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**Public Health Wales
Research and Evaluation
Strategy
2023-2026**

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1. Executive Summary

We have developed a Research and Evaluation Strategy for Public Health Wales which will take us through to 2026. It shows how we will work with others to lead research and evaluation to improve the health and wellbeing of the people in Wales and to reduce health inequalities.

This plan will sit alongside a document called **Areas of Research and Evaluation Interest for Public Health Wales** which aims to help researchers, funders and collaborators to understand our priorities and focus their efforts to make the biggest impact.

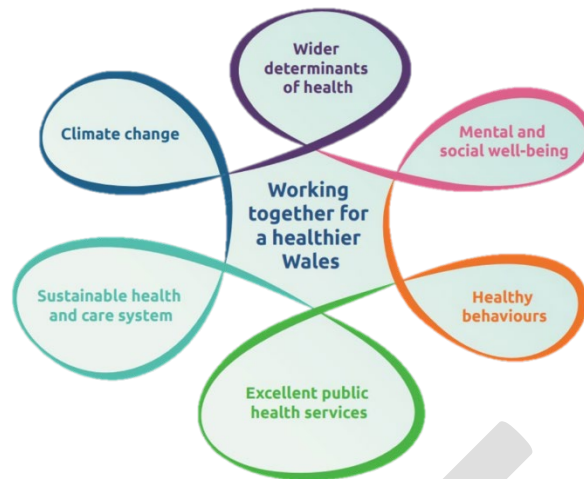
Our strategy for **2023-2026** shows how we will work, what we will focus on, and how we will work with others in Wales and other countries to improve research and evaluation in Public Health Wales. We want to know what works to improve people's health and well-being, and we will use research and evaluation to figure this out.

To make our plan work, we will:

- ❖ Build a **culture** of research and evaluation,
- ❖ Improve the way we **manage** and **support** research and evaluation,
- ❖ **Work together** with others and share our findings with **everyone**,
- ❖ Ensure that partners, stakeholders and the public are **included** in our research and evaluation.

To develop our strategy, we have concentrated on conducting research and evaluation that aligns with Public Health Wales' six strategic aims as set out in our long-term strategy.

Figure 1: Public Health Wales' priorities for population health in Wales:



We will enable the delivery of our strategy through focusing on conducting research and evaluation that is rigorous, meaningful, and addressing gaps in our knowledge to improve health.

Building and strengthening research and evaluation across the organisation is essential if we are to meet the complex challenges, maximise opportunities for population health and reduce health inequalities.

2. Introduction

Public Health Wales is part of the National Health Service (NHS) and our role is to be a leader for protecting and improving the health of the population in Wales.

This includes:

- ❖ Identifying **research and evaluation priorities** that will influence the population health research agenda.
- ❖ **Leading** and **working with partners** on a robust research and evaluation portfolio to produce and utilise evidence to enhance population health.
- ❖ **Shaping** research and evaluation to understand what approaches are effective and how they can be implemented to enhance the health of the population and lesson health inequalities in Wales.

A Healthier Wales highlights that an evidence-driven approach, using research, evaluation, knowledge, and information to understand what works and work with others, is a fundamental principle for driving change and transformation across the population health system.

As the NHS organisation providing public health leadership in Wales, it is our duty to promote a research and evaluation agenda that produces high-quality evidence and contributes to our knowledge of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health and wellbeing for everyone. In this strategy, research and evaluation are defined as distinct activities (**Box 1**).

Research is aimed at filling gaps in the evidence base, while **evaluation** is focused on understanding the impact of specific interventions, programs, or policies on health outcomes. While both research and evaluation are important, they serve different purposes in the context of improving population health.

