

Our approach to research



Mental Health
Foundation

We are passionate about the transformative power of research to create change in people's lives, their communities and workplaces, in services and policy.

Our research takes many forms so that we find out what works to:

- prevent mental health problems
- aid recovery, and
- support people who have enduring mental health problems to live well and have fulfilled lives.

Mental Health Foundation recognises that research takes place in a world that is constantly changing; and needs to address the complexities of mental health across the life course for individuals, families, communities and society. Thus we apply a broad perspective to our research and use a wide range of methods and measures.

Research must matter to people, by being relevant, meaningful and inclusive. Therefore, we believe that research should answer questions asked by people directly affected by mental health problems, disadvantage, inequalities and adversities; and those who care about them. Asking questions that matter to people makes research authentic and current. Also, it increases the likelihood that it will be used by decision makers.

We make sure that we are clear about why we are doing research and what we hope to gain from it.

When people contribute their expertise and experiences to research, we believe that it is an ethical requirement for them to have opportunities to learn what we have found out and what we are going to do with this knowledge. We encourage people to use this knowledge in their own lives and advocacy.

Mental health research findings should be made available to everyone through effective communication. It is crucial that this knowledge is translated so that it can be used by a wide range of audiences.

Mental health research can be emotionally challenging for researchers. Therefore, we are committed to minimising emotional risk and ensuring that all researchers, whether they have experience of mental health problems or not, are adequately supported.

Participation



We believe that it is important to recognise and address how power operates within research. Power is present in what research is funded, how it is designed, who are researchers and who are study participants, how research is communicated and used, and what types of research knowledge is valued. In mental health research, these power dynamics can mirror the power relationships within services.

We promote participation as one way to equalise power.

We recognise that research is more relevant, valuable and enjoyable when it involves the participation of people who have direct experience of the issues that the research is investigating. We recognise the importance of communicating the benefits of participation in order to secure and sustain involvement.

Participation in research can take many forms including developing research questions; designing studies; providing advice and review; collecting, analysing data; writing up studies; and communicating findings. We have championed peer and survivor research initiatives such as 'Strategies for Living' and the 'Right Here' youth programme, and continue to do so.

We encourage and motivate a wide range of stakeholders in services and policy to prioritise funding for and use of mental health research in order to maximise impact.

We are committed to supporting early career researchers through opportunities to: volunteer and intern with us, publish on our platforms and compete for the Janice Sinson Award.

Mental Health Foundation undertakes participatory research that is applied to people's lives. Participation is our central value and we are committed to co-produce research. We do research with people rather than on, for or to them. This takes time and we invest the resource knowing that this will achieve more valuable and enjoyable research.

Impact



Mental Health Foundation believes that research and evaluation must always have a clear and transparent purpose and process.

Everyone involved in research including participants, researchers and funders need to know the aims of the research, how it is being undertaken, what we want to find out; and be confident about how it is to be achieved.

Mental Health Foundation designs research for impact by:

- asking the right questions – developing these with people who are directly affected by an issue,
- selecting the right methods to rigorously and effectively answer these,
- adhering to strict ethical standards,
- supporting researchers undertaking challenging and emotionally risky research,
- communicating in an accessible way that is persuasive, innovative and without delay;
- engaging audiences in communities, academia, services and policy; and
- supporting people to use research to create change.

Evidence



Everyone at Mental Health Foundation pride ourselves in producing robust and independent research.

Mental Health Foundation contributes to the mental health evidence base by:

- undertaking original research,
- synthesising existing knowledge, and
- translating this research to further *understanding* of what works, *transferring* interventions to other populations and places at a scale that maximises benefit and impact, and *including* mental health in all policies.

We place equal value on evidence generated by people with lived experience of mental health problems, disadvantage, inequalities and adversity. Because this evidence is seldom heard, we prioritise it within our research and evaluations.

We recognise the importance of evidence produced by a wide range of scientific disciplines; and of using a range of methodologies to produce qualitative and quantitative data, which advances mental health for all. We prioritise research where:

- there are knowledge gaps around topics, voices and perspectives, and methodologies;
- studies can be aligned with programme innovation and / or policy opportunities; and
- there is greatest need or scope for greatest impact.

Unique offer



For over six decades the Mental Health Foundation has been working with a host of partners across the UK and internationally. From our offices in England, Scotland and Wales, we have a wide reach through our programmes, networks and alliances. We engage local and national and devolved government at Westminster, Holyrood, the Senedd and Stormont.

We have strong partnerships with: people who experience mental health problems and those who care about them; academics; community and voluntary organisations; practitioners; services; and policy makers.

We bridge communication between real world experience, practice, policy and theory. We facilitate collaboration between those who experience mental health challenges, those who provide and deliver services, and those who make decisions on policy and support.

As a charity we are independent. We co-produce rigorous, ethical, high quality research.

We work across the life course and have developed expertise in learning disability and dementia as well as mental health. Our research is directly and dynamically engaged with our intervention programmes and policy so that it is always current, relevant and grounded in the real world.



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