

# Behavioural Science In Action

## BeSci Unit @ Public Health Wales

### 2024-25 Review



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**Behavioural Science Unit:**

The Public Health Wales Behavioural Science Unit provides specialist expertise on behavioural science, and enables and supports the application of it, to improve health & wellbeing in Wales. The Unit is part of the Policy and International Health Directorate World Health Organisation (WHO) Collaborating Centre on Investment in Health and Wellbeing.

For further information, or support around the application of behavioural science to improve and protect health and wellbeing in Wales please get in touch.

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg / This document is available in Welsh

Some aspects of this tool have been previously published, and are owned by others. Their content has been translated, with retention of some of the originally published language and design.

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## SUMMARY

This report is for the staff, teams and services in Public Health Wales, and the wider public health system in Wales, with whom the Behavioural Science Unit has collaborated in 2024-2025, and for those the Unit has yet to work with.

The document sets out the range of work, across the range of priorities, services and teams, in a range of depth, which the BSU has undertaken over the last year, with a spotlight on some of our key activities. It acknowledges the partners who have worked with us, provides insight for those that are considering working with us and, reflects on our impact as well as delivery.



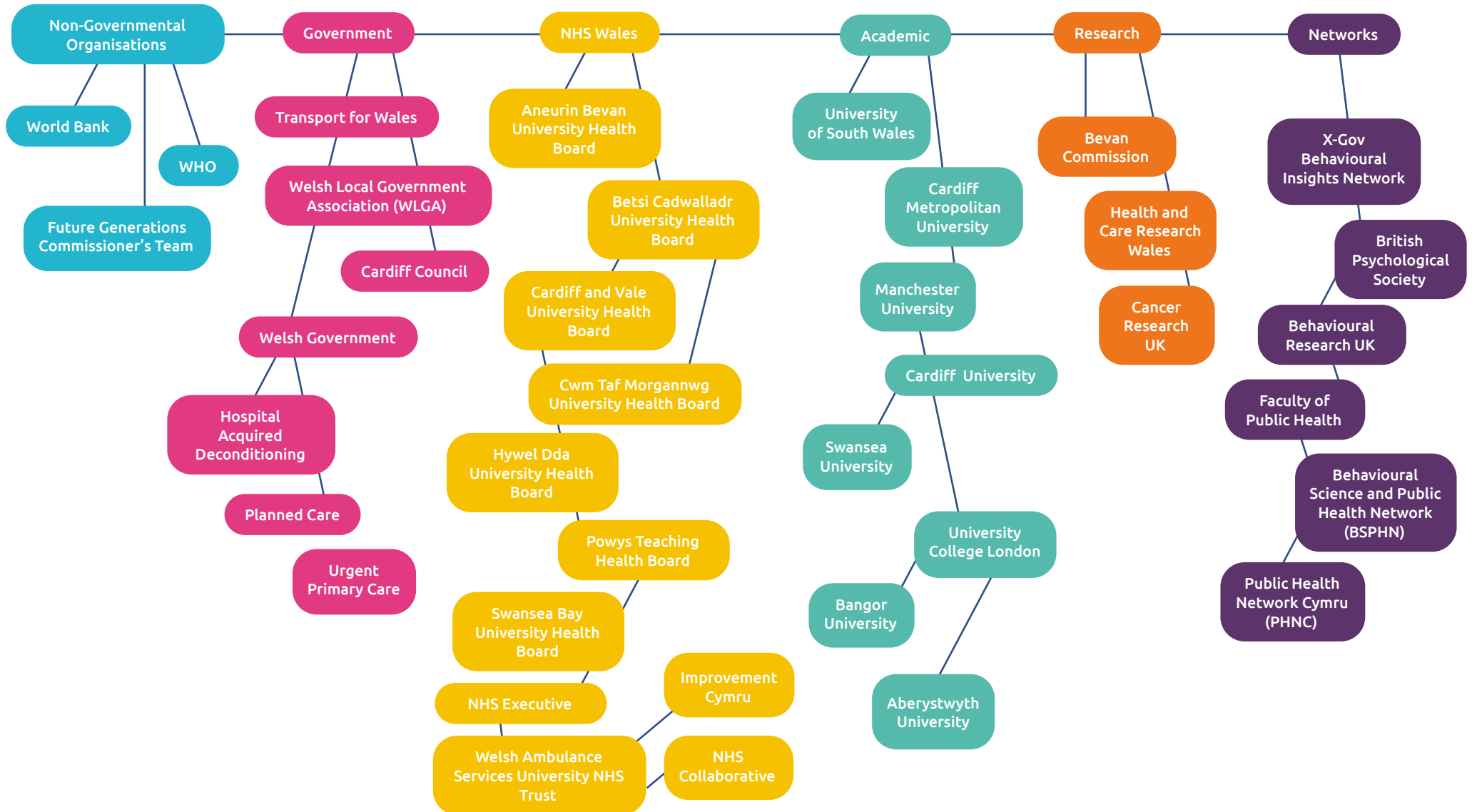
## Our Collaborative Partners



# Who We've Worked With: Public Health Wales



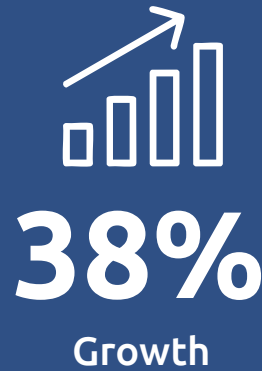
## Who We've Worked With: External Partners



Our Growth This Year

BESCI COMMUNITY FOR WALES

350 Members



38% Growth



3 Online Webinars and an In-Person Event

Attended by over 250 participants

IMPROVED CAPACITY

Recruited 2 Principal Behavioural Science Specialists



3 Senior Behavioural Science Specialists and a Project Manager

Trained 40+

Behaviour Change Agents to increase routine use of behavioural science across the Public Health System

Engaged as Co-Investigators/Advisors to 6 UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funded programmes

## FOUNDATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

Established in 2022, the Behavioural Science Unit (BSU) is provided by the Policy and International Health Directorate of Public Health Wales (PHW).

A large and growing body of scientific evidence shows that when there are behaviours on the critical path to achieving successful implementation or outcomes from activities aiming for better health, then using behavioural science can improve their impact – there are almost always behaviours, of staff or the public, on the critical path.

*“[Behavioural Science] work adds value across the entire health-related policy, service and communication planning cycle, ranging from defining problems and conducting research into root causes, barriers to and drivers of health behaviours, to programme planning and implementation, monitoring and evaluation and scaling up or replicating effective interventions and policies.” – World Health Organisation*

We describe behavioural science as the systematic study of behaviour, the observable, measurable actions of human beings, what enables them, what prevents them and the development of approaches or techniques most likely to change or sustain them.

The mission of the Behavioural Science Unit is to enable the routine application of behavioural science to optimise the activities of PHW and their stakeholders, aiming to improve and protect health and wellbeing and reduce health inequity in Wales.

The Unit works with colleagues from PHW and the wider public health system in Wales, across the priorities set out in PHW’s [Long Term Strategy](#) summarised in the graphic below. By routinely and systematically deploying behavioural science across policy development and practice endeavours, impact on all the Long Term Strategy priorities can be optimised.



**Influencing the wider  
determinants of health**



**Supporting the development  
of a sustainable health  
and care system focused  
on prevention and early  
intervention**



**Promoting mental and  
social well-being**



**Delivering excellent public  
health services to protect  
the public and maximise  
population health outcomes**



**Promoting healthy  
behaviours**



**Tackling the public health  
effects of climate change**



To achieve its mission the BSU undertakes a range proactive and responsive work, itself based on principles of behavioural science, aiming to build the capability, opportunity and motivation of our stakeholders to use behavioural science in their activities.