Research	Research can take many different forms, but the essential feature is the systematic and rigorous approach to answering a defined question or hypothesis. This can involve various methods, such as qualitative or quantitative research, and different study designs, including observational or experimental studies. The aim of research is to generate new knowledge that can be of value to others in similar situations, and to contribute to the evidence base that informs public health practice and policy
	Primary research involves collecting new data from scratch, often through experiments or surveys, to address specific research questions. Secondary research , on the other hand, involves analysing and synthesising existing data and research findings from a variety of sources, such as health surveys, administrative records, or published literature. This can be done through methods such as systematic reviews or meta-analyses to provide a comprehensive understanding of a particular topic.
Evaluation	Evaluation can be used to determine whether an intervention, policy, or program has achieved its intended goals and to identify any unintended consequences. It can also help to identify the mechanisms by which an intervention works, and to assess the extent to which it can be scaled up or replicated in other settings.

2.1 Why research and evaluation matter

Research and evaluation play a vital role in informing the evidence base that supports public health practice and policy. They help us to better understand the root causes of poor health and aid in the development of public health interventions, treatments and services such as new vaccines and public health policies.

Research helps us answer questions and gaps in our knowledge, for example, 'What are the key causes of poor health?', 'Are different factors more important for some groups or at certain points over our life course?' Research can help us develop and test new tools to improve health. Evaluation helps us assess the impact of our and others' actions on the health and well-being of people in Wales; to better understand what works to improve health, how that differs across groups and the reasons for any difference. We need to determine "what works, for whom, and why."

As the lead organisation for delivering public health services in Wales, we are responsible for conducting rigorous evaluations that provide a structured assessment of interventions, programs, or policies to understand their impact on health in Wales. Given the complex factors which affect our health and the need to work with many different organisations to improve health, research and evaluation activities are critical to finding innovative ways to achieve effective change.

This plan shows that Public Health Wales is committed to research and evaluation to find ways to improve health, reduce inequalities, and promote well-being in Wales. In this strategy we explain our plans for research and evaluation within Public Health Wales, the areas that we will concentrate on and how we will work with our partners across Wales and globally to produce and encourage rigorous research and evaluation.

2. A Look Back at Research and Evaluation in Public Health Wales

During the COVID-19 pandemic and afterwards, Public Health Wales has conducted research and evaluation which has helped with the response and recovery efforts by providing valuable knowledge that could be put into practice. Supported by Health and Care Research Wales (HCRW) funding, the Public Health Wales Research and Development (R&D) Office provided a central function in supporting research and evaluation activity across Public Health Wales by identifying research opportunities and providing advice and support for research and evaluation.

3.1 A shared research agenda with partners

Across Public Health Wales, we work in partnership with academic and other research partners to strengthen population health research and evaluation.

Examples include:

A One-Wales approach to COVID-19 research
- <u>A collaboration between Public Health Wales</u> (Principal Investigator (PI) Dr Chris Williams), Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, Health and Care Research Wales, and the Centre for Trials Research at Cardiff University, took part in the phase II/III of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine trial sponsored by the University of Oxford.
- The Public Health Wales R&D Office in partnership with HCRW provided strategic oversight and monitoring of <u>COVID-19 vaccine research trials</u> delivered in Wales.
- Public Health Wales worked with the UK Health Security Agency and HCRW to deliver the Urgent Public Health study <u>SIREN</u> (SARS-CoV2 Immunity & REinfection EvaluationN).

Research to understand the impact of COVID-19

- Con-COVID was a partnership between Public Health Wales' Health Protection Services and the SAIL Databank at Swansea University to create a data platform for enhanced population surveillance and evaluation of interventions including vaccine surveillance and inequalities.
- The Networked Data Lab Wales and National Centre for Population Health & Wellbeing Research - two partnerships with Public Health Wales and others undertook research to understand the impact of COVID-19 on different populations such as unpaid carers and on the impact of working from home.
- Public Health Wales funded a collaborative research grant between Cwm Taf University Health Board and Sheffield Hallam University to understand and address the barriers and facilitators for influenza and COVID-19 vaccine uptake among NHS employees in Wales.

The use of genomics to understand COVID-19

- The work of Public Health Wales' genomics researchers led to Wales becoming a global leader in COVID-19 genomics. Their work fed into a £20M project led by the COVID-19 Genomics UK (COG-UK) consortium.

