

Somerset Research Engagement Network (REN) Project 2023-24

Final Report & Recommendations Summarised Version

Disclaimer: This activity was funded through the ICS Research Engagement Network (REN) development programme.
The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of NHS England or the Department of Health and Social Care.



Glossary, Abbreviations & Acronyms

REN/D Research Engagement Network/Development

ICB Integrated Care Board, which is known as 'NHS Somerset'

ICS Integrated Care System in Somerset, partners include NHS Somerset, Somerset Council & VCFE sector

VCFSE Voluntary, Community, Faith & Social Enterprise sector in Somerset

Community groups An umbrella term for organisations working locally, regionally or nationally for a defined community. Includes voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors.

Research Connector A term used by the Somerset REN project, for trusted community leaders who had conversations with individuals & groups that they support in localities across Somerset

CRN Clinical Research Network

NHS Somerset The Integrated Care Board in Somerset

NIHR National Institute for Health and Care Research

HDRC Health Determinants Research Collaboration



Overview

BACKGROUND

National REN programme funded by NHS England & Department of Health & Social Care.

AIM

To understand barriers to research participation among adults in Somerset not currently represented in research, such as accessibility, language and trust.

INSIGHT

The Project Oversight Group of representatives of partners from across the Integrated Care System (ICS), used all available data and insight regarding health inequalities, research participation & engagement to inform their discussions and planning.

ENGAGEMENT

Worked with community leaders, 'Research Connectors', of VCFSE groups & local organisations, who had community conversations around research – knowledge, experiences, challenges and enablers to research participation. From the feedback, key findings helped shape important recommendations for future ICS work around research participation.

REPORTS

Final report submitted to NHS England on 30th April 2024 and key findings & recommendations report shared widely and available on NHS Somerset & ICS partners' websites and social media.



Findings

Below are some of the key findings from the engagement phase, around key themes such as **awareness, communication, language, motivation, accessibility & trust**:

- The majority of participants didn't know what health & care research is or what it involves
- Most participants had never taken part in health & care research
- There was a lack of awareness and communication around research opportunities in Somerset and nationally
- Participants felt that their experience or voice was not important to researchers and research
- Time, travel difficulties, rurality, cost implications were all factors that made research involvement a challenge
- Personal interest and potential health benefits were seen as motivators, if invited by a trusted medical professional
- Belief that involvement would not lead to service improvement nor would they find out what happened with the results
- Need to connect and collaborate with existing community networks, organisations and trusted individuals
- Connection, and facilitation of sessions, via trusted, local community networks, groups and individuals within accessible community spaces
- Ensure that research opportunities are accessible, in everyday locations and at accessible times
- Online methods of spreading awareness as well as noticeboards, leaflets and magazines would promote opportunities in communities
- Researchers need to be aware that their environment, language and methods are unfamiliar and may make people feel uncomfortable
- Researchers need to connect with local communities by visiting and establishing relationships in existing local spaces
- Honest, open and transparent working helps to build trust, outlining expectations and always reporting back on how feedback was used



Recommendations

- ✓ Develop peoples' knowledge and understanding of what health & care research is
- ✓ Raise awareness of research and research opportunities through a wide range of communications
- ✓ Researchers should travel to local communities, meet people face-to-face and connect with individuals, groups, trusted leaders and networks
- ✓ Build effective, long-term relationships with local, trusted community leaders to work collaboratively on engagement and research projects
- ✓ Plan engagement around research in accessible, local community spaces
- ✓ Ensure that all view-seeking and feedback activities are accessible for all
- ✓ Recognise and value peoples' time, expenses and feedback through monetary or other payments
- ✓ Invite people to partake in co-production of a project but understand the barriers and challenges people may face
- ✓ Ensure that participants are aware of the projects' aims, intended outcomes and why their contribution matters
- ✓ Commit to sharing how peoples' contributions were used and had an impact