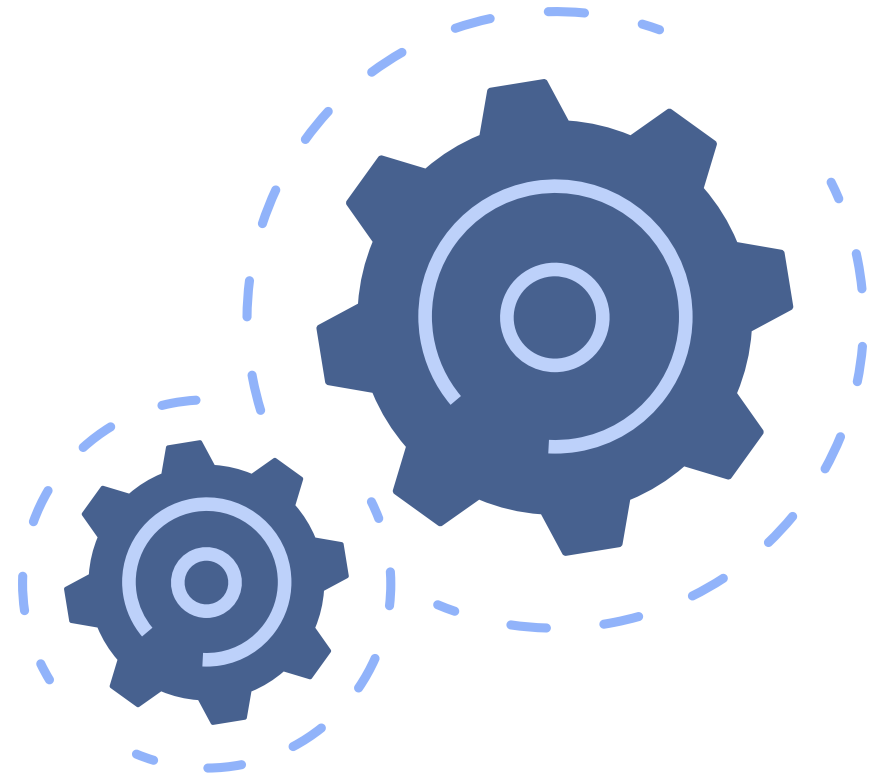
The Unit's functions are based on guidance from the World Health Organisation and a close association with a number of national and international behavioural science units as well as research centres and collaborations. We've used the World Health Organisation Behavioural and Cultural Insights (BCI) Action Framework to carry out an objective assessment, with stakeholder support and submitted the update to the WHO. This indicates solid progress over the past two years, around five 'strategic commitments' that the UK Chief Medical Officer has signed up to, to advance the application of BCI for better health.

We are also guided by the latest published research, and from ongoing collaboration with the BeSci Community for Wales. The Unit uses these sources, along with evaluation of activities, to understand our impact and the mechanisms by which we can continue to improve our offer.

Meeting stakeholders where they are, the BSU provides responsive capacity, through specialist consultation, advice and direct support, on request, from a wide range of stakeholders, balancing rigour from behavioural science with proportionality and pragmatism to meet stakeholder need.

The Unit builds capability through proactive and responsive training and development programmes and projects, the creation, curation and mobilisation of resources, and the facilitation of the BeSci Community for Wales. The BSU has developed and delivered programmes guiding colleagues through the implementation of behavioural science to their direct communications with staff and the public. The team aims to integrate behavioural science within the policies, strategies, plans, structures and procedures that drive public health practice, with the dual aim of optimising their intended impact and increasing the opportunity for the system to use behavioural science within their activities.

Looking ahead, the Unit is committed to supporting stakeholders to use behavioural science to further drive better health outcomes for all, whilst continuously looking to improve our own practices. In February, Public Health Wales Executive Team approved an enabling plan for behavioural science for better health in Wales. The plan, developed with strategic leads from the public health system and behavioural science experts, sets out the areas of focus and priority actions that the BSU and its partners can undertake together to achieve the mission.



