

Annual Report Summary

2024 - 2025





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Introduction

from Professor Sir Nick Black

The Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) is a dynamic partnership bringing together local universities, NHS organisations, councils, and voluntary groups, united by a shared vision to improve health and social care across Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

Supported by the **Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust**, it is dedicated to bridging the gap between research and practice, ensuring that the latest evidence informs and enhances the health and care services provided in our communities.

As the Chair of the ARC KSS Board, I am delighted to present this annual report which captures the progress and collective achievements realised over the past year through collaboration. It provides a thorough overview of our

milestones, the innovative projects we have delivered, and the impact of our research in enhancing the health and wellbeing of people across the region. This commitment has made Kent, Surrey and Sussex an increasingly attractive destination for clinicians, other professionals, and health and care leaders who are passionate about making a difference.

Looking ahead, the ARC hopes to continue playing its part in endeavouring to foster and strengthen the emerging research environment.

Professor Sir Nick Black
ARC KSS Board, Chair



Foreword

By Professor Stephen Peckham

It is with great pride that I introduce this year's report, which highlights the remarkable achievements delivered through the collaborative efforts of the ARC KSS.

Throughout the past year, our partnerships have gone from strength to strength, uniting the expertise of local universities, NHS organisations, councils, voluntary groups, and members of the public. This shared dedication has not only enhanced our research output but has also ensured these efforts translate into practical improvements that positively affect the wellbeing of people in our communities.

I am delighted to welcome Professor Clara Strauss as Co-Director, whose expertise in mental health research and experience of research leadership will further strengthen the ARC's strategic direction. Clara will help the ARC work more closely with researchers as we expand our work in the future.

We secured more than £6 million in additional funding, enabling us to expand our support for initiatives that reflect local priorities. Our close collaboration with universities, councils, health and care providers, and voluntary groups has ensured our research stays relevant and delivers meaningful results. In particular, we value the involvement and support of our public partners, as we continue to strengthen our focus on inclusion and public involvement, empowering young people, supporting underserved communities, and amplifying public voices in research.

Our leadership in the National Priority Programme for Adult Social Care and Social Work has been a particular highlight. Working with 8 ARC partners, nationally, we have led 5 major projects, including: developing innovative tools for care homes, new community support models, and new resources to support victims of domestic

abuse. These efforts are already making a recognised impact.

With additional National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) funding, we have been able to recruit knowledge mobilisation fellows, to help bridge the gap between research and real-world practice. Supported by Health Innovation Kent Surrey Sussex (Health Innovation KSS), these fellows - all practising professionals within health and care organisations - play a vital role in ensuring that evidence-informed improvements are implemented where they are needed most.

Through our Academy, we continue to provide accessible research opportunities at all career stages. This year, we delivered 17 Individual Development Awards supporting projects such as menopause, skin health, and suicide prevention in autistic adults. We have now helped over 70 practitioners and young researchers start their research careers, with sustained investment in mentoring and development.

As we look to the future, I am confident ARC KSS will continue to drive innovation, support wellbeing and deliver positive change for all those we serve. I would like to thank everyone whose dedication has made this possible, including our host trust, Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, whose support and guidance underpin our collaborative success.

Professor Stephen Peckham
Director, ARC KSS



Our impact at a glance

Since October 2019, we have been working hard to establish applied health and social care research in the region.



Over the past 6 years we have:



Secured over **£20 million** in research funding



Received **£5.9 million** in additional funding



Supported **299** research projects addressing public needs



Shared **155** opportunities with our public members



Co-funded **43** PhD students



Involved **9,000** research participants



Attracted **266,000** visitors to our website



Held **66** external events



Worked with **56** supporting organisations



Published nearly **200** journal articles



Produced **88** videos



Held more than **20** communities of practice across our themes



Delivering applied health and care research that influences outcomes and services

We carry out practical research in health and social care that actually changes things for the better. Our aim is to support research that really helps people and makes a genuine difference to their lives.

In 2024-2025, we were able to support even more research projects because we won additional grants and got extra funding from the organisations we work with.

By teaming up with local universities, councils, and health and care providers, we managed to bring in over £6 million in extra funding. This money came from lots of different places, such as research councils, charities, the NIHR, non-profit groups, and businesses.

Between April and September, nearly £500,000 came from joint funding with local universities, health and care services, voluntary organisations, and Health Innovation Kent Surrey Sussex. Thanks to this extra support, we were able back projects that matter most to local people and really help our communities.



Supporting national level working

Driving change through national collaboration in adult social care.

