

Public Health Theme

Supporting resilience in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

Local authorities have always played a significant role in addressing the wider 'social determinants of health' such as housing, financial security and the living environment. But since 2013 they have also had a much greater responsibility for promoting population health and well being and reducing health inequalities.

In order to pursue these public health objectives many people in local government and the NHS are interested in developing ways to help people maintain and improve their health in the face of adversity. Such approaches are often described as aiming to enhance resilience. However little is known about how well these activities work and how they interact to influence the health of local people.

The CLAHRC NWC public health programme therefore provides a valuable opportunity for some joined-up thinking and action. Led by representatives from eight local authorities, the programme is



Photo: Robert Wade

focusing on developing approaches to enhance resilience in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and evaluating how well they work.

What might actions to promote resilience look like?

Our early investigations suggest these actions fall into the four main areas shown below. Examples of the kind of activities that may contribute to enhancing resilience are provided in the boxes.

Living environment

- More and better quality green space and making better use of it
- 'Healthy Homes-style' initiatives
- Reducing fuel poverty
- Providing more new affordable housing
- Licensing private landlords
- Collectively buying gas and electricity

Economic systems

- Welfare benefits and debt advice
- Action against loan sharks
- Credit Unions
- Fewer gambling outlets in poor areas
- Living wage policies
- Purchasing policies that create local jobs
- Support for small businesses in poor areas

Social relationships

- Community clubs and associations
- Community arts projects
- Befriending schemes
- Reducing social isolation

Community governance

- Neighbourhood partnerships or boards
- Councilor led ward solution meetings
- Participatory budgeting
- Housing associations owned by tenants
- Other public mutual bodies

Choosing Neighbourhoods for Learning

Each of the authorities involved in the CLAHRC NWC public health programme has identified a 'Neighbourhood for Learning' and is working with CLAHRC NWC researchers to identify resilience related activities already underway or planned in these neighbourhoods. As well as actions initiated by the local authority these will include the activities of other organisations such as the NHS and community and voluntary groups. For each Neighbourhood a comparison area has also been chosen.

How do resilience-promoting actions work?

As well as identifying specific policies and activities that are taking place in the Neighbourhoods, researchers will be exploring what research evidence there is about how they work.

How can such actions be designed and implemented for maximum impact on health and wellbeing? How can existing policies be adapted to ensure they are most effective in poorer neighbourhoods? How can very different policies and activities - relating to the environment, economic systems, social relationships or governance - be combined to have the best possible impact on the social determinants of health inequalities and on people's health and wellbeing?

This work will be done in two phases. First we will look at the research evidence across a wide range of topics. Then more detailed evidence reviews will be conducted for a smaller range of activities which have been identified by local authorities as having the greatest potential to promote resilience in their neighbourhoods for learning.

This work will be carried out by CLAHRC NWC researchers and local authority staff who are interested in the subject areas and who would benefit from developing skills and expertise in evidence review and synthesis. Local authority staff will be given training and honorary university contracts so they can access university library facilities.

Supporting and evaluating resilience initiatives

Working with local authorities, we will use the findings from the evidence reviews to alter or 'tweak' resilience-related activities already happening in the Neighbourhoods for Learning in ways which the research suggests will increase the positive impact on social and health outcomes. We will then compare what happens in the Neighbourhoods with what happens in the comparison areas.

The evaluation will take place between 2015 and 2019. A variety of methods will be used to investigate the changes the resilience initiatives bring about and how these happen; which people are affected and where. The evaluation will have three main components: a neighbourhood survey; analyses of data collected routinely by local authorities and the NHS; and studies conducted by a network of community researchers.

The neighbourhood survey

Questionnaires will be designed by CLAHRC NWC researchers, local authority partners and community organisations. They will be used to collect information from residents in both the Neighbourhoods and the comparison areas. A specialist survey provider will be commissioned to carry out a core survey and local community groups will be funded and trained to carry out an extended version.

The core survey will include questions about mental health and wellbeing as well as physical health and measures of resilience. The extended survey will include some of the same questions but also questions about the specific locality. In total about 350 people in each Neighbourhood and comparison area will be interviewed.

The National Institute of Health Research Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care North West Coast (NIHR CLAHRC NWC) brings universities, local authorities, NHS organisations and the public together – working to accelerate the translation of research findings into health service improvements and

Using routinely collected data at neighbourhood level

A great deal of anonymized data of various types is already routinely collected. This includes information on hospital admissions, prescriptions, educational qualifications and welfare benefits. Local authorities have datasets relating to social care, housing, how leisure centres are used, election turnout and public assets. By collecting this sort of data together and making it accessible, researchers will be able to identify changes over time and compare what has happened in different areas. As well as helping to identify the impact of the neighbourhood resilience initiatives, these routine datasets will be an ongoing resource which can be used by local authorities and others to help plan and evaluate future policies.

Community research network

Another long lasting impact of our research will be that local community groups will develop the capacity to conduct their own research using surveys and participative methods. A network of community researchers will be trained in sampling methods and interviewing techniques, including the use of Computer Assisted Interviewing. The experience they gain through conducting the extended neighbourhood survey and using qualitative research methods will enable them to study other issues of particular concern to them in the future and give them skills that can open up employment opportunities.



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changes that will reduce health inequalities and improve population health. This leaflet presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR or the Department of Health.