Research with and about underrepresented groups

- A partnership with Swansea University funded by HCRW to understand the Health Experiences of Asylum seekers and Refugees (HEAR 2) has made policy recommendations for the commissioning and delivery of interpretation services in Wales, benefiting patients, the public, and the NHS.
- Research by the Wales Violence Prevention Unit and the University of Exeter about Bystander Experiences of Domestic Violence and Abuse during COVID-19 indicated that people are more likely to take action against domestic abuse and its warning signs if they feel connected to their community.

3.2 The development of a culture of evaluation within the organisation

A **Central Evaluation Team** within Public Health Wales has been established to:

- ❖ Work to **set standards of practice for evaluation**
- ❖ **Undertake robust evaluation** of Public Health Wales' core high priority programmes, or those delivered by partners, that require organisational independence.
- ❖ Work with **everyone** to understand the importance and need for evaluation and involve evaluation experts early in design interventions.
- ❖ Develop an evaluation **community of practice** to share best practice, support others to develop evaluation skills and capabilities across the organisation.

Evaluation underway across Public Health Wales

- Public Health Wales and Swansea University Trials Unit are working in partnership to evaluate the All-Wales Diabetes Prevention Programme through a process and outcomes evaluation.

3. Our goal

Our main aim is to make a measurable improvement to the health of the population in Wales by leading and supporting population-level health research and evaluation.

To achieve this, we will:

- 1) Identify public health research and evaluation priorities to shape the research agenda, work with partners to lead a valuable research portfolio, and generate and use evidence to improve the health of the population and reduce health disparities in Wales.
- 2) Help researchers in Public Health Wales to develop, set-up and conduct research and evaluation that is rigorous, meaningful, and focused on important public health research and evaluation gaps. We will do this by providing a streamlined and effective model to help manage and support research and evaluation.
- 3) Promote leadership in public health research and evaluation throughout Wales and the UK. We will work to influence the research funding environment and foster a culture that encourages impactful research and ensures that evaluations measure the impact on health outcomes.

To support the growth of research and evaluation in Public Health Wales we will use our strengths and assets to inform our work.

Our strengths	Our assets
The knowledge and expertise within our staff.	Specialist microbiology services and reference laboratories.
Collaborative partnerships with academics, practitioners and policy makers; both nationally and internationally.	Pathogen Genomics Unit (PenGU) and sequencing capabilities.
The identification of applied research priorities, programmes and policies for evaluation.	Health surveillance and vaccine uptake data.
Our ability to translate new knowledge to inform policy and practice decisions.	National public health programmes and population-level datasets.

	Population-based national screening programmes.
	A dedicated evaluation team.

4.1 Ways of working

We will deliver accessible, transparent, and reproducible research and evaluation to support decision-making by being:

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Open by default

- Our research and evaluation will be accessible, transparent, and reproducible. We want to be open about our priorities, encourage and facilitate access to, and the utilisation of our routinely collected datasets to generate evidence to improve public health.

Inclusive

- We will build a research and evaluation culture with an enabling infrastructure to support successful implementation. We will conduct our research and evaluation collaboratively with those likely to be affected by the research, including the public.

Multi-disciplinary

- We will work to ensure that research and evaluation is cross-cutting and pulls together the skills we need and the diverse expertise across Public Health Wales and externally; focusing on where there are identified research and evaluation gaps.

Joined-up

- We will work collaboratively to deliver research and evaluation priorities. We will foster collaboration internally and externally across different organisations, disciplines and partnerships working with academics, policy makers and practitioners.

Influential

- We are a leader for public health research and evaluation, and we will work with partners to set the agenda. We want to understand the impact and value of our research and evaluation, informing future action with a focus on “what works”.

This strategy does not exist on its own but is aligned to Public Health Wales' Data and Digital, International Health and Long-Term strategies [[LINK](#)] and to the NHS Research and Development Framework [[LINK](#)].