We have teamed up with research centres, universities, and health and care organisations from all over the country to tackle some of the most difficult challenges in health and social care.

Funded by the NIHR, the National Priority Programme for Adult Social Care and Social Work is a partnership between 9 different ARC groups across England, working together - with ARC KSS taking the lead.

We are working on 5 important projects to make adult social care and social work better and collaborating closely with NHS research teams, local councils, care home staff, and organisations focused on health innovation to make sure our research has a real impact on the people who need it most.

This year, we organised a major event where more than 120 researchers, care workers, and members of the public came together to discuss some of the country's biggest health and social care issues, including: how to improve care settings, using technology to reduce loneliness, and supporting those affected by domestic abuse.

People with first-hand experience of these challenges played a key role in guiding the discussions, making sure the ideas put forward would genuinely help local communities.

Following these sessions, we were able to award additional funding of up to £15,000 per project. This support has enabled teams to further develop their initiatives and seek out innovative approaches to enhancing care for all.

Project 1: Making care more personal in care homes

Making care in care homes more personal ensures each resident receives a tailored care plan reflecting their individual needs and wishes. We worked with research groups, care workers, families, and universities to develop 3 free planning tools.

These tools place residents at the heart of decisions and have already improved communication, saved time, and empowered staff.

Over 2,000 care homes and community groups now use them, helping professionals, families, and care teams collaborate more effectively. Staff report increased confidence in creating care plans that truly matter to residents.

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Project 2: Community-led Support: making social care better by working together with local people

Community-Led Support (CLS) is a way for social care teams to work more closely with local people and communities. Created by 3 universities and supported by several organisations, CLS is already making a positive difference in over 30 places in the UK and has won a European award. It helps

make care more focused on each person and builds better local support. The team is now working on a simple guide to help more community centres use CLS across the country.

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Project 3: Domestic abuse and family safeguarding

This project explored how services can more effectively support families impacted by domestic abuse. It examined real-life situations and collaborated with local organisations to develop a practical toolkit for councils, aimed at enhancing cooperation between different services.

The study, 'Safeguarding the Family when Responding to Domestic Violence: Innovative Approaches to Integrating Services' (VISTA), highlighted the need for continuous funding and improved

collaboration to provide better support for adults, children, and those who have caused harm.

Developed with insights from frontline practitioners, the toolkit is designed to be flexible and tailored for use in various regions. It is currently being trialled in local authorities to assess its effectiveness.

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Project 4: Connected Communities: Improving local support services

This project looked at how community support services, like social prescribing and link workers, are used in everyday life. The team worked closely with people who use these services, those who provide them, and local organisations. Their goal was to find out what makes these services work well and what might get in the way.

The main things that help are being able to adapt when needed, working

together, and making services easy for everyone to use.

Based on what they learned, the team is now creating a practical guide to help others set up and improve similar services. This guide will be shared widely to help boost wellbeing and bring communities closer together across the country.

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Project 5: Digital technology and social wellbeing

This project looks at how things like smartphones, tablets, and computers can help older people and their carers stay in touch with family, friends, and their community. The research team is now focusing on people with vision problems and dementia—groups who often find it hard to use digital devices.

By working with local charities and council staff researchers will be able to find out what stops people from using

technology and how to help them use it more easily.

The main aim is to help people feel happier and more connected, so they don't have to rely as much on social care, and to create simple advice and tools that can guide future decisions about care and support.

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Building a national social care learning community

We have been helping to build a community of social care researchers across England, making it easier for people to connect and learn from each other.

In 2024-2025, we set up a national social care learning community, offering regular peer support sessions and shared resources to strengthen our research network.

At our main event, 70 social care researchers and practitioners came together to share ideas and experiences, with many people appreciating the networking opportunities and the chance to think up new ideas.

Getting the right information to the right people at the right time

To make our work even more useful and impactful, we've brought in 3 specialists - called Knowledge Mobilisation Fellows - in Kent and Medway.

These fellows come from a range of backgrounds: some are doctors, others are therapists or managers, and some have experience in public health and working with communities. This mix means they have a lot of know-how, both from working directly with people and from understanding the bigger picture, which helps them put research into practical use.

Partnering with Health Innovation KSS, these fellows are leading projects that aim to improve local health and care services. They receive tailored training and ongoing support to make sure they have what they need to make a real and lasting impact.

We are also bringing in more fellows in Sussex and Surrey to help spread these improvements further.

