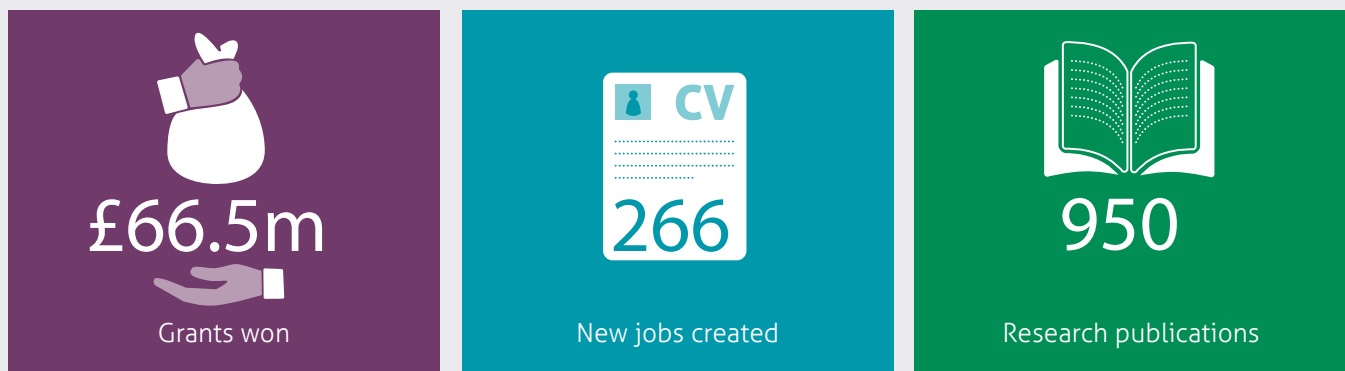


# Research Achievements

## Research delivery

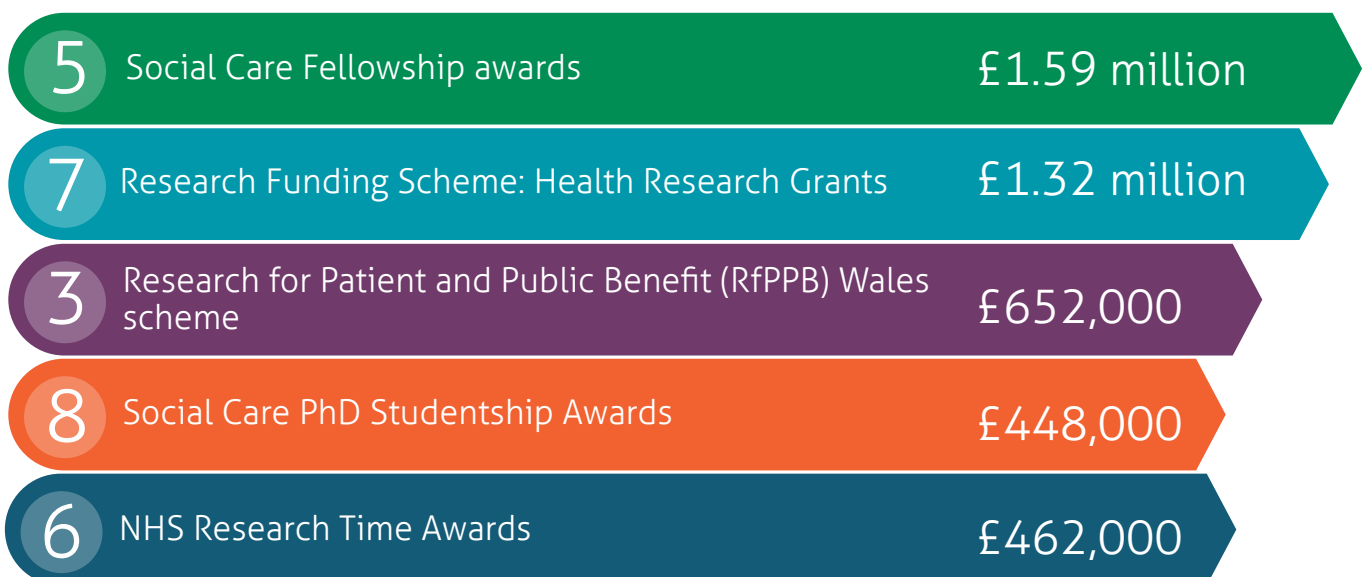


## Our funded centres



## Our funded schemes

Total **£4.472** million



# People in Research: involving and engaging the public, patients and staff

Here in Wales we have a wealth of extremely talented people designing, participating and facilitating research. It's important we celebrate the people behind the life-changing research and here are just a handful:

**Dr Leigh Sanyaolu** is a GP in Torfaen and a Health and Care Research Wales / NIHR Doctoral Fellow at Cardiff University and PRIME Centre Wales. He is a member of the Health and Care Research Wales Faculty which has supported him on his trajectory to becoming a future leader in research.

His current research focuses on the treatment of recurrent Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs) in women and improving long-term antibiotic use through the development of an evidence-based decision-aid. This will give patients evidence-based options to support the shared decision-making process regarding their recurrent UTIs.



Using the SAIL databank to review how common recurrent UTIs are in Wales, how commonly long-term antibiotics are used and how commonly bacteria in the urine are resistant to antibiotics in these groups, he is making important steps towards improving patient care in this area.

He said: "As a GP I see first-hand how UTIs affect women. I am passionate about how this research could result in significant impacts through reduced acute infections, improved long-term antibiotic use, less antibiotic resistance, and cost-savings for the NHS, and I'm proud to be at the heart of it here in Wales."

**Anthony Cope** is an active member of the Health and Care Research Wales public involvement community, who uses his lived experience to help researchers craft and deliver research across the country.