Outcomes

- Outcome 1: Improved understanding of research participation diversity in Somerset
- Outcome 2: Better understanding of barriers and enablers for individual and VCFSE research participation
- Outcome 3: Better understanding of the long-term strategies needed to increase diversity of research participation
- Outcome 4: Improved relationships for ICS partnership working and opportunities
- Outcome 5: Strengthened relationships between ICS partners and research infrastructure
- Outcome 6: Developed a greater awareness of research within the Somerset health and care system
- Outcome 7: Improved community awareness of research campaigns and opportunities
- Outcome 8: Influenced wider work programmes approach to partnership design and delivery
- Outcome 9: Influenced ICS research priority setting through a set of recommendations



Next Steps/Sustainability

The following are activities that will be undertaken in 2024-25, to continue conversations around research, research opportunities & how to ensure diversity of research participation in Somerset.

Activity	Details
<p>Spark Somerset’s VCFSE Research Event, May 2024</p>	<p>On 14th May, Spark Somerset arranged a Research Event bringing together representatives from over 65 groups and organisations from across Somerset, for example, individuals from the VCFSE sector, from statutory, health & social care organisations and academics.</p>
<p>Somerset’s Big Conversation May-September 2024</p>	<p>The aim is to embed research conversations as part of a key workstream, alongside other health & care projects, that will be taken around the county as part of NHS Somerset’s roadshow, with the aim of talking to and hearing from diverse people & communities.</p>
<p>VCFSE Participation Fund</p>	<p>A VCFSE ‘Participation Pot’ of money to enable VCFSE organisations to be awarded bids, to carry out research engagement activities with local people. We aim to build on the original REN project relationships with VCFSE groups, use the strength of trusted community relationships to engage with and hear from those who we have historically found challenging to reach.</p>
<p>ICS Research Strategy</p>	<p>NHS Somerset have now appointed a research & innovation lead and there is work currently underway to develop a Research Strategy for the ICS. There will be close working together as part of a regional-wide research and innovation strategy. We will ensure that we are linked into this.</p>

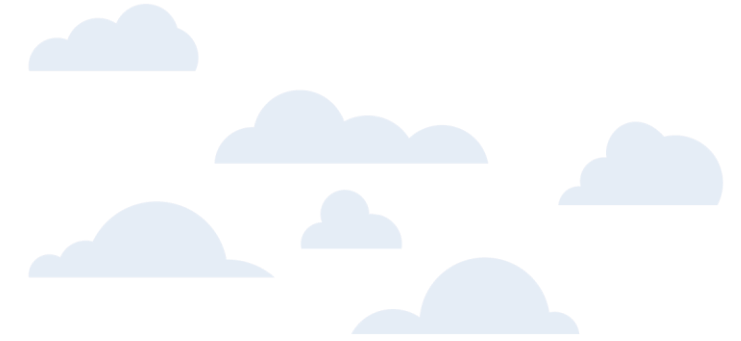
Somerset REN Project Oversight Group

- **Kat Tottle** – Engagement & Insight Lead Officer, NHS Somerset – Somerset REN Project Co-ordinator
- **Jack Brazier** – Public Health – Somerset REN Project Co-Ordinator Support
- **Laura Alexander** – Engagement Team – NHS Somerset - Former Engagement Lead & initial Somerset REN Project Co-Ordinator
- **Charlotte Callen** - NHS Somerset
- **Sara Bonfanti** – Head of Communications & Engagement – NHS Somerset
- **Katie Mooney** – Community Connector Coordinator, Spark Somerset, VCFSE Lead
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- Dulverton Talking Café
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- Alzheimer's Society - Dementia Voice
- Nelson Trust
- Homestart
- Minehead Eye
- Watchet Dementia Alliance
- MIND (Bridgewater Group)
- Seed of Hope (West Somerset Group)
- Jonathan Hibbert, Director – Darmax Research



Appendices

1. Engagement activity resources: Somerset REN Research Connectors Guide Parts 1 & 2
2. Engagement activity resources: Somerset REN Research Connectors' Engagement Activity Proforma
3. Engagement activity resources: Our Somerset photo filming audio consent form
4. Engagement activity resources: Somerset REN Patient Information and Consent Form
5. Engagement activity resources: Somerset REN Spark Mid-Point Reviews
5. Somerset REN Project - Testimonials

