



Public Health Research and NIHR

Overview and signposting to relevant information

These slides are intended to provide a high-level and brief overview of information related to public health research as it relates to NIHR, and to signpost to further information – please follow the hyperlinks below to relevant webpages.



National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)

NIHR is the UK's largest funder of health and care research, with a mission to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research. NIHR is funded through the Department of Health and Social Care.

It is an NIHR strategic priority to build capacity and capability in public health and preventive research. The latest NIHR strategy was published in 2021, called 'Best Research for Best Health: The Next Chapter'.

The Public Health Research Programme

The NIHR Public Health Research (PHR) Programme funds evaluative research to generate evidence to inform delivery of non-NHS interventions. Outputs are intended to improve the health of the public and reduce health inequalities.

Research teams applying to the PHR Programme can do so through two routes: by submitting a proposal (i) through the 'researcher-led' route, proposing a research idea that fits within remit of the programme, or (ii) in response to a commissioned call, proposing a study designed to address the commissioning brief that centres on a specific topic.

Research funded serves a variety of stakeholders including decision makers. Public involvement is key. Research focusing on the wider determinants of health is very much welcomed.

PHIRST



The NIHR [Public Health Intervention Responsive Studies Teams \(PHIRST\)](#) scheme was launched by NIHR in 2020 and now comprises [six academic teams](#). The aim of the scheme is to build the evidence base for local government decision making as it relates to health and health inequalities. A short [blog](#) from 2020 provides the context.

The PHIRST model is that local government teams can put forward their local initiatives for evaluation. There is a [call for expressions of interest](#) (or search [here](#) for 'PHIRST') that involves completing a short online form. The call operates two drawdowns per year, each Jan and Sept. Local initiatives are prioritised by NIHR based on public health importance and other factors – further detail [here](#).

Selected initiatives are allocated to a PHIRST team, who lead on conducting the evaluation in partnership with the local government team. Outputs are tailored to local government needs. Evaluations typically have a duration of 12-18 months, and might involve mixed-methods approaches.

The newly-launched [PHIRST website](#) provides an online presence for the PHIRST teams and over time will become a [repository](#) of evaluation outputs (in addition to peer-reviewed publications resulting from evaluations) that can inform local government commissioning, policy, and practice in the UK, as it relates to public health.



HDRCs

The NIHR [Health Determinants Research Collaborations \(HDRCs\)](#) were launched in autumn 2022 and represent a substantial investment in augmenting public health research in the local government setting.

The HDRCs (ten initially, increasing to thirteen, with potentially more to come) are collaborations between local government and higher education institutions, designed to build capacity and capability in public health research in local government.

HDRCs are intended to stimulate economic growth, embed a culture of evidence-based decision-making within local government, and help address the wider determinants of health and health inequalities.

School for Public Health Research

The NIHR [School for Public Health Research \(SPHR\)](#) is a partnership between nine leading academic centres conducting applied public health research in England. The research can be applied across the country to meet the needs of policymakers, practitioners, and the public.

- The SPHR also runs the [Public Health Practice Evaluation Scheme \(PHPES\)](#).



Also...

The NIHR funds, or is complementary to, other initiatives that conduct or facilitate research relevant to public health. This includes:

The [NIHR Academy](#), which develops and coordinates academic training, career development, and research capacity. There are a variety of [local-authority-related fellowships and similar opportunities](#), including the:

- Pre-Doctoral Local Authority Fellowship (PLAF) Scheme
- Doctoral Local Authority Fellowship (DLAF) Scheme
- Local Authority Short Placement Award for Research Collaboration (LA SPARC).

The (non-NIHR) MRC [Public Health Intervention Development Scheme](#) (PHIND).

NIHR [Applied Research Collaborations](#) (ARCs) may conduct public-health-related research as part of their activity.

NIHR [Health Protection Research Units](#) (HPRUs) fund research related to health protection.

NIHR [Policy Research Programme](#) (PRP) and [Policy Research Units](#) deliver evidence to inform national policy decisions across the health, care, and public health systems.



Research Design Service and PHRADA

The NIHR Research Design Service (RDS) provides free and confidential advice on research design, writing funding applications, and public involvement.

Support is available to health and social care researchers across England.

The RDS can support a broad range of familiar quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research designs, as well as newer and more novel approaches.

The NIHR Public Health Research Applications and Design Advice service (PHRADA) is provided across the RDS in England. PHRADA has a specific remit to support applicants to develop competitive applications to the NIHR Public Health Research (PHR) Programme, with a focus on commissioned calls.

To make best use of the RDS and/or PHRADA, potential research applicants should contact their regional RDS or PHRADA at an early stage to discuss research ideas.

