

# **NIHR RSS Specialist Centre for Public Health:**

## **Public health research delivery pilot**

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# Research delivery pilot for public health research outside the NHS

- £1.5m DHSC funding for the NIHR Research Support Service (RSS) Specialist Centre for Public Health (SCPH) delivered by Newcastle University and Partners to scope, design and pilot a research delivery support service to meet the needs of **public health research outside the NHS**
- Pilot to test what is needed in practice for public health research, **not in scope of the Research Delivery Network (RDN)**
- 4 work packages to be delivered over 2 years from September 2025
- Ensure all researchers receive appropriate and high-quality support from **across the NIHR** with no gaps to fall through

# Working with the RDN

- Jointly with Jo Morling, RDN Public Health National Specialty Lead
- Ways of working developed between the RDN and SCPH for research delivery, setting out the roles, responsibilities, processes and guidance
- Together, the RDN and SCPH offer enhanced delivery support for **public health research outside the NHS**
  - Research involving **recruitment of individual participants** will be considered for inclusion on the RDN portfolio and associated RDN support, **plus** integrated support of the SCPH delivery pilot, where appropriate
  - Research involving **population-level interventions** or **data that sits outside the NHS** (outside of the scope for the RDN) will be supported by the SCPH delivery pilot
- Seamless cross-referral and collaborative working to ensure a **joined-up NIHR research delivery function** that meets the diverse and complex needs of public health research

# Our pillars

Local authority support and resources



Fund Public Health Engagement Leads, Local Authority Research Practitioners, Grassroots Awards, Public and community partnership awards to support research in local authorities.

Research design advice



Provide researchers at all career stages with advice on research design and funding applications for public health research outside NHS.

Training and development



Increase capacity and capability to undertake research that can provide evidence on the interventions likely to be effective in improving population health.

Research governance and ethics



Scope current and emerging systems around ethics and governance. Foster shared learning, develop guidance, templates and a repository of examples of best practice.

Research delivery pilot



Research delivery support for public health research outside the NHS as part of a 2-year pilot.

Public and Community Partnerships / Research Inclusion

# Work packages



## WP1

Scope the support needs of PH research delivery outside of the RDN remit



## WP2

Co-produce a pilot public health research delivery support service



## WP3

Expand the scope of pre-award research design advice



## WP4

Pilot a new post-award public health research delivery support service

Final report will include recommendations for the scale, nature and suggested systems for a future service and hosting options

# WP1: Scope support needs for PH research delivery

Build on and expand previous scoping

- Work undertaken by NIHR Coordinating Centre involving 27 NIHR Public Health Programme award holders.
- [Research governance and ethics scoping report](#), involving over 60 local authorities to understand the enablers and blockers.

Scoping survey and conversations

- Survey (12 February – 16 March 2026) - challenges and support options
- 20+ informal conversations with public health researchers
- SCPH Public Health Engagement Lead and Public and Community Partnership Board sessions

Scoping settings outside the NHS

- Informal conversations with colleagues working in, or with, local authorities schools, VCSEs and the criminal justice sector
- School Research Network mapping

# Scoping survey - early findings

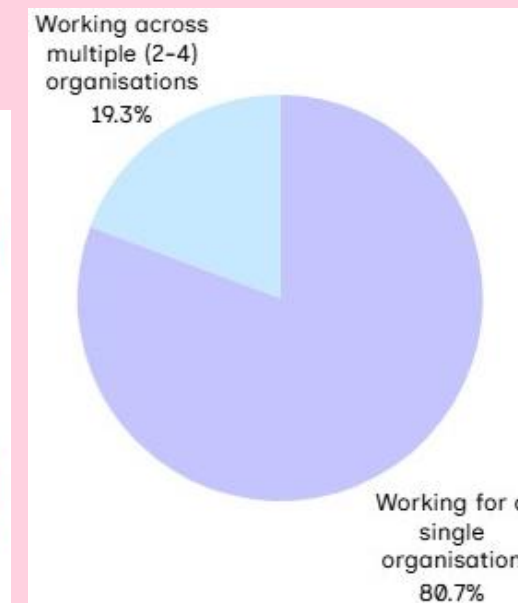
## About the respondents

- 160 completed surveys
- English regions and devolved nations represented in at least 1 of the target audience groups
- Respondents work across a range of organisations including local authorities, universities, VCSEs, RDN, ICBs, schools, nurseries and 'other'
- No response from the criminal justice sector or religious or faith-based settings

## Respondent breakdown across each target audience group

I am a researcher awarded funding (now or in the past) to do public health research	<b>65</b> (40.6%)
I work in a setting outside the NHS (e.g. local authority, VCSE organisation, school, nursery, prison or probation service etc.), supporting research within my organisation	<b>81</b> (50.6%)
I work in an organisation that provides a research support function (e.g. RDN, ICB)	<b>14</b> (8.8%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>