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Our Mobilisation Fellows



Ruth Germaine Knowledge Mobilisation Fellow in Kent and Medway, brings nearly 4 decades of NHS nursing and leadership expertise. Passionate about improving care, Ruth champions staff development and co-designs services with people who have lived experience, making a real difference for those with learning disabilities and autism.



Mobilisation Fellow, **Dr Sarah Westerbeek**, is a GP in Kent and Medway, who is dedicated to improving heart health by tackling high blood pressure. Following a successful pilot in Maidstone, she now supports GP practices with training and practical advice, focusing on underserved communities to help more people access vital checks and care.



Supporting national policy

We are helping to put the NHS's 10-Year Health Plan into action by focussing on 3 big things: bringing care closer to people's homes, making better use of technology, and preventing illness before it starts.

We work with local communities and health professionals to make services more accessible and suited to people's needs, moving care out of hospitals and into neighbourhoods.

We also encourage new ideas for mental health support for young people and help shape personalised care for those with dementia. By training new researchers and working together on health projects, we're helping to build a stronger NHS that uses digital tools and gives communities a say in their care, helping everyone live healthier lives.

From hospital to community

Helping parents stay connected during hospital treatment

A new programme, developed by researchers from the University of Surrey, University of Sussex, and Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, is helping parents in psychiatric hospitals stay connected with their children.

The programme, the first of its kind in the UK, offers 5 sessions that provide emotional support and practical tools for parenting during hospital stays.

Early feedback from parents, caregivers, and staff has been overwhelmingly positive. It has helped parents feel more confident and supported, while also raising awareness among staff about the importance of recognising patients' parenting roles.



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Innovative approaches to dementia support

Dementia affects more than 67,500 people living in Kent, Surrey and Sussex. To help them, the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board set up Dementia Care Coordinators (DCCs) in 42 local health areas. These coordinators act as single, easy-to-reach contacts for people living with dementia and for their carers, making it simpler to get support and advice.

The University of Surrey led a study to see how well this service works.

Thanks to the positive results, the DCC service will continue. The study also suggested ways to make the service even better, such as giving more help to staff, reaching people who don't always get support, and using data more effectively to respond to local needs.

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Supporting people with dementia who live alone

Approximately 120,000 people in the UK live alone with dementia, which can make it harder for them to get help and feel less lonely. Most support is aimed at those with family or carers, but a recent NIHR-funded review focused on those living by themselves in Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

The study found some helpful ways, like home care led by nurses, gadgets such as alarms, and opportunities for social visits or activities.

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Making care moves easier for older people

It can be tough and worrying for older people and their families when someone moves between places like hospital, home, or a care home. The Better Care Moves for Older People project, funded by the NIHR School for Social Care Research and supported by ARC North Thames and ARC Kent, Surrey and Sussex, looked at ways to make these changes smoother and less stressful.

Experts from the University of Kent and University College London worked closely with older adults, their carers, and care staff to come up with practical help. They created clear summaries of

what works best, handy guides for care workers, and short, online videos to help everyone understand the process.

By sharing these tips and resources, the project hopes to make moving between different care places easier for older people and those who support them. The next step is to make sure these tools become a regular part of how care is given, and to keep working with everyone involved.

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Reducing hospital admissions for people living with dementia

Many people with dementia are readmitted to hospital soon after discharge, often due to difficulties with mobility, personal care, or multiple health problems. Poor discharge planning, weak communication between hospitals and care homes, and social barriers worsen the situation.

Certain medications can also increase readmissions. Research led by Brighton and Sussex Medical School highlights that better teamwork, planning, and community support are crucial to improving health outcomes and preventing unnecessary hospital stays.

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From sickness to prevention

Transforming community health in Surrey

Growing Health Together (GHT) is a fresh approach in East Surrey that changes how local NHS services work with communities. Instead of only treating illness, GHT aims to help people stay healthy by connecting them, making services easier to access, and creating supportive neighbourhoods.

By teaming up NHS staff, councils, charities, and residents, GHT lets each area decide on the activities that matter most to them. People taking part feel more confident, less alone, and healthier - both in body and mind. Local doctors play a big part, acting as leaders to make prevention a priority, not just treatment. This project has reduced the demand



on GP surgeries and helped different services work together better. The main reason GHT works so well is because it builds strong relationships and trust in the community, showing how local, preventative care can become a reality for everyone.

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Empowering young people in Sussex: community-led mental health support

A new project in Sussex is making a real difference to young people's mental health. By training local link workers and mentors to offer friendly, practical support to 16-24-year-olds right in their own communities.