5. Implementing the strategy

Public Health Wales' Integrated Medium-Term Strategy states that the organisation will develop a new research and development agenda alongside **areas of research and evaluation interest**. Establishing joint ownership of this strategy across the organisation and with partners is essential to ensure its successful implementation and delivery.

5.1 Building a research and evaluation culture within Public Health Wales

Research and evaluation provide opportunities for staff development and enhanced job roles which helps with recruitment and retention, as well as developing leaders and critical thinkers within the organisation. We want to build an organisational culture which values research and evaluation activities and supports staff to develop and apply research and evaluation skills to increase workforce capacity and capability, strengthen evidence-based practice and contribute towards creating a learning organisation. This includes a focus on the 'how', 'what works' and 'how to deliver' public health interventions working cross-organisationally and across the wider research system, to drive excellence and positive culture of continuous improvement through research.

We will do this by:

- Empowering researchers to deliver rigorous, impactful, coherent research and evaluation programmes focused on addressing gaps in knowledge in-line with public health priorities.
- Supporting staff to develop research and evaluation proposals and funding applications based on their public health practice experience in collaboration with partners and academic networks.
- Building research and evaluation capacity and capability for all staff by developing and implementing a sustainable research and evaluation development programme that will address technical knowledge and skills, and application into practice - covering areas such as statistical design, questionnaire design and evaluation methods.
- Developing research and evaluation leadership through the development of job families and career pathways internally and maximising uptake of internal and externally-funded research programmes.
- Facilitating cross-organisational collaborative working and identifying interdisciplinary research and evaluation opportunities within the organisation.
- Investing to support and strengthen research and evaluation capacity and capability within Public Health Wales.
- Ensuring that all Public Health Wales staff have a level of awareness of the value of research to be able to identify knowledge gaps and use robust tools.
- Working with academia and the Faculty of Public Health, to strengthen Public Health Wales' role in the training and development of academic Public Health

Specialty Registrars in Wales; and continued engagement in research amongst Public Health Consultants within Public Health Wales.

- Ensuring there are set standards for the quality (e.g., questionnaire design and survey methodology standards) and communication of research and evaluation outputs.
- Demonstrating clear Public Health Wales executive and board commitment to research and evaluation, with members leading and contributing to agenda setting, assessing performance, and impact.
- Appointing an independent board member for research, to act as an ambassador and to champion research and evaluation at the Public Health Wales board and across the organisation.

5.2 Strengthening the support and management of research and evaluation activities

The embedding of research and evaluation across the organisation is vital to enable the generation of evidence needed to address priority areas for public health in Wales. Building an enabling infrastructure within Public Health Wales to support and manage research will drive forwards the implementation of this strategy. This will support the development of a thriving research and evaluation environment in the organisation.

We will do this by:

- Strengthening research and evaluation infrastructure and governance through transparent oversight, processes, systems and reporting.
- Facilitating high quality research and evaluation set-up and delivery through agile, clear and systematic NHS governance processes – led by the Research and Development (R&D) Office.
- Facilitating access to support for staff at all levels in Public Health Wales who wish to undertake research and evaluation, advising on how to navigate the R&D environment and signposting to internal and external sources of information (e.g., on funding streams, development, writing funding applications, statistical support, research design, protocol design and methods).
- Ensuring financial support is provided to advise on and monitor all costs relating to commercial and non-commercial research.
- Including Research and Evaluation within Public Health Wales' financial strategies and plans.
- Ensuring there is the data infrastructure and agreements in place to enable access where appropriate.
- Planning, reporting and overseeing research and evaluation activities through the Public Health Wales Knowledge, Research and Information Board Committee with reporting to the Public Health Wales Executive Team, to the Public Health Wales Board and to Health and Care Research Wales.

