

## NIHR Three Research Schools

### Mental Health Research Programme 2021-2024

#### Improving mental health and wellbeing in underserved populations through collaborative research

The three NIHR Schools are pleased to announce that they have been awarded funds for a mental health research programme. We are inviting applications for a range of activities. This document is focussed on capacity building and development. Information about research project commissioning and other activities will be published before the end of September.

[www.spcr.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.spcr.nihr.ac.uk)

#### 1. BACKGROUND

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 two programmes of work funded through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR): one on **mental health** hosted by SPCR and the second on dementia hosted by SSCR.

The funding will support more mental health research as an element within a broad DHSC/NIHR mental health research initiative. It will support proposals addressing a range of mental health conditions within the HRCS mental health category, including depression, schizophrenia, psychosis and personality disorders, addiction, suicide, anxiety, eating disorders, learning disabilities, bipolar disorder, autistic spectrum disorders and studies of normal psychology, cognitive function and behaviour. Research addressing an alternate HRCS code (such as HRCS neurological category, which includes dementia) are out of scope for this programme.

#### 2. BUILDING RESEARCH CAPACITY

In order to develop a critical mass of mental health research in underserved communities it is essential to build strong capacity with the expertise and local knowledge needed to make an impact. We aim to do this by establishing:

- Bespoke fellowship scheme to develop new research capacity in key topic areas and localities in need of capacity development
- Masters/post-graduate training to increase research capability
- Dedicated service user, carer patient and public involvement and engagement expertise
- Early career research forum

#### 3. COMMISSIONING RESEARCH

To support underserved communities, we need to better understand their needs, which are likely to be complex and span traditional health and care boundaries. This will allow us to co-create research that has a greater impact on local populations. We will establish a series of workshops, attended by academics, practitioners, users, carers and patients or other experts by experience

from the NIHR Schools for Primary Care, Public Health and Social Care Research to identify, prioritise and design mental health research meeting the needs of underserved areas.

Workshops will be open to the broadest range of stakeholders (including non-School academic departments), providing additional networking and collaborative opportunities. Workshop findings will be published as outputs in their own right. We will work with our involvement team to ensure strong user and practice representation at the workshops. This will include people with lived experience, their families and carers, local authority, NHS, third sector, private sector, housing services, and education partners.

Workshops will prioritise topics for funding in years 2 and 3 of this proposal. When developed by the workshop team, studies will be externally peer-reviewed. Our steering committee will review the range of proposals to ensure appropriate coverage of relevant themes and geography.

### **Practitioner lead initiatives**

Building on the success of the NIHR SPHR Public Health Practice Evaluation Scheme ([PHPES](#)) scheme we will develop a new programme addressing the challenges faced by front line health and care professionals, wherever they work: in local authority teams or other departments; in the third sector; in the private sector, or in the NHS and other social care settings.

## **4. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The Three Schools aim to foster an environment of trust and co-production in mental health-related research, building on the existing involvement strategies in place within each School and following guidance and standards from NIHR.

All individual research projects will be required to have appropriate and meaningful involvement; proposals that are co-produced with relevant individuals and groups will be welcomed.

The three Schools will endeavour to develop further links, building on their extensive network of stakeholders, to support further engagement with Programme activities.

### **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](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. <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/file-download/63608018>

## **Call for applications to the Mental Health research capacity building and development programme**

The application process and associated documents will be made available shortly. Applications need to be submitted by **Thursday 7 October**. Decisions and feedback are expected to be communicated by the end of October at the latest.

### **Fellowship Programme**

We will appoint a new cohort of 12 career development fellows, working with underserved communities, to build capacity in topic areas that have been under-researched. This will include 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).

Fellows will be based across School Departments to ensure they receive the academic support needed to develop a strong research career. The host organisation for Fellows will usually be based in areas identified by heat maps as being underserved (details to follow), although we encourage cross-institutional supervision and exchange placements. Awards will typically be made to those wanting to develop doctoral training opportunities and to postdoctoral academics developing a career in mental health research.

There will be support for fellows to develop a doctoral training application, further promoting academic capacity development.

Depending on professional background and research area, each Fellow will become a member of one of the NIHR Schools and be able to access the wider resource available. 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 will have a personalised training budget to provide access to development activities including (and not limited to) leadership programmes and dissemination opportunities.

Funds to support a number of small 'starter grants' will be available giving our Fellows and early career researchers experience in leading research.

### **Masters Training Programme**

To address the academic skills shortage in mental health research we will support several Masters/post-graduate degrees, providing the opportunity for health and social care practitioners to increase capability in research methodology. This scheme will be particularly relevant to those working in health and care who do not yet have a strong academic background but want to gain early exposure to research.

Master's students will be allocated a mentor (who is a member of a School Department) and will be eligible to join our early career researcher forum. This scheme will fund tuition costs in participating

departments and support internship placements to gain further research experience. Backfill funding will be provided.

### **Dedicated patient and public involvement and engagement (PPIE) expertise**

In addition to building strong research capacity, this proposal will also build strong expertise in mental health service user, carer, patient and public involvement / community engagement.

We will establish 2 new posts to work with our existing three Schools' involvement infrastructure and to support our research and capacity building programme. These posts will also develop wider expertise in mental health PPIE and provide the opportunity to engage in PPIE focused research activity. These posts will have a specific remit around mental health, linking with key stakeholders including patients, service users, families and carers, health and care providers, third sector and private organisations and schools. They will establish a new network which will reach out to and engage with underserved communities. They will collaborate with other parts of NIHR Infrastructure, including the Applied Research Collaborations and Clinical Research Networks (CRN), supporting the wider adoption of mental health studies to the CRN portfolio in underserved populations.

### **Other posts**

We want to appoint an administrator to support the SPCR in the management of the three schools' mental health research programme. The post will be 0.5FTE and available for up to 30 months.

We will require input from a communications officer to oversee the web content, social media, news items and design aspects of the programme. FTE and duration to be agreed.

We would welcome applications as a secondment opportunity for these posts. The secondment opportunities are open to all University Professional Services colleagues based in the schools' member department. Sign off by your current line manager would be required before submitting your application.

### **Early career research forum**

All Fellows and early career researchers will be part of an early career 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, trials).

We also plan to work with the NIHR Mental Health Incubator.

Any queries about these opportunities should be addressed to Dr Georgina Fletcher, Assistant Director, SPCR. [e.g.fletcher@keele.ac.uk](mailto:e.g.fletcher@keele.ac.uk)