Instead of having to visit clinics, young people can talk about their worries, set goals, and find hope in familiar, trusted places with someone who truly understands.

Run by the University of Sussex and partners, the CATALYST scheme is being piloted in Brighton & Hove, West Sussex, and Hastings. Already, over 30 young people have received help, with early results showing more engagement and fewer obstacles to getting support.

By putting care into the hands of local champions, this project is making mental health help warmer, more accessible, and more effective for young people across Sussex.

"Young people have told us that they want support to navigate their lives and that support to be available in a place where they feel comfortable, we are delighted to be part of the CATALYST project and to be working together for young people."

Joanna Martindale
Chief Executive Officer Hangleton & Knoll Project

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Outdoor swimming for depression

We are supporting the national OUTSIDE study, led by Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and funded by the NIHR, to examine whether outdoor swimming can help people with depression.

This randomised, controlled trial spans 21 sites across England and involves over 500 adults taking part in an 8-week outdoor swimming course in various natural and man-made locations. The aim is to determine if outdoor swimming offers an effective and affordable treatment for depression.

The study is shaped by people with lived experience of depression, with 2 public members as co-applicants and a Lived Experience Advisory Panel involved in its design and delivery.



Early findings have already influenced national organisations such as Swim England, Mind, and the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Results from the first phase have been published, and, if successful, there are plans to expand the programme nationally with support from other ARCs.

A community-led mental health solution



We are running a project in Sussex to help support the mental health of migrants and minority ethnic communities. The Friendship Bench is simply a wooden bench in a public place, where trained local people offer a friendly ear and practical talking therapy for those feeling anxious, lonely, or low.

This idea began in Zimbabwe and has helped thousands by making mental health support less formal and easier to access. The project is important because research shows that migrants and people from minority backgrounds often face more mental health challenges and have less access to help.

To make a difference, we have trained 9 local community members—who understand these challenges themselves—to become “benchers” who offer support on the bench. Our work has already been noticed nationally, showing how local people can play a big role in improving wellbeing in their own communities.

Tackling delays in lung cancer diagnosis for patients with long-term conditions

Delays in diagnosing lung cancer are a big problem, especially for people with existing lung conditions like Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) or asthma.



A study by Brighton and Sussex Medical School looked at almost 12,000 patients and found that those with conditions such as COPD or asthma waited much longer for a lung cancer diagnosis than those without. On average, having 1 of these conditions meant a 31-day delay, while having 2 or more led to a 74-day wait.

People with COPD experienced the longest delay - nearly 2 months longer than those without the condition. These findings show that lung diseases can hide the signs of cancer, making it harder for doctors to spot early.

The study calls for better GP training and updated guidelines, so doctors can spot lung cancer sooner, improve care, and save more lives.

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How helping to speed up ovarian cancer diagnosis can help save lives

We are backing research that aims to speed up how quickly ovarian cancer is diagnosed, which could help save more lives.

A recent study looked at the medical records of more than 2,000 women and found that the first symptom a woman reports really matters. If women see their GP with back pain or tiredness, they tend to wait much longer for a diagnosis than if they show more obvious symptoms like a swollen tummy. Women with other health issues—like

urinary infections or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) - were also at risk of delays, as their symptoms can be mistaken for less serious problems.

The research shows that GPs need better tools and training to spot ovarian cancer sooner, even when symptoms are unclear. This work is already making a difference by informing NHS leaders and training, and it's helping shape how GPs approach diagnosing ovarian cancer in the future.

From analogue to digital

Working locally to improve domestic abuse services

Researchers from the University of Surrey have assessed how a digital tool, DAVIT (Domestic Abuse Data sharing and Visualisation Tool), might be implemented into practice. It has been developed by Surrey County Council, to improve identification of domestic abuse. DAVIT helps agencies like police, health, and councils share and access data in one place.

The team found DAVIT easy to use and effective for planning and quicker action. The tool could support better services for survivors if backed by robust data-sharing, leadership, and training, with potential for national use.

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“Our hope for DAVIT, is that, in time, adoption of the methodology by other local authorities will make it into a national tool, helping us gain a better and more detailed understanding of domestic abuse not just for Surrey.”

Dr Sara Dicerto, one the leads on the Development of DAVIT, Surrey County Council

Improving access to social care

Accessing social care can be daunting due to confusing forms and unclear information about available support. To address this, councils in England are introducing online guides and self-check tools to help people understand their options and how to apply.