5.3 Working jointly and collaboratively together

Effective collaboration across an extensive research infrastructure, health and non-health sectors, commercial and industry partners in the UK and internationally has the potential to deliver greater and more impactful research and evaluation for population health in Wales. As Public Health Wales is part of a wider research and evaluation ecosystem, it is vital that we work with partners and funders to influence, support and strengthen the population health agenda for people in Wales.

Public Health Wales is not a large research funder; however we want to influence the strategic direction of public health research including national health research funders (e.g. national and international academic funders such as National Institute for Health Research, Economic and Social Research Council, Medical Research Council, and voluntary sectors), governmental sectors (e.g. Welsh Government and others), and the research agendas of academia and partner organisations.

We will do this by:

- Strengthening links with the research and evaluation infrastructure in Wales, nationally and with international partners.
- Facilitating the development of strategic research and evaluation partnerships in collaboration with academia, the public sector, local and national government, health boards and others which are aligned to our priority areas to bring in skills and data we don't have and which we need.
- Supporting and developing research and evaluation groups aligned to Public Health Wales' priorities and in collaboration with key stakeholders including academic and non-academic partners to capitalise on opportunities.
- Developing a co-produced vision for academic public health research in collaboration with the research community in Wales.
- Proactively identifying and facilitating opportunities for academic placements, postgraduate supervision, staff secondments, honorary contracts and joint posts spanning organisational boundaries (e.g., Honorary contracts, partnerships, secondments and joint staffing models).
- Increasing the visibility of the Public Health Wales R&D Office as a clear initial point of contact to facilitate research, commercial, industry and academic collaboration opportunities with Public Health Wales.
- Working with the wider health and care system to support research and evaluation priorities ensuring better data quality, open and shareable data systems and data sharing agreements.
- Increasing membership on national health research funding boards to be able to influence funders to address evidence gaps and research and evaluation needs.

5.4 Co-producing research and evaluation and sharing findings with everyone

Public involvement makes research and evaluation more relevant, more reliable and more likely to change practice. Excellent public involvement is an essential part of health research, and we want to involve people with an interest in population health and achieving well-being goals to improve its quality and impact.

Whilst we have some highly successful and visible research programmes recognisable to internal and external stakeholders, we recognise the need to increase the visibility of Public Health Wales as a leader in population health research and evaluation, and to further develop as a coherent and impactful research active organisation. We want to be a trusted research environment which is open, transparent, and replicable and have usable and impactful outputs.

We will do this by:

- Developing and applying a systematic approach to identifying key research and evaluation priorities for population health aligned to priorities for population health in Wales, in collaboration with policy makers, the public and interdisciplinary researchers.
- Being open about our research and evaluation interests and priorities by developing and sharing areas of research interest within and external to Public Health Wales.
- Ensuring an effective and meaningful model of engagement with the public to inform and share our research and evaluation programmes.
- Adopting the [UK Standards for Public Involvement](#), enabling good practice in public involvement.
- Having active representation on the [Health and Care Research Wales Public Involvement Alliance](#).
- Effectively linking with public involvement and engagement/co-production organisations to co-design research and evaluation programmes with the communities we serve and ensuring that equality, diversity and inclusion are key drivers.
- Ensuring that we capture and are representative of all areas of society when developing research and evaluation activities.
- Capturing equalities information systematically to enable evaluation.
- Including research in Public Health Wales' communications and engagement plans to demonstrate the value and importance of research, celebrating successes and raising the profile amongst staff and the public.
- Having active representation at the Health and Care Research Wales Communications Alliance.
- Recognising and celebrating success amongst our researchers and increasing the visibility of Public Health Wales research and evaluation.
- Having common standards for Research and Evaluation outputs and publishing Research and Evaluation outputs targeted to user needs.

- Being open about which areas of research and evaluation are in development via communications such as blogs.
- Being open about our data, methods, ensuring replicability and sharing non-findings

6. Measuring Impact

The overarching goal of this strategy is to have a demonstrable and beneficial impact on population health in Wales, through leading and facilitating population health research and evaluation.

