



Supporting the use of best available, up-to-date, and relevant research evidence to inform managing the COVID-19 pandemic and establishing recovery and regeneration in Wales

WCEC Newsletter



FOREWORD BY CENTRE DIRECTOR, PROFESSOR ADRIAN EDWARDS

I am delighted to welcome you to the Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre's Summer 2022 newsletter. We are now in our second year of bringing together the evidence on key topics which will affect us all as we move forward into the recovery phase of the pandemic.

Whilst entering the recovery phase, it is essential to remain vigilant for further outbreaks and emerging new strains of COVID-19. Cases are rising and we need to be prepared for what winter may bring and how the pandemic will continue to have an impact on our lives, including NHS waiting lists, undetected long term health conditions, long COVID and mental health.

Since March, we have reviewed evidence about inequalities which were exacerbated by the pandemic, including a report on the effects on disabled people. Research showed the risk of death involving COVID-19 was three

times greater for disabled people than non-disabled. This report was used to inform the Welsh Government's Disability policy team, Disability Rights Taskforce, and highlighted the need for more research into how services recover from the pandemic.

Inequalities for women and girls were also impacted by the pandemic. Our report findings for health innovations included that digital health companies could benefit from women developing gender friendly technology that meets the health needs of women, and creation of authentic partnerships with black women and female-led organisations are needed to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality. The findings informed Welsh Government's plan to tackle gender inequalities in Wales.

Our evidence summary into the effects of the pandemic on the LGBTQ+ community was also used to inform the Welsh Government LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales. Further work has looked at the effects on prison populations, homelessness, and racism in the NHS. We will be discussing these reports at the Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre Symposium on 27 September.

Topics which are important to the NHS and social care staff also formed the basis for our reports this year. We looked at how we can support patients on surgical waiting lists, how we can support recruitment and retention of clinical staff, and the cost impact of Long-COVID on the NHS and social care

services, and on employment and caring responsibilities.

Recently, we joined with the BioComposites team at Bangor University to look at the effect changes in working practice due to COVID had on greenhouse gas emissions. This work aimed to describe environmental effects of energy usage and commuting during the pandemic. Findings were shared with the head of the Welsh Government decarbonisation team. The report is included in the Welsh Government Technical Advisory Cell Summary of Advice.

Throughout June and July, we have worked with our stakeholders, disabled people, housing community tenants, ethnic minority groups and young people to identify what is important to them when it comes to COVID-19 recovery. We used the opinions highlighted during these sessions to inform our work going forward.

Our rapid reviews have provided answers to many questions, but they have also highlighted key evidence gaps that could benefit from further investigation. This was the driver for setting up the Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre Primary Research Work Programme, where work has now begun to conduct rapid, relevant and robust research studies to address challenges created by the pandemic in Wales.

Work programme and question prioritisation

GOOD QUESTIONS, ANSWERED QUICKLY

We have almost completed our new Work Programme, which will be published on the Health and Care Research Wales website in August. This includes new topics which we will be investigating.

Research questions are prioritised according to relevance to the current or future COVID-19 context in Wales, potential benefits, potential for translation into practice and urgency.

During the third round, we have reached out to over 40 stakeholder groups, and members of groups more unequally impacted by the pandemic.

We also conducted a question prioritisation exercise as part of the Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre Symposium in March 2022. All participants were invited to discuss their priorities as part of small breakout groups. In total 57 topics were identified. Following this, all people who registered were invited to rank their top 10 questions. The top 10 questions overall were included in our current prioritisation exercise. The other questions are kept on file for future review.

Involving the public

We can only 'learn to live' with COVID by learning from those who have lived through it.

Public Partnership Group

We are delighted that eight members of the public have now joined our Public Partnership Group (PPG). Their input has already been invaluable (see [infographic](#)), and they are involved in all the Centre's work from start to finish - including

question prioritisation, grant finding panels, meetings, interpreting findings, writing lay summaries, and attending Welsh Government evidence briefing sessions, and as co-authors on our planned publications.

Examples of lay summaries written by our PPG members can be found in our [report library](#).

Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre Public Partnership Group



Robert Hall



Sally Anstey



Debs Smith



Nigel Pearson

Working together with the Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre core team, evidence review collaborating partners, and other stakeholders to support all our processes from start to finish

Rashmi Kumar

Chris Pavlakis

Nathan Davies

Alexandra Strong

“ How do we deal with living with covid and rebuilding people's lives... and how can we try and prevent something like this happening again? ”
Debs Smith, WCEC Public Partnership Group Member

“ I did not realise how much work was involved in a review or the ability to gain insights into many aspects we have to think about regarding the best way to limit the effects of covid... I have enjoyed the experience and hope my contribution has been worthwhile and my results are beneficial for the public in the end. ”

Bob Hall, WCEC Public Partnership Group Member

Working with underserved groups

Dr Natalie Joseph-Williams (public involvement lead for the Centre) also worked with Pete Gee (Health and Care Research Wales Senior Public Involvement Manager) to identify and work with underserved groups which had been unequally impacted by the pandemic. This included holding four face-to-face and online workshops during April and May with disabled people, housing community tenants, ethnic minorities, and young people, seeking to identify their priority COVID recovery questions.

We are grateful to all attendees and the support of the following organisations in running these workshops:

- Disability Wales
- Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales
- ALPHA Group (DECIPHer Centre)
- Children's Commissioner Wales
- Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health
- Child Friendly Cardiff
- Taff Housing

Our reports

Rapid Evidence Summaries (RES), Rapid Evidence Maps (REM) and Rapid Reviews (RR)

We were excited to launch our **new report library** in March 2022. All of our published reports can now be searched for by themes and downloaded from [here](#).

