NIHR Three Research Schools' Mental Health Programme

Improving mental health and wellbeing in underserved populations through collaborative research

Postdoctoral Launching Research Fellowship 2024/5

RESEARCH BRIEF

The NIHR Schools for Primary Care Research (SPCR), Public Health Research (SPHR) and Social Care Research (SSCR) ("three schools") have joined together in a unique collaboration between leading academic centres in England to collaborate on three programmes of work funded through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR): one on mental health led by SPCR, the second on dementia led by SSCR and the third on prevention led by SPHR.

Background:

At least one in four people experience mental health problems, many of whom never access care and treatment. There are also large numbers of people with learning disability (prevalence c.2%) and autism (prevalence c.1%). Mental health problems, learning disabilities and autism generate challenges for individuals with these conditions, their families and the wider society, with often quite high utilisation of health, social care and other services. Those challenges are seen across the life course.

The impacts of mental health problems on individuals and the wider societal and economic consequences are multiple and vast and include above-average rates of concurrent physical illnesses, shortened life expectancy, social exclusion, socioeconomic disadvantage, and the need for health and welfare support. Despite the high prevalence, many people do not receive the support they need and there are significant inequalities in access. These underserved groups include, but are not limited to, people with learning disabilities, older people, parts of the autistic and neurodiverse community, people from Black and other ethnic minority backgrounds. There are also other geographical, demographic and socioeconomic inequalities which this call addresses.

By working collaboratively across primary care, public health and social care, we aim to address problems in a multi-professional, multi-disciplinary way and at the individual, family, group and population levels using a variety of methodological approaches. Research will be underpinned by strong and diverse public, carer, service user and patient, and, as appropriate, practitioner involvement and engagement. Our research will prioritise those groups with high needs for treatment and support, and that have been underserved by research to date.

The requirement:

Phase 1 of funding awarded to the Three Schools has supported 53 projects ([Three NIHR Research Schools' Mental Health Programme — NIHR School for Primary Care Research)](#). Funding was awarded to a diverse range of partners, including practitioners, local authorities and those working in the third sector. Funding also achieved a wide geographical reach, actively working with populations and communities not traditionally engaged in research. We have established a Fellowship scheme to develop new research capacity in key topic areas and localities in need of capacity development.

Research funding in phase 2 would build on our early successes, supporting the implementation of evidence into practice and policy. As part of our second year monitoring, we identified a number of areas that are not significantly represented in phase 1. These

include suicide prevention in high-risk groups (including those working in the agricultural sector and young men), mental health in pregnancy, prison mental health, mental health in different religious groups and mental health in military veterans, but applications are not limited to these areas.

Opportunity

For this **Postdoctoral Launching Research Fellowship call**, we are inviting applications from those in the early stages of their mental health research careers to further develop their academic careers and build their research networks. We are particularly interested in applications from health and care professionals working in mental health but without a strong track record of mental health research (including but not limited to social work, nursing, midwifery, pharmacy, public health practitioners, housing providers, care home managers, paramedics) and methodologists (including social scientists, statisticians, economists and evidence synthesis experts) wishing to develop research careers in the area spanned by this programme. We will continue to draw on our expertise and established and recently developed networks to ensure strong lived experience (patient, carer, service user, practitioner, public and community) engagement, and work across traditional disciplinary and sector boundaries.

Funding of research through this Programme requires collaboration between at least two members of different NIHR Schools. The Principal Investigator must be based in one of the university members of the three NIHR Schools. Collaborators from outside the three Schools are allowed. The host organisation must be based in areas identified by the NIHR 'heat map' (appendix 1) as being underserved, however collaborators outside of these areas are welcome. Participant recruitment to the study must take place from the underserved region although this can be in conjunction with sites located in other regions, where the burden or need is high. The choice of recruitment regions and sub-localities must be justified in relation to the size of the impacts. We encourage applicants to use a mapping tool, such as the Research Targeting Tool (to access this please contact inforequest@nihr.ac.uk), to demonstrate how the planned target population fit with prevalence and impacts. Special consideration should be given to the inclusion of people from socioeconomically disadvantaged groups and other underserved communities that are more affected by mental health problems. Research methods may involve primary research or evidence synthesis, including systematic reviews, intervention development and testing, modelling studies, or the analysis of existing datasets.

The quality of the applications received will determine how many fellowships will be funded but all fellowships STRICTLY must end by **31 March 2026**. Part time fellowships will be considered (0.6FTE minimum).

The maximum budget for each proposal is £160,000 for this call. The Programme will fund:
- 100% of the directly incurred staff time on the project
- 100% of the directly allocated staff time on the project
- Overhead of 30% of the directly incurred staff cost
- Overhead of 30% of the directly allocated staff time cost
- 100% of the directly incurred non-pay items

Fellows will be based across the Three Schools' Departments to ensure they receive the academic support needed to develop a strong research career within the remit of this programme. Cross-institutional supervision and exchange placements will be encouraged.