## DELIVERY OF THE BSU AND PARTNERS IN 2024-2025

2024-2025 has been a busy and productive year! The breadth of projects worked on is credit to the attitude and aptitude of the people, teams and services we have worked with, whom despite increasing system and service pressure, are striving for improvement. It is also testament to the diversity of the specialist expertise, collaborative approach and connectivity within the BSU. This year's work also represents an indication of the growing recognition of the value behavioural science brings – we get what we aim for more often, when we use behavioural science in our activities for better health. Highlights of our collaborative delivery and impact for the 2024-2025 financial year are provided below.

### The BSU responsive service

The BSU provided timely support to requests received from across PHW and the wider public health system. The specialist capacity we provided included: specialist consultation, advice and guidance, workshopping problem and solutions from BeSci, bespoke training and development and direct support and input to partners interventions. A key principle we apply in this service is “meeting the client where they are”, we aim to meet our partners' needs by balancing rigour from behavioural science with proportionality and pragmatism, delivering what is agreed within their timescales.

We have worked with each of the seven PHW Directorates, across the majority of long term strategy priorities including infection prevention and control, outbreak control, screening services, antimicrobial resistance, reducing health impacts of climate change, tobacco control and obesity. We have also extended our impact beyond Public Health Wales working on requests from stakeholders including Welsh Government, local authorities and the Welsh Local Government Association, and Health Boards, Transport for Wales, Wellbeing of Future Generations Commissioners Team, and academia, providing the range of functions above.

### Behaviourally Informed Communications Initiative (BICI)

Our toolkit Developing Behaviourally Informed Communications has been downloaded more than 350 times and received a hugely positive response. There have also been numerous requests for support with client/patient-direct communications. In response, the Unit established the BICI Programme to offer hands-on support and learning, with the guided application of theories, frameworks and methods from behavioural science to redevelop over 30 different types of personal communications produced by Public Health Wales and stakeholders. The teams involved included: Screening Services, Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme, Help Me Quit, Microbiology, Health Protection, and Primary Care Division (GP and Dental), along with external stakeholders including the All-Wales Cellulitis Improvement Programme.

The programme consisted of two workshops, in June and September 2024, support between- and post-workshop support, 'service-desk', a Teams channel and a workbook. The first workshop included expert speakers from WHO and the Irish Government on behaviourally informed communications for improving outcomes, alongside BSU speakers. In the workshops, participants worked through the BSU process for applying BeSci to communications, using the workbooks and working independently or in groups and made plans for implementation and evaluation. As part of our evaluation we assessed colleagues' confidence in developing behaviourally informed communications, from the start of workshop 1 to the end of workshop 2 the average score increased by close to 50%.

We received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the sessions. Participants said:

*"It's been a revelation really, as I was developing my specification, I realised I actually had two different audiences with different target behaviours."*

*"I can't believe how obvious some of these changes are, yet we've never done them. I'm so excited to get started and make change."*

A [development and learning report](#) has been published alongside a [self-directed workbook](#) and a [collection of case studies](#). Participants are being supported through their implementation and evaluation, and the BSU will produce a final evaluation in 2025-26.

BICI 2.0 will be starting in June 2025. If you would like to participate or learn more, please contact [PHW.BehSciUnit@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:PHW.BehSciUnit@wales.nhs.uk)

### Behaviour Change Agents (BCA) Programme

In response to the insights and recommendations of the BSU research into the capability and readiness of the public health system in Wales to use Behavioural Science, we created the BCA learning and development programme to support the following behavioural outcomes:



Using a behavioural lens in conceptualising needs/challenges and effective solutions.



Applying behavioural science principles, models, frameworks, tools and techniques in the development, implementation and evaluation activities for better health.



Ability to commission effective efficient "behavioural science services" from other specialists.



