

Equitable place based health and care theme

Summary of Findings: Social Isolation

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 participants took part in these discussions. This summary outlines key issues raised in these conversations about social isolation. The findings from these conversations are now being used to inform the focus of future research.

Validation and awareness of issue

- Social isolation was recognised to be an important issue and could affect anyone, though often there is a focus on older people.
- A range of groups at risk of isolation were identified by participants including new tenants, those new to area, those living in specific housing settings, carers, young people and young parents.
- Individuals with health conditions or a disability could also feel isolated.
- Experiences of young people, for example, if they have negative interactions with schools/services/activities, can lead to and compound isolation.
- Participants pointed to a range of barriers affecting connectivity in localities ranging from cultural and societal changes in how communities' function and individuals interact; to people's levels of confidence and past experiences of connecting with services/activities, as well as financial and transport barriers.
- Participants spoke about a range of activities already taking place in areas that either directly/indirectly contribute to reducing social isolation. This included services and activities facilitated/provided by the third sector and NHS/LA's e.g. Arts and crafts, community connectors, community centre activities, passport for well-being, groups for parents and toddlers, luncheon clubs, Recovery College and libraries, mentors for young people.
- There was recognition that there is lot of activity that takes place in the third sector that supports social isolation. One group highlighted that there are limited activities that focus on young people specifically.

Role of communities

Communities and individuals were recognised to have important knowledge about their needs and how those needs could be met by those planning and delivering services/activities. Community members also identified they had local knowledge and experiences that could be shared with other residents and used to encourage other individuals to engage and get involved. How young people voices are involved was also mentioned and the importance of finding a range of ways to facilitate this.

Challenges and considerations

- Reaching out to those who may identify themselves as isolated
- Cultural norms affecting how men engage or seek support
- Continuity and the lack of funding and reduction in services
- Accessibility of activities/services
- Social media can be both positive and negative
- Importance of providing spaces to connect
- The role of volunteering as a positive opportunity
- More holistic approach needed by better connecting services and activities

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: Koser Khan (k.khan4@lancaster.ac.uk)

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