Each Fellow will become a member of one of the NIHR Schools and be able to access the wider resource available; which School will depend on professional background and research area. Fellows will also be allocated a second supervisor / mentor who is based in one of the other Schools, promoting cross-school working and awareness of the importance

of cross-sector working. Each Fellow with have a personalised training budget to provide access to development activities including (and not limited to) leadership programmes and dissemination opportunities. It is anticipated that Fellows will also work on and lead other initiatives associated with this programme including workshops, dissemination and networking events.

Selection process

All applications received will be reviewed by a panel using these selection criteria. There will be no interviews for these awards.

PERSON
Commitment to research career in mental health research in the UK, particularly with reference to social care, primary care and/or public health and their interfaces
Knowledge of mental health priorities in England
Excellent written and verbal communication skills
Ability to manage own work with excellent organisational skills and attention to detail
Ability and motivation to pursue an independent research project
Evidence of ability to work as part of a team
Knowledge of some research methods
Previous research experience or formal training, allowing for career track and proposed career development
PROJECT
Relevance of proposed project to the Three Schools' Mental Health Programme
Clarity of project aims
Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) - quality of plain English summary
PPI - involvement of practitioners/users/carers/patients/other experts by experience/the public in developing this proposal and active involvement throughout the proposed project
Consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion
Appropriate methodology proposed
Feasibility and likelihood of completion in available time
Fit between proposed project and proposed supervisory team interests and expertise
Attributes of the research environment to support the person and the proposed research project
Likelihood of being able to secure a further personal award or research funding at end of this fellowship

Support for Fellows

All Fellows will be part of a mental health research forum. This group will meet twice a year (either face-to-face or virtually) providing additional training opportunities, networking and dissemination activity. This group will access the on-line and face-to-face training opportunities provided by the Schools. Funding for training bursaries will be provided to allow skill development in key methodological areas (e.g., systematic reviews, quantitative research, qualitative methods, trials).

Fellows will be part of workshops and will be involved in progressing the ideas identified during them, ensuring a strong connection between research and capacity building. Fellows will be appointed to ensure a balance across both the Schools and different mental problems (as described in the background section). This approach will help Fellows rapidly develop new partnerships and allow them to gain experience in a range of methodological

approaches. The Fellows appointed will form a network, promoting cross-disciplinary working and to link the different strands of the programme together.

Fellows with a particular social care interest will also be linked to the NIHR Mental Health Social Care Incubator.

How to submit an application

Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to make contact with a member of the relevant School members to discuss your proposed project and agree supervisory arrangements.

[NIHR School for Primary Care Research](#)
[NIHR School for Public Health Research](#)
[NIHR School for Social Care Research](#)

To apply for one of these fellowships, please complete and submit an application form and email it along with a short CV (two pages maximum) and a covering letter (one page maximum) to c.ashmore@keele.ac.uk by **3.30pm on Thursday 28 March 2024**.

Please state 'Postdoctoral Launching Research Fellowship 2024/5' in the subject line of your email and name your documents as:
- SURNAME_Launching_Application
- SURNAME_Launching_CV
- SURNAME_Launching_Letter

If you have any questions, please email Claire Ashmore, Programme Manager, Three NIHR Research Schools' Mental Health Programme c.ashmore@keele.ac.uk
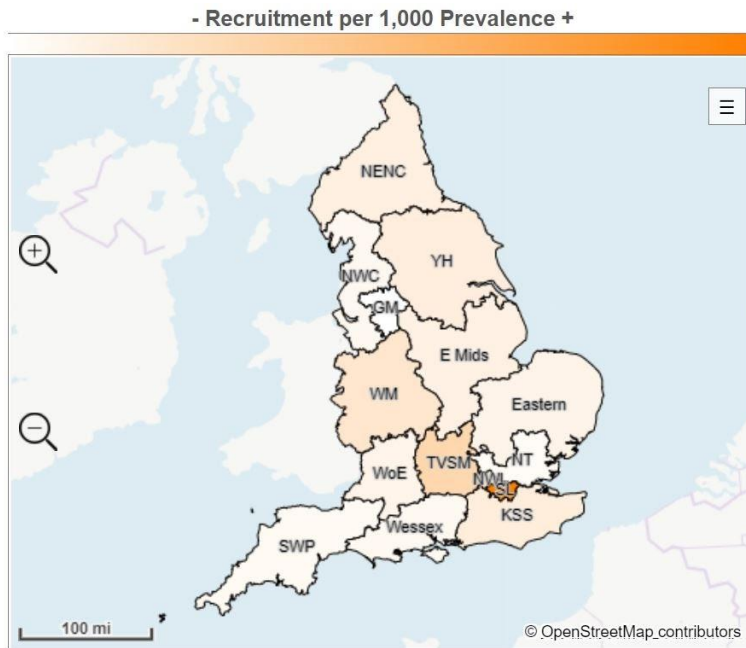
TIMETABLE

Monday 19 February 2024	Competition launch
Thursday 28 March 2024 at 3.30pm	Closing date for submission of applications
Friday 19 April 2024	Panel meeting to discuss applications
April/May 2024	Competition outcomes to be announced
June 2024	Awards may start from this date

Analysis of Regional Mental Health Burden and Research Activity

There is a mismatch between regional research activities (measured by patient recruitment per 100,000 patients) in mental health and the prevalence of mental health conditions in England in the past 10 years (2010-19). The recruitment per 100,000 prevalence map shows where the highest proportion of people with mental health conditions are being recruited to research studies.
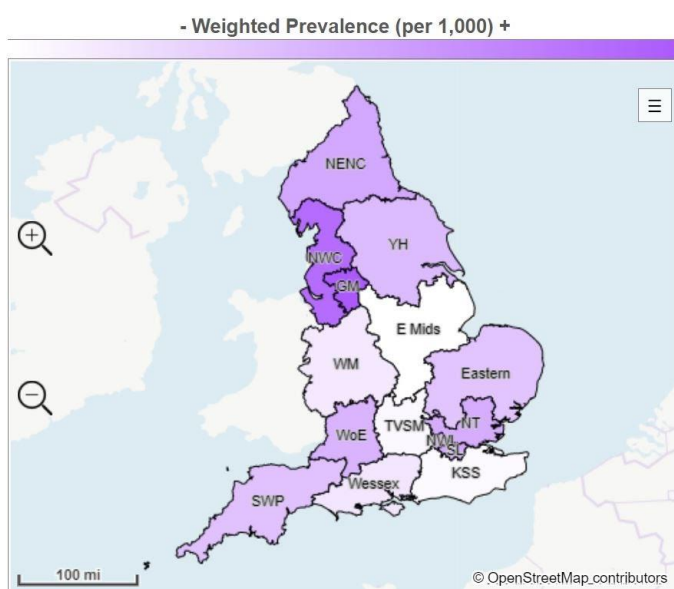
The areas of highest prevalence per 1,000 map shows where mental health conditions are most prevalent, with the shade becoming paler as prevalence drops.

Local Clinical Research Network region	Recruitment	Prevalence	Recruitment per 100,000 prevalence
South London	22,101	387,025	57.1
Thames Valley and South Midlands	4,332	222,443	19.5
West Midlands	7,484	568,463	13.2
North West London	2,869	250,377	11.5
Kent, Surrey and Sussex	4,286	426,269	10.1
Yorkshire and Humber	6,145	630,356	9.7
North East and North Cumbria	3,427	383,540	8.9
East Midlands	3,442	420,127	8.2
Eastern	3,108	418,186	7.4

West of England	1,888	256,886	7.1
North West Coast	2,929	521,317	5.6
Wessex	1,559	289,753	5.4
South West Peninsula	1,251	250,971	5.0
North Thames	2,803	648,839	4.3
Greater Manchester	1,133	430,692	2.6
England total	68,757	6,114,244	11.2

Where are common mental health conditions most prevalent?

- Weighted Prevalence (per 1,000) +

Local Clinical Research Network region	Prevalence	Adult population	Weighted prevalence (per 1,000)
Greater Manchester	430,692	2,146,470	200.7
North West Coast	521,317	2,707,490	192.5
North East and North Cumbria	383,540	2,296,045	167.0
North West London	250,377	1,505,994	166.3
South London	387,025	2,328,617	166.2
North Thames	648,839	3,952,295	164.2

West of England	265,886	1,644,509	161.7
Yorkshire and Humber	630,356	3,971,913	158.7
South West Peninsula	250,971	1,611,110	155.8
Eastern	418,186	2,704,008	154.7
Wessex	289,753	2,065,847	140.3
West Midlands	568,463	4,088,391	139.0
Thames Valley and South Midlands	222,443	1,637,712	132.9
Kent, Surrey and Sussex	426,269	3,218,657	132.4
East Midlands	420,127	3,236,427	129.8
England total	6,114,244	39,151,485	156.2

References:

1. https://hrcsonline.net/health-categories/mental-health/
2. https://hrcsonline.net/health-categories/neurological/
3. https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20201124_cmh20_statisticalrelease.pdf
4. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/better-mental-health-jsna-toolkit/3-understanding-people
5. NIHR Incubator for Medical Health
6. NIHR Incubator for Social Care