## Who do you work for?



# Research topics



# Challenges

- Capacity within the research team and within organisations involved
- Capability (having the right skills to support the research)
- Research governance and ethics (including contracts and agreements)
- Recruitment of organisations or individuals
- Data access and/or sharing
- Research costs and payments/reimbursements

*"Contracts with RDN, local authorities and community centres can be longer than anticipated"*

*"The main barriers are capacity and lack of confidence to do research"*

*"...in a university setting we have dedicated staff to help us manage our budgets....in a local authority setting I do not know how I would go about this as we don't have dedicated support for research budgets and grant management"*

*"Contacting and accessing schools –that part is easy – getting a response is harder"*

# Top support options

- Help to broker relationships with people and organisations
- Early feedback on research proposals
- Support to accurately cost a study
- Help to set up a research study
- Recruitment of organisations or individuals
- Guidance on data agreements
- Study promotion
- Drop-in or named contact to discuss any challenges

*"How to identify and broker relationships with relevant people for research is vital"*

*"We need hands-on help not advice at arms length"*

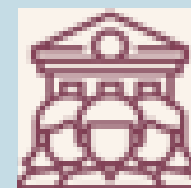
*"Contracts and data sharing agreements take an inordinate amount of time to set up"*

*"Early involvement...would be useful – and doesn't always happen. This can push us to work at a pace which is challenging... it precludes conversations around practicalities, logistics, timescales etc"*

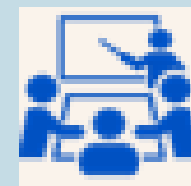
# WP2 Design Workshop (7 May and 11 June 2026)

## Aim:

- To build on the scoping survey findings and 20+ group and individual conversations
- Move from a focus on barriers and challenges to exploring opportunities a pilot service could provide
- Introduce resources being developed by the SCPH (e.g. local authority costing tool, public health research interests map)
- Focus on the areas that were highlighted as being the most challenging in terms of research delivery and those that were identified as being most useful in response to those issues
- To develop a foundation for our service offering



**Navigating research governance pathways outside the NHS**



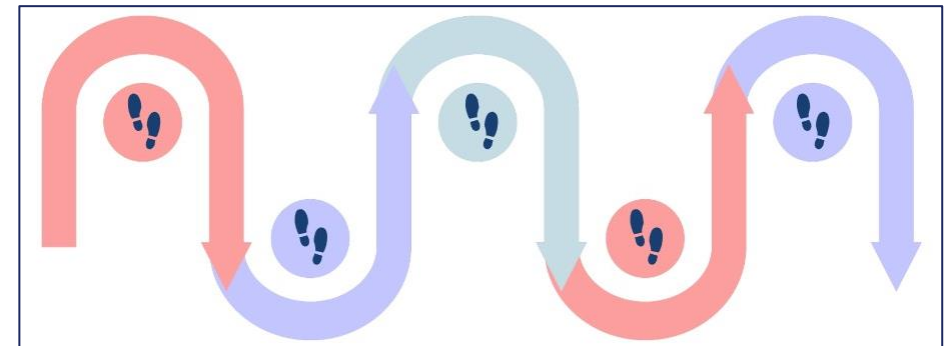
**Training needs to deliver public health research**



**Engaging with organisations to deliver public health research**

# WP3: Expand pre-award research design advice

- Early feedback (involving Local Authority Research Practitioners (LARPs), Public Health Engagement Leads (PHELs) and Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HDRC) colleagues)
- Tools to position studies in the most appropriate geography, population and environment (supported by the RDN)
- Costings support (template costing tools and calculators, costings and finance training for local authorities and other settings)
- Signposting to the increasing SCPH resources and guidance offer



# WP4: Pilot a public health research delivery support service

Designed with, & to meet the needs of researchers and organisations outside the NHS

Aligned with existing support systems in the RSS and RDN

Testing resources developed by the SCPH in practice

Scheduled Check Points & Ongoing Support

Flexible as the service develops

SCPH development of resources and guidance

Refinement of delivery offer

Wider development of the RSS (hubs and specialist centres) post-application offer

# WP4: Pilot a public health research delivery support service

- Launch planned August 2026
- Independent evaluation of the pilot service December 2026 – May 2027
- Seeking studies in remit that meet one of the following criteria



Research led by a research organisation/ HEI



Research led by a local authority



Research involving more than one research site in the same setting



Research involving more than one non-NHS setting



Research that straddles NHS and non-NHS settings

# Next steps

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- Publish WP1 scoping report and complete WP2 design workshops and discussions by end of June 2026
- Continue to identify and work with researchers to pilot different aspects of the service
- Launch pilot support service August 2026
- Commission independent evaluation of the pilot service (by September) to begin in December 2026