

Top tips for care home researchers

Key principles

Engage in relationship-centered research within care homes, building positive relationships and maintaining respect and effective communication.

Co-produce the research as early as possible, making it easy for the care home to be involved and have a voice in the design and delivery of the study.

Integrate the research into the care home environment in a non-intrusive manner, ensuring that research activities are perceived as beneficial and enjoyable for both staff and residents.

Tip 1: Build relationships and respect

- Prioritise building strong relationships with care home staff and residents. For example, you could attend existing meetings, participate in activities, or offer to lead activities, to become a familiar and trusted presence.
- Make the first contact personable, emphasising collaboration. For example, 'Here is what we want to achieve. How could we best do this with you?'.
- Remember you are working in someone's home.
- Appreciate that every home will have a different set-up. So make sure that you are flexible in your approach throughout the research journey.
- Staff and residents may feel anxious about the research, so you should try to look for ways to offer reassurance. For example, you could visit weekly before the research begins so that your face is known within the home.

Tip 2: Simplify research participation

- Try to be flexible and involve managers in the planning and implementation.
- Describe your research in a simple and accessible way. This includes using non-technical language, avoiding terms like 'recruit' or 'patient', and focusing on what the research aims to achieve.
- Use terms such as 'lessons learned', or 'making things better'. These are ideas and language that care homes are more used to and are things that they are doing all the time.
- Be flexible with methods to suit the different needs of participants. For instance, consider whether there could be simpler alternatives for people who can't complete a questionnaire or focus group.
- Produce easy-read formats for all documents.

Tip 3: Communicate effectively

- Consider approaching someone at the level above the home manager, as they may have more capacity to engage and to see the bigger picture.
- Send a short introductory email first, and then offer to arrange a face to face meeting to discuss the project in a collaborative way.
- Try to avoid using unnecessary technical language or professional titles like Dr or Professor.
- Send reminders before visiting, and a final reminder on the day, care homes can be busy places!
- Make it clear that what you are doing isn't 'regulation' and that you are not there to point out faults within the home.
- Be clear about the timescales involved in the project. For example, outlining when you might have initial findings if the final report might be longer than the care home is expecting.
- Send periodic updates about the project's progress and next steps to keep staff and residents in the loop, so that they don't feel that they have been forgotten. For example, you could send updates on a hand-written card.

Tip 4: Show appreciation and recognition

- Acknowledge the contributions of care home staff and residents. For example, offering certificates of participation or thank you cards can be a meaningful gesture.
- Consider providing summaries of research aims and outcomes to demonstrate the value of participation. Consider going to the care home and presenting the findings too, not just via email.
- Encourage and support the homes to share on social media about the research and share with the local authority/social services department for extra recognition. You could offer to write a summary or provide details that are suitable for sharing on social media.

These top tips were co-produced by a group of care home managers and staff, along with care home researchers, as part of an ENRICH Cymru workshop run with Dr Laura Brown from Manchester University (December 2024). Thank you to the care homes (Pilipala Care Ltd, Swn-y-Mor Care Centre, and the Hafod Care group), researchers from Cardiff Metropolitan University and Swansea University, the ENRICH Cymru Advisory board and Dr Laura Brown for working with us to produce this resource.

Contact ENRICH Cymru

Website: www.HealthAndCareResearchWales.org/ENRICH-Cymru

Email: enrich-cymru@swansea.ac.uk

