

Equitable place based health and care theme

Summary of Findings: Air Pollution

About the research

Three topics, social prescribing, social isolation and air pollution, have been identified as priority research issues for the Equitable Place Based Health and Care (EPHC) theme of ARC North West Coast. Between November 2019 and January 2020, a series of ten group conversations were conducted in the region to understand public perspectives on these issues. A workshop was also held with members of the public, ARC staff and members attending the ARC Fest 1 event. In total, 116 people took part in these discussions. This summary outlines key issues raised in these conversations about air pollution. The findings from these conversations are now being used to inform the focus of future research.

Validation and awareness of issue:

- There was a growing awareness and concern about links between air pollution and health inequalities with a particular emphasis on traffic generated air pollution in the discussions.
- Tackling air pollution was thought to have health benefits both for those most at risk (e.g. infants, elderly, those with chronic conditions) as well as the wider population more generally.
- Knowledge of the issue was often drawn from sensory and personal experiences, such as being conscious of traffic congestion at a particular bus stop, or traffic lights, and the variability of times of day when problems were experienced.
- Participants also spoke about issues connected to indoor pollution such as concerns about opening windows, or ventilation systems in flats.
- Some participants noted that their area had a poor reputation because of the air pollution locally. This led to 'stigmatising' labels being used to describe people living there.
- There was some awareness of initiatives to address air quality but this was mainly schools based initiatives focussing on traffic management, travel to school, and education for children and parents. There was more limited knowledge of scientific/accredited monitoring equipment, or strategic, policy information and actions in relation to air pollution.

Role of communities:

- Knowledge of opportunities for community participation varied. In one group, the participants were involved in city consultation about air quality. In a second group, there was much less awareness as to whether forums existed.
- It was recognised that communities could provide detailed insights about their lived experience of air pollution, which was important for decision making.
- Communities could also help disseminate / raise awareness of the issue.

Challenges and considerations

- Discussions of air pollution highlighted the complexity of the issue, and that this could stray into other agendas including environment pollution and climate change.
- There was some concern expressed that action to address air pollution might have negative or unintended impacts for the local economy and jobs.
- There were also some suspicion / credibility issues around existing local authority monitoring equipment with limited public feedback on their use.

Further information

The Applied Research Collaboration North West Coast (ARC NWC) consists of health and social care providers, NHS commissioners, local authorities, universities, public advisers, the Innovation Agency (Academic Health Science Network), working together to learn more about these health inequalities, and overcome the barriers around translating these discoveries in health research into practice which improves lives.

The 'Equitable Place-based Health and Care' (EPHC) theme aims to build collaborations between residents, local stakeholders and researchers, so that individuals and communities can exert greater influence over decision making processes that affect their lives within the places they live and work. The theme's focus is to support and work with local systems aiming to integrate health and social care so that they are able to operate more responsively to the needs of people, communities and places.

To download these summaries, or find out more about the EPHC theme, visit: <https://arc-nwc.nihr.ac.uk/equitable-place-based-health-and-care/> or contact an ARC researcher: Emma Halliday (e.halliday@lancaster.ac.uk)

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