Through collective ownership of this strategy and investment in our staff, we will develop as a system leader for population health research. We will work to; identify the research and evaluation priorities for population health, influence the population health research agenda, and lead a credible research and evaluation portfolio to generate and use evidence to improve population health and reduce inequalities in Wales. Building and strengthening research and evaluation across the organisation is essential if we are to meet the complex challenges and maximise opportunities for population health over the next decade.

The successful implementation of this strategy will be measured through core outcome indicators to ensure that research and evaluation is undertaken and used by Public Health Wales and by the wider population health system to influence practice and service delivery:

Internal outcome indicators:

1. Increase in research and evaluation activity

Average annual increase in the number of evaluation programmes and research grant applications led by Public Health Wales and in collaboration with partners

2. Research income generation

Average annual increases in research income for non-commercial and commercial studies to facilitate capacity building.

3. Robust research governance processes to manage and support the set-up and delivery of research and evaluation

The Public Health Wales Research and Development office should have the necessary infrastructure to support researcher development, research governance and the set-up, delivery, and quality assurance associated with studies.

External outcome indicators:

1. Annual Survey of Public Health Wales stakeholders

An annual monitoring process covering:

- Stakeholder awareness of Public Health Wales' research and evaluation work.
- Its relevance to their area of work.
- Whether they feel it has been produced in a format that could be used within their organisations.
- How it might be used/has been used.

2. Targeted survey of anticipated users of research and evaluation outputs

Key recipients of the research and evaluation output would be chosen to be contacted by email and asked to complete a brief 7–10-minute survey after the output's release. The purpose of this targeted survey would be to map the impact route that the output takes, and to ensure all avenues that the output takes can be reviewed, monitored and followed up.

3. Structured post-project interview with requesters of research and evaluation outputs

Semi-structured interviews with key product requestors can provide useful feedback on the functionality of the team, the product development process, the clarity and usefulness of the output, and the proposed and realised impact of the work.

7. Implementing the Strategy

Establishing joint ownership of the Research and Evaluation strategy across Public Health Wales is essential to support successful implementation towards our goal of having a thriving research and evaluation environment addressing the major health challenges in Wales.

The **Public Health Wales Research and Evaluation Strategic Group** will develop and drive forwards the implementation plan for the strategy, assessing progress against the outcomes of this strategy and monitor the research and evaluation activity across Public Health Wales. This group will be chaired by the Head of Research and Development and include representation from the R&D Office, Evaluation Team, Divisional/Directorate Research and Evaluation Leads (or nominated deputies) and as necessary, representation from People and Organisational Development, and Information Governance and Operations and Finance.

The Directorate / Divisional Research and Evaluation Leads will support the implementation of the strategy, with a specific focus on capacity and capability development and the review of research and evaluation priorities. Accountability and reporting will be to both the Public Health Wales Executive Team, and to the Public Health Wales Board via the Knowledge, Research and Information Board Committee. Accountability to Welsh Government is via Health and Care Research Wales.

An external **Research and Evaluation partnership panel** will be developed focusing on maximising research and evaluation opportunities for collaboration with external research partners, and providing advice to support the development of leadership for research within Public Health Wales.

Implementation of this strategy will be guided by our principles for research and evaluation, which are strongly aligned to the five ways of working, as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Five ways of working / Sustainable Development Principle	Guiding principles for research and evaluation within Public Health Wales
Long term: The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.	We will develop and engage in research and evaluation that will make a difference to population health and align to the long term strategic priorities for population health in Wales.
Prevention: How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.	We will develop and engage in research and evaluation to prevent or mitigate poor health and wellbeing in the population and reduce inequalities.
Integration: Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.	We will develop and engage in research and evaluation that will make a difference to population health integrated across the strategic priorities within Public Health Wales and spanning the goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act.
Collaboration: Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.	We will foster collaboration internally and externally across different organisations, disciplines and partnerships working with policy makers and practitioners.
Involvement: The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.	We will conduct our research and evaluation collaboratively with those likely to be affected by the research including the public.