Involved in public involvement since 2021, Anthony first took an interest in research during the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to utilise his skills after an extended period of ill health. He attended some events and participated in Zoom calls with researchers offering his advice on patient documents and processes and felt he was really making a difference to the research landscape in Wales.

Since his first few months, he has gone on to represent the public on a variety of projects and boards including the Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre, the National Centre for Mental Health, through People in Research (PâR), extending his involvement nationally through Health Data Research UK (HDR-UK) and a Lived Experience module development at King's College London, at the Hull Science Festival and even in the House of Lords.



Anthony said: "Public involvement is so rewarding. It has allowed me to meet so many new people and is taking me to places I never dreamt I would go. I really feel like I am making a difference: that I am both valued and add value."



**Professor Ceri Battle** is a Clinical Academic, working as a Consultant Respiratory Physiotherapist in Morriston Hospital and an Honorary Professor in Trauma and Emergency Care at Swansea University Medical School.

Professor Battle is an NIHR-CAHPR Research Champion and co-leads CAHPR Cymru, which she set up during the COVID-19 pandemic to promote and support Allied Health Professionals in Wales.

She is currently completing a Health Research Fellowship funded by the Health and Care Research Wales Faculty, with her main research interest being the management of blunt chest trauma. She is the Chief Investigator of three studies funded by Health and Care Research Wales (STUMBL, Co-PACT and ELECT) and a co-applicant on several funded critical care studies.

She is an Honorary Professor in Trauma and Emergency Care at Swansea University; the first woman in Wales and the fourth in the UK to achieve the position. She also has an honorary senior lecturer post at Queen Mary University of London and teaches internationally on management of chest trauma. She is also the Health and Care Research Wales Joint Specialty Lead for Trauma and Emergency Care

She said: *"Research means we know how to do this safely and most effectively. I'm doing research because it is needed to help us to find better ways of treating patients and to improve how we take care of people long term."*



**Professor Marcela Votruba** is the Health and Care Research Wales Specialty Lead for Ophthalmology. She is a clinician scientist specialising in inherited eye disease of the retina and optic nerve, and her real-world practice includes the clinical and genetic diagnosis, management and treatment of patients.

She is a passionate advocate for patients with rare diseases and the development of novel therapies for inherited eye disease.



She conducts genetic, cell and molecular biology research and commercial and academic clinical trials. Currently, in a study funded by Fight for Sight, she is exploring how and why retinal ganglion cells are lost in Leber's Hereditary Optic Neuropathy, which causes degeneration of the nerve at the back of the eye.

She said: *"Once we can gain a better idea of this process we will be in a much better position to target new treatments to this blinding disease."*

As one of Health and Care Research Wales' 31 Specialty Leads, Professor Votruba champions research delivery by building networks of principal investigators and supporting the uptakes of studies throughout Wales.



**Beth Hales** is a patient from Penarth who is part of a study investigating how to speed up diagnosis of endometriosis by improving conversations with GPs and symptom identification.

Beth was diagnosed with endometriosis in 2015 after almost 20 years of experiencing symptoms and has actively campaigned for more knowledge and awareness of the condition.

As part of the study, called ***A realist review on the varied use of symptom reporting tools to support the timely diagnosis of endometriosis and shared decision making***, she will be providing her expertise through lived experience of endometriosis. This will include advising the primary researcher on finding relevant grey literature, the development of theories that will form an evaluative framework and on a dissemination strategy.

As well as the researchers and delivery staff, participants are integral in the research journey and this life-changing research couldn't be conducted without them.

She said: *"Thanks to research like this, I can reassure my daughters that things will be different for their generation, so they don't have to go through the long battle for diagnosis and treatment that patients are currently faced with."*



# Looking Ahead

**Although we have made lots of progress in implementing Research matters: our plan for improving health and care research in Wales, there is still a lot to do.**

We are now working to review and improve clinical research delivery in the NHS, and to strengthen our research links to industry. We are implementing the NHS R&D Framework with all health boards and trusts, and launching a new round of infrastructure funding for centres and units, including some catalytic investments in new research centres. We're also launching a new commissioned arm of our research funding schemes and more frequent funding calls, and we are widening access for Welsh researchers to funding programmes managed by the National Institute for Health and Care Research.

At a UK level, there are many important developments where Wales needs urgently to keep pace with our partners in the other three countries; it is vital that we continue to harmonise research delivery arrangements across the UK, build capacity and capability in the research workforce across the NHS, social care and universities, and play our full part in major UK initiatives like the UK Life Sciences Vision, and UK government agreements with major industry partners like Moderna and BioNTech.

It remains the case that health and social care research in Wales is underfunded compared with most of the rest of the UK – the data shows that about 55 per cent of public investment in health and social care research goes to London and the Greater South East (including Oxford and Cambridge), and the least well-funded nations and regions are Northern Ireland, Wales, north east England and south west England.

We are doing all we can to change that, and to make the case that positive intentions from UK government departments and funders like UKRI need to be converted into concrete commitments to change funding mechanisms and processes to remedy past underinvestment and to recognise and reward distributed excellence in science. At the same time, all of us, including Welsh funders, NHS and social care organisations and universities need to raise our game – recognising that we must focus our research investments in areas where we have demonstrated research excellence to match that elsewhere in the UK and internationally and to be ambitious and determined in pressing the case for health and social care research in Wales.



*Kieran Walshe*

**Professor Kieran Walshe**  
Director of Health and Care Research Wales



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

# Today's research; tomorrow's care.



+44 (0) 2920 230 457



healthandcareresearch@wales.nhs.uk



Www.HealthAndCareResearchWales.org



@ResearchWales



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government