Recent reports include:

- RES00019. [What evidence is there of the inverse care law in social care in Wales and has this been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic?](#) Bangor Institute for Health and Medical Research, with Health and Care Economics Cymru (BIHMR)
- RR00025. [Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and access to health care of disabled people: a rapid review.](#) Specialist Unit for Review Evidence (SURE)
- REM00025. [Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on disabled children and adults across the Equality and Human Rights Commission life domains: a Rapid Evidence Map.](#) SURE
- RR00027. [What innovations can address inequalities experienced by women and girls due to the COVID-19 pandemic across the different areas of life/domains: work, health, living standards, personal security, participation and education?](#) BIHMR
- RR00028. [Rapid review of the effectiveness of interventions/innovations relevant to the Welsh NHS context to support recruitment and retention of clinical staff.](#) Wales Centre for Evidence Based Care (WCEBC)
- REM00028. [What innovations \(including return to practice\) would help attract, recruit, or retain NHS clinical staff? A rapid evidence map.](#) WCEBC
- REM00029. [What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on LGBTQ+ communities in the UK and what actions could help address these?](#) SURE
- RR00030. [Rapid review of the effectiveness of innovations to support patients on elective surgical waiting lists.](#) Public Health Wales Evidence Service
- RR0031. [What impact have COVID-19 induced changes in working practice had on greenhouse gas emissions?](#) BioComposites Centre, Bangor University
- RR00036. [Modelling studies used to evaluate the effect of population-level non-pharmaceutical interventions on the reproduction number of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 \(SARS-CoV-2\).](#) Health Technology Wales
- RES00034. [What is the cost impact of demands due to Long COVID on NHS and social care services?](#) BIMHR
- RES00038. [What is the cost impact of demands due to Long COVID on NHS and social care services?](#) BIMHR

The Primary Research Work Programme

The Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre Primary Research Work Programme was launched in March 2022 and is funded for 12 months

Our rapid reviews have provided answers to many questions, but they have also highlighted key evidence gaps that could benefit from further investigation.

The remit of this work programme is to **address the need for relevant, rapid and robust primary or 'new' research** alongside the evidence synthesis work of the centre.

The research that will be commissioned/ conducted will:

- Have an applied focus
- Address COVID-19 illness, impacts, and recovery; and
- Will be rapidly undertaken to inform policy needs in Wales over the next year

The team

The Work Programme is led by Dr Natalie Joseph-Williams and supported by a team of dedicated researchers and professional services staff:

- [Dr Alison Cooper](#) (Research Insight)
- [Dr Denitza Williams](#) (Research Manager)
- Dr Abubaker Sha'aban (Researcher)
- Dr Erin Wynands (Researcher)
- Elizabeth Doe (Research Prioritisation and Impact Manager)
- Helen Freegard (Project Administrator)

Some of our early primary research projects include:

- Brain and Brainstem basis of long covid (Dr H Davies & Professor N Harrison, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board / Cardiff University Brain Research Imaging Centre)



- Public views during the coronavirus pandemic (Dr K Dienes and Dr Williams, Swansea University)
- Evaluating equality in Covid-19 vaccine uptake (PHW / SAIL)

Our full primary research programme will be published in July and regularly updated on our website.

Events

Recent event



Our March Symposium 'A year of Impact' was held on the 23rd March..

The event was opened by the **First Minister Mark Drakeford**. **Fliss Bennée**, Co-Chair of the COVID-19 Technical Advisory Group, Welsh Government, talked about science communication, the importance and future of scientific advice and policy making. **Judith Paget**, NHS Wales Chief Executive and Director General for Health and Social Services also gave an address.

The Evidence Centre introduced their **Public Partnership Group** and our **new Primary Research Work Programme**. This was followed by an interactive session to discuss and identify **participants' priority questions**.

Forthcoming event

Our virtual event 'UNEQUAL IMPACT, FAIRER RECOVERY' will take place on 27th September 9:30 – 12:20, and will be opened by Sir Frank Atherton, Chief Medical Officer for Wales.

Further information and registration [here](#).

The event is free and open to all. We will share findings of our evidence reviews on inequalities and the latest questions that we are answering, including those prioritised by members of the public, under-represented communities and harder to reach groups in Wales.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and access to health care of disabled people: a rapid review.

What innovations can address inequalities experienced by women and girls due to the COVID-19 pandemic: a rapid review.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on LGBTQ+ communities in the UK and what actions could help address these? A Rapid Evidence Map and summary of recommendations.

The effect of the COVID pandemic on homeless people.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on prison populations.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on racism in the NHS and anti-racist interventions.

Engaging communities in Wales: identifying further research priorities for the WCEC.

Meet the team: The Public Health Wales Evidence Service



The Evidence Centre works with the Public Health Wales Evidence Service to produce rapid evidence reviews. The Public Health Wales team also present the review findings at Welsh Government evidence briefings. Evidence-informed health policy, practice and decision-making underpins public health action. The Evidence Service supports this by producing systematic reviews, evidence maps and rapid summaries. Their methods are transparent and reproducible, and they give the quality of included research due consideration.

They use evidence from a wide variety of sources that adopt different research methodologies to develop outputs that are fit-for-purpose. They also provide specialist support and advice to colleagues in Public Health Wales who are involved in evidence projects. You can find out more about the evidence service and their work [on their website](#). The core team working with the Centre are Chukwudi Okolie, Alesha Wale, Amy Hookway, Hannah Shaw, Jordan Everitt and Helen Morgan. The core team is drawn from the wider team with some staff rotation.