Advocating for, and supporting others, in applying behavioural science principles, models, frameworks and tools and techniques









The BSU collaborated with Transport for Wales (TfW) and with experts in behavioural science and professional education from the University of Manchester to develop, implement and robustly evaluate the BCA programme. Based on what is known about learning styles of professionals and behaviour change for the role of BCA, the programme was multi-component and multi-format. The components were induction (2 hours, online), workbooks with feedback, online learning from the Centre for Behaviour Change at UCL (a flexible four-session course), teams-based learning (one day, face to face), and action learning sets (four, two hour sessions).

Following articulation of the purpose, commitment and potential of the course, nominations from Executives in PHW, TfW and health board Directors of Public Health led to the recruitment of ~20 colleagues from the public health system and ~20 colleagues from TfW. Robust, mixed-methods evaluation of the programme is being completed and this, along with wider learning and reflections, will be used to inform further development of the programme for a second cohort in 2025-2026.

## Behavioural Science Community for Wales

A Behavioural Science Community for Wales (BSCW) was launched by the BSU in January 2023, and has now grown to over 350 members, delivering seven in-person and online events to date. A steering group representing the composition of membership includes representatives from Welsh Government, universities, Public Health Wales, Health Boards, and local government.

The aim of BSCW is to increase behavioural science capability, capacity and connections across the public health system in Wales, delivering events containing a mix of small-group workshops, open space workshops and presentations to meet the following objectives:





-  **Sharing knowledge, expertise, experiences, and learning**
-  **Enabling sharing of data, intelligence, and insights**
-  **Identifying common challenges/shared goals where behavioural science could support achievement of desired outcomes**
-  **Enabling connections and collaborations on behavioural science projects**
-  **Providing access to training and development opportunities to enhance behavioural science skills and knowledge**
-  **Facilitating access to behavioural science advice, guidance, and expertise**
-  **Identifying and disseminate notable practice**
-  **Supporting the co-production of behavioural science tools and resources in collaboration with the Behavioural Science Unit**

The BSCW events have featured speakers of international renown from behavioural science, along with practitioners and policy professionals in Wales. In 2024-25 we have organised, co-developed and co-delivered three events. Two online events were attended by over 130 people and a full day in-person event attended by 110 people. Through regular evaluation and communication with the BSCW, we are achieving against many of those objectives outlined above, with further plans in place to develop and improve the offer with our partners.



### Tackling Diabetes Together Programme

The Tackling Diabetes Together Programme is a system wide programme aiming to bring about a step-change by having more people live well with diabetes and stopping the prevalence of diabetes increasing by 2028-2029. Behavioural science has been identified as an enabling function of the programme from initiation, and within the first year we have:

-  Developed a participatory behavioural systems map of a local system of diabetes treatment and support in collaboration with the public health team, health care professionals from all relevant services and other stakeholders in Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB and experts from University College London's Centre for Behaviour Change. The powerful insights gained, and further analysis of the map, are being used to inform local and national improvement activity
-  Co-developed a prototype CoachBot aiming to increase attendance at diabetic eye screening in those with type 2 diabetes
-  Provided BeSci expertise in developing and procuring qualitative research seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers and facilitators to engagement with diabetes services among adults living with type 2 diabetes in Wales
-  Supported a UHB in procuring the development of a bespoke behaviourally and psychologically informed training package for primary care professionals with the aim of optimising patient activation

### Positive Non-Responder Pathway - Bowel Screening Wales and Cancer Research UK

Through existing working relationships BSU supported Bowel Screening Wales to secure funding from Cancer Research-UK, to implement interventions around those on the 'positive non-responder pathway' - people that have received a positive screening result and need further investigation. The BSU have reviewed and supported improvements to the sequence of letters sent to this cohort, to increase engagement of follow-up services.

After completing a desk-based behavioural diagnosis, the team worked collaboratively with Bowel Screening Wales colleagues and patient involvement groups to incorporate behaviour change techniques to the letters. The amended letters were implemented in January 2025, with the pilot trial running until December 2025 when results will be analysed and shared to help develop our understanding of 'what works'.