However, a University of Kent study revealed that only about 20% of council websites provided easy-to-read information, and just 25% offered self-check tools. Where available, these tools led to increased use of vital services like community alarms and telecare. The research highlights the importance

of offering both digital and traditional support methods, such as paper forms and phone lines, to suit everyone’s needs.

Councils and health teams should ensure online tools are simple, while also improving non-digital support, regularly updating information based on user feedback. Clear and inclusive support helps make social care more accessible and empowering for all.

[Read More](#)

A new app to support people living with dementia

People with mild to moderate memory problems often struggle to access health and care services, and changes in their wellbeing can go unnoticed.

To help, a new app called CO-COG has been created, funded by ARC KSS and developed in partnership with Health Innovation KSS. The app was co-designed with people living with cognitive impairment and healthcare professionals to make sure it meets their needs.

It asks simple wellbeing questions and includes optional cognitive tasks to spot early changes that might need attention. Technical development was handled by Unusual Designs. The research is now in its third phase, recruiting volunteers and their study partners.



Participants use the app weekly for 4 weeks and share feedback, helping researchers understand how CO-COG works in everyday life. Co-design has made the app accessible and relevant, supporting better care for people with dementia.

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Using AI to improve skin cancer diagnosis

Skin cancer causes more urgent NHS referrals than any other cancer, but only a few of these cases actually turn out to be cancer, which puts extra pressure on dermatology teams.

To help, a company called Skin Analytics developed an Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool called DERM. This tool helps doctors work out which skin problems need urgent care and which do not. It was tested in 6 NHS locations and found to be safe and accurate in both hospitals and local clinics. DERM cut down on unnecessary appointments, saving time

and money—up to 2,600 appointments a year in a typical NHS trust. Patients and staff liked using DERM, especially when a consultant double-checked the results.

While DERM saves money for hospitals, further research is needed to see how well it works for different people and places. AI tools like DERM could help make skin cancer diagnosis quicker and simpler for everyone.

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Reaching our underserved communities

We make health and social care research accessible for communities often overlooked or facing barriers.

By working with local partners and those with lived experience, we create inclusive solutions for groups like LGBTQ+ elders, at-risk youth, and coastal residents, helping to reduce health inequalities and empower communities.

Creating inclusive residential care for LGBTQ+ elders



Recognising the urgent need for inclusive care for the UK's 1 million LGBTQ+ elders, we funded the Creating Inclusive Residential Care for LGBTQ+ Elders (CIRLCE) project. This initiative, led by the University of

Kent, involved the development of a co-designed educational resource, an online community of practice, and a comprehensive inclusion programme to support care home staff in delivering respectful, inclusive care.

The resource has already reached 20,000 care home staff and been downloaded over 200 times internationally. Beneficiaries included both staff and LGBTQ+ residents, with the project influencing local commissioning, informing regulatory improvements, and raising national awareness through significant media coverage.

Protecting young people from gang exploitation

The Buddi tag programme, supported by ARC KSS, helps protect young people at risk of gang exploitation. Participants voluntarily wear an electronic tag for 6–8 weeks, which tracks their movements and ensures regular adult check-ins, support, and links to services.

Run by the Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit, the initiative has seen positive outcomes: the 36 young people

involved were suspected of fewer crimes and violent offences dropped. Participants also reported feeling more confident. Due to its success, the scheme will be trialled elsewhere.

The project's findings are available on the College of Policing website.

[Read More](#)

Addressing health inequalities

Reaching communities that are often overlooked is essential to reducing health inequalities. Responding to concerns about issues in coastal towns—such as low wages, seasonal jobs, and limited access to services—ARC KSS researchers have developed a new, simpler way to assess the health of people in these areas.

Traditional health data tends to cover only large regions, making it difficult to see the real situation in individual towns. The new method, piloted in Kent and Medway, reveals significant differences between towns, such as rates of high blood pressure. The aim is to inform better healthcare and support nationwide.



Making PSHE more inclusive for neurodivergent pupils



Around 15–20% of UK children are neurodivergent, including those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or autism. Teachers have had little guidance on supporting these pupils in Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education lessons.

To address this, University of Sussex researchers, in partnership with Brighton and Hove City Council, support services, and neurodivergent pupils, created practical resources—such as posters and a helpful guide—for teachers.

These tools are now in use, boosting teacher confidence, with schools pledging improvements and sharing feedback nationally.

By involving neurodivergent young people, the project is making PSHE lessons more inclusive and supportive for all students.



Helping local health and care services make informed choices

We are supporting health and social care organisations to use research in decision-making by creating clear, reliable summaries tailored to local needs. Our rapid reