



# Health and Care Research Wales

## Inclusivity Action Plan

2025 - 2028

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## Introduction

Health and Care Research Wales brings together a wide range of partners to facilitate research into diseases, treatments, services, and the prevention of ill-health and outcomes that can lead to discoveries and innovations to improve and even save people's lives. Our mission is to fund, promote and support high-quality research relevant to the needs and challenges of everyone in Wales. To achieve this, we must think about the inequalities that exist in our society due to differences in social, economic and environmental conditions and without doing so, the research we support will not tackle the avoidable differences in our population's health, the care people receive, and the opportunities people have.

Our plan [Research matters](#) recognises the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in addressing health and social care inequalities. To improve health and social care research for all, we are embracing diverse people and communities at the heart of all our activities planned and underway. In this document, we often use the terms inclusion or inclusivity as a shorthand for EDI.

Health and Care Research Wales strives to create and maintain a culture where everyone feels included and valued, and where they can participate in, contribute to and benefit from our investments in research. We work to fund and support research that will address the health and social care needs of all people across Wales. To achieve this, we have developed this Inclusivity Action Plan with actions and activities that will embed inclusive practice across Health and Care Research Wales. Recognising our diverse population helps to produce meaningful and impactful research for all, therefore embedding EDI in our activities is essential to provide a space for everyone to flourish and succeed.

Through this plan we will ensure that our inclusive practices have the potential to reduce health and social care inequalities and increase research equity. We have seen over the last few years an increased focus on the importance of inclusive research. The pandemic shone a light not only on the value of research but on the need for the research to be shaped by, reflect the needs of, and include the very communities that are affected by its outputs. We will promote and stimulate an inclusive research environment which recognises the breadth of diversity in our society and champions the engagement and participation of all.

We will do this by:

- engaging with diverse groups across all our activities to aid understanding of the needs and priorities of all;
- making our research relevant and accessible to create impactful outcomes;
- developing inclusive practices that drives high-quality research.

We support inclusive approaches being considered throughout the study lifecycle from the initial design of research through to dissemination of research findings and knowledge mobilisation.

We will measure the success of our approach against the actions set out below across our six themes.

## Wider context

The focus on the importance of inclusive research is increasingly embedded throughout a range of UK-wide activities and programmes of work. This includes the UK Clinical Research Delivery programme which particularly highlights the need to improve diversity in participation in research. The Health Research Authority has identified research that is 'representative and fair' as one of the [Hallmarks for Patient-Centred Research](#). Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and the Health Research Authority (HRA) are developing guidance to help researchers improve the diversity of participants in their research.

We will be working with partners (government departments and regulators) in clarifying our expectations of researchers by updating the [UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research](#) regarding diversity of people taking part in research. Across the UK, there is a [Shared Commitment to Public Involvement](#) in health and social care research to embed excellent public involvement, which [has been shown to improve](#) the quality of health and social care research. The commitment is reflected in the [UK Standards for Public Involvement](#).

A number of research funders have also set out their equality, diversity and inclusivity plans including government funders, research councils and research charities. It is important for Wales to continue to work with all partners across the UK to ensure that efforts to improve inclusivity are shared and good practice adopted and aligned, where appropriate.

Health and Care Research Wales is a member of the Ensuring Value in Research (EViR) international funders forum which has established EDI as a priority area. Furthermore, we have developed [a partnership with the Centre for Research Equity to support us with implementing this plan](#). We are also participating and looking to align our practice with the recommendations of the [MESSAGE](#) initiative on sex and gender to improve gendered health outcomes. These are some early examples as we continue on our journey to make Wales an inclusive research environment.

As we implement our plan, we are aligning our activities to the Welsh Government [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan \(June 2022\)](#) which sets a vision for 2030 - to make a measurable change to the lives of ethnic minority people by tackling racism. We are also building on the vision set out in A Healthier Wales, and the refreshed action

published in 2024 that address the need for an equitable whole system approach to health and social care and we embody the five ways of working outlined in the Future Generations Act 2015.

## Our approach

All public bodies have a legal obligation under the Equality Act 2010<sup>1</sup> to ensure that the impact on groups with characteristics protected under the Act, is considered in their decision-making.

Health and Care Research Wales works to ensure that research meets the health and social care needs of all. However, it has become increasingly evident that some groups in society have been under-served and under-represented in research processes, participation and outcomes. In recent times, particular attention has been drawn to inequalities related to ethnicity, and sex and gender. However, we are also interested in inequalities associated with socio-economic background, geographies, access to health and care, along with other characteristics not included under the Equality Act.

We will continue to understand the characteristics of our Welsh population so that our approach to implementing the plan reflects the people of Wales. This has included our participation in NIHR's INCLUDE project which aims to clarify which groups are under-served in research and develop detailed ways to address them. As a result, we have collaborated with NIHR INCLUDE colleagues to deliver workshops with public contributors and researchers on the concept of 'allyship' and how it can support inclusive approaches to involvement and research design.

We will use the census data, where appropriate, to understand our population (annex A shows 2021 Census data for Wales). However, this does not reflect all the diverse groups we want to consider as part of our action plan. Our approach across all our actions will be to consider cultures, attitudes and behaviours, and recognising people's diverse beliefs and faiths.

This plan builds on a range of activities already underway and new activities planned and sets these out against six themes - all of which implemented together will lead to stronger inclusion across our processes and our Welsh research landscape.

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<sup>1</sup> Protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2020 - age, disability, gender, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.



We are on a journey. It is therefore important to recognise that the actions presented may differ in specificity, depending on the activity to be undertaken in the context of an evolving landscape. With some, there will be clarity on the task whilst others might require further developmental work to understand what future actions might be required.

## **Theme 1: An inclusive organisation**

**We will be an inclusive organisation by ensuring that inclusivity is threaded throughout our strategies and policies, that we have diverse representation on our Health and Care Research Wales Advisory Board and other forums, and that we ensure inclusivity across our public involvement network.**

### **Actions:**

1. We will work towards diverse representation on our Health and Care Research Wales Advisory Board and other forums, by advertising and promoting all opportunities widely, offering appropriate training and support, and monitoring and reviewing membership.
2. We will continue to work to expand and monitor the membership and demographics of the Health and Care Research Wales public involvement network, linking appropriately with community organisations and identifying advocates to champion inclusive practice, to ensure that an inclusive range of public voices are involved across all our activities.

3. We will require our partners in receipt of Health and Care Research Wales funding to have inclusivity as a core part of their activities. For instance, as part of implementing the NHS R&D framework.
4. We have adopted the UK Standards for Public Involvement into our policies and practice, of which 'Inclusive opportunities' is a core standard. We will work collaboratively and share good practice with other research organisations as part of the UK 'Shared Commitment to Public Involvement' consortium.
5. We will continue to actively work with other funders and partners to inform our inclusive practices, both internationally via EVIR and also with a range of UK funders.

## **Theme 2: Inclusive research funding**

**We will ensure the research we fund is inclusive by embedding inclusivity in our prioritisation, application and assessment processes. We will encourage applications from diverse groups, as well as applications that address the needs of under-served groups.**

### **Actions:**

1. We will continue to collect, monitor and review inclusivity data in our funding schemes, across project grants **and** personal awards.
2. We will continue to monitor our portfolio of funded projects to ensure the research we fund addresses the needs of all.
3. We will undertake a bespoke EDI research prioritisation exercise within the next 3 years to identify issues that matter most to people and where there are research knowledge gaps.
4. We will introduce improvements by adopting recognised good practice, and aligning with appropriate initiatives from other funders, including partners within the EViR international funders forum.
5. We will ensure that our Research Centres embed inclusivity in their work programmes and monitor its impact.
6. We will provide, or signpost researchers to, training and support to ensure that inclusive practices, including inclusive research design, are embedded in funding applications and delivery of funded research.

## **Theme 3: Inclusive participation**

**We will strive to improve access to and participation in health and social care research through a range of strategies including engagement plans, so that people from all backgrounds can participate in research.**

### **Actions:**

1. We will continue working with the Health Research Authority and with other UK nations to ensure that the research ethics and approvals system provides clear guidance and requirements on how researchers are expected to design research to include people who could be impacted by the findings, and that people often under-served by research are not overlooked.
2. We will scope how to develop and deploy processes for the efficient ongoing collection of research participant demographics, collaborating with similar developments in other UK countries, to facilitate a better understanding of participation gaps and under-representation.
3. We will work with funders and sponsors, including industry, and the public to develop recruitment strategies (including targeted communication activities) to overcome practical barriers, offer equitable opportunities, and widen access to research studies for all.
4. As part of the implementation of the NHS R&D Framework in NHS Wales, we will work with NHS organisations and other health and care service providers at a local level to raise awareness of the importance of research among diverse communities.
5. We will undertake an independent evaluation of public perceptions (via YouGov or similar commissioned survey) on access to research which will enable NHS organisations to understand their diverse population and inform their R&D strategies.
6. We will work with system leaders and partners for example, the Centre of Research Equity (Oxford University) to share good practice around community-based recruitment and research study design, and to support health and social care research workforce to improve diversity.



## **Theme 4: An inclusive workforce**

**We will collaborate with partners across Wales to ensure that inclusivity will be at the heart of developing the Welsh research workforce<sup>2</sup>, sharing best practice and learning.**

### **Actions:**

1. We recognise that collaborative action is required to improve diversity in the health and social care research workforce and will actively engage with partner and employer organisations to achieve system-wide change that consider cultural sensitivities.
2. We will continue to engage with academia, the NHS and local authorities to jointly explore and improve diversity among the research workforce, for example using existing groups such as the Health and Care Research Wales' Higher Education Institutes (HEI) forum and the Embedding Research in the NHS Programme.
3. We will be collaborating on the development of the UK Clinical Research Delivery research workforce strategy to enhance our inclusive research delivery workforce practices and improve cultural competency.
4. We will improve inclusivity in the talent pipeline by offering career development and career pathway opportunities through our Faculty personal award schemes, and ensuring they are appropriately promoted and accessible to all.
5. Through our Faculty, we will provide training, development and mentoring opportunities to support researchers from diverse backgrounds.

<sup>2</sup> *In this context, we are referring to the wider research workforce across the NHS and social care sector, and academic institutions.*

## **Theme 5: Evidence-informed inclusion**

**We will take an evidence-informed approach by routinely reviewing our own data and the data collected by partners, and using emerging knowledge along with the data, to strengthen our diversity and inclusion activities.**

### **Actions:**

1. We will use data collected on our own boards, panels and forums, and the membership of our public involvement network to identify and address gaps in diversity and representation.
2. We will use data collected from funding applications to project grants and personal award schemes to understand current gaps and develop targeted outreach activities.

3. We will use portfolio information from our research centres to ensure equality and diversity issues are being addressed, and to help identify continuing research gaps and priority research topics.
4. We will learn from inclusive study recruitment practices to better understand what works and adopt evolving best practice in future design and recruitment practices.
5. We will share data collected from across our activities to inform discussions on improving the diversity of our workforce with our partners.
6. We will ensure our inclusion initiatives/activities take on the learning from emerging new knowledge from a range of sources, for example frameworks, journal articles and lived experience.

## **Theme 6: Impact for all**

**We will ensure that findings from the research we support, deliver and fund are shared and mobilised appropriately for the benefit of all. We will work with, and learn from, partner organisations and other funders to follow best practice in relation to the dissemination, communication and mobilisation of research findings with *all* groups within our community.**

### **Actions:**

1. We will continue to monitor the impact our funded research has and champion exemplars of impactful research inclusivity.
2. We will continue to build our understanding of how we, and the researchers we fund, can share knowledge in an inclusive way throughout the research process.
3. We will continue to build our knowledge of effective approaches to, and models of, knowledge mobilisation. We will pay particular attention to understanding the challenges of, and appropriate methods for, communicating and mobilising knowledge for different and under-served audiences.
4. We will ensure Health and Care Research Wales' communication and engagement plans are inclusive, building on the work of the Communications, Engagement and Involvement (CE&I) EDI Advisory group. This group includes organisations such as Disability Wales, Diverse Cymru and the Children's Commissioner for Wales.
5. We will continue to work with the HRA to ensure the research we support and deliver fulfils the requirements in making the results of research studies public.
6. We will work to create equitable opportunities and safe environments that support the sharing and dissemination of research findings.

## Next steps

Research and Development Division (RDD), Welsh Government will oversee the delivery of this plan. We will provide annual progress updates against all actions to the Health and Care Research Wales Advisory Board and update the webpage periodically as we make progress. We will continue to review this plan on an ongoing basis.

The inclusivity space is a rapidly evolving environment, and we will look to be agile and adaptable. We are committed to monitoring and benchmarking where appropriate but measuring what good looks like will vary greatly across the actions. We believe that annual progress reports focused on actions and their impacts will be the best way of meaningfully capturing developments.

As part of the implementation of our plan, we will work collaboratively with our research community and population groups, across the various initiatives and activities outlined. This will enable Health and Care Research Wales to achieve more equitable, diverse and inclusive research that is impactful and responsive to the needs of the people of Wales.

## Annex A

Table 1: Census 2021 data for Wales

Characteristic	Categories	Percentage of Wales population
<b>Gender</b>	Female	50.9
	Male	48.7
	Non-binary	0.4
	Prefer not to say	0
<b>Fluent Welsh Language</b>		17.8
<b>Disabled people</b>		21
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	2.9
	Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	0.9
	Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	1.6
	White	90.6
	Other ethnic group/did not answer	0.9
<b>Religion/Faith</b>	Buddhist	0.3
	Christian	43.6
	Hindu	0.3
	Jewish	0.1
	Muslim	2.2
	Sikh	0.1
	Other religion	0.4
	No religion	46.5
	Not answered	6.5
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Heterosexual	89.4
	Gay or Lesbian	1.5
	Bisexual	1.2
	Other	0.3
	Did not answer	7.6
<b>Age</b>	under 18	21
	18-25	8
	26-40	18
	41 - 55	19
	56-70	19
	Over 70	14
	Did not answer	1