*"The work that the BSU has supported us with has provided invaluable insights into how we can amend our communications so that they are more impactful for our target audience. It has helped us to look at all our communications through the lens of the participants more and consider behaviour change techniques which can have a positive impact on getting our important messages across."*

### Understanding our impact

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, the Unit worked with independent academics to evaluate the direct and indirect impacts of our work, and better understand the mechanisms by which BSU can further meet the needs of stakeholders across the public health system to be able to use behavioural science in their practice.

A Realist Ripple Effects Mapping (RREM) approach was used, comprising three distinct research phases:

- 1 Ripple effect map development: A guided discovery workshop in which the BSU team mapped their activity and perceived impacts of their work over time.
- 2 'How and Why conversations': Qualitative interviews and focus groups with stakeholders from across the public health system to investigate the perceived impacts identified by the BSU in phase one.
- 3 'Learning and refining': Convergence of findings from phases one and two to inform the BSU's future development and activity.

The RREM evaluation demonstrates that work undertaken by the BSU since their inception has, over time, resulted in further ripple effects between implemented activities and wider impacts.

There was a consensus amongst stakeholders that the BSU were approachable and flexible, which facilitated relationships and encouraged application of behavioural science in practice.

The BSU's activities were most effective for building stakeholders' capabilities when they were delivered using practical and relevant examples of how behavioural science could be applied in that context.

The main barriers to stakeholders' application of behavioural science in practice was a lack of resources (i.e. staff, capacity and time), and limited understanding of how to evaluate the effectiveness of behavioural science use. This was reinforced through recognition that demonstrating impact is pivotal to behavioural science becoming embedded across the public health system.

As a crucial approach to improving health outcomes and reducing inequalities, this evaluation has informed how behavioural science can help optimise policy, services and communications and help drive continued impact across the system.

[The full report](#) was published in March 2025.



## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

The majority of public health action relies on individuals doing something differently. By deploying behavioural science, **we can get what more of what we aim for, more often**. To continue progress in this regard, we have developed Better Health Through Behavioural Science: An Enabling Plan for Wales – which has been co-created and was approved by the Executive Team in February 2025. The plan centres on seven key enabling action areas summarised here, and designed to incrementally develop capability, conditions and constructs to increase the routine use of behavioural science to optimise policy, services, communications, improvement and systems approaches, underpinning our Long Term Strategy priorities to 2035.



## READY TO BOOST YOUR IMPACT?

The Behavioural Science Unit supports a growing range of work for partners across the public health system and beyond. We can offer assistance and expertise in the following areas:

INTERVENTION DESIGN

OPTIMISING COMMUNICATIONS

SUPPORTING SYSTEMS WORKING APPROACHES

SUPPORTING BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH

SUPPORTING COMMISSIONING OF BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE SERVICES

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

BESPOKE BEHAVIOURALLY INFORMED PROBLEM DEFINITION AND SOLUTION

SUPPORTING BEHAVIOURALLY INFORMED EVALUATION

TIMELY CONSULTATION AND FEEDBACK ON PRODUCTS

BEHAVIOURALLY INFORMED EVALUATION

OPTIMISING APPROACHES IN SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

BEHAVIOURALLY INFORMED POLICY-MAKING

Flowing from the enabling plan, we have a range of co-produced [tools and guides](#) that can help at each stage of the policy, service and communication stream – design, implementation and evaluation. We also have [a large resource repository](#) where you can find a wide variety of research articles, reports, videos, podcasts and more, to help with the application of BeSci to boost the impact of your work, for better health.

We also run a BeSci Community for Wales - hosting events and workshops that foster learning and collaboration with a membership from across the public health system, including academia, within a supportive and friendly environment. [Join the community today](#) for first access to our events, and keep an eye out for our new LinkedIn page.

We are keen to support your efforts to improve and protect health and reduce inequity. If you think we can help, please get in touch at [PHW.BehSciUnit@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:PHW.BehSciUnit@wales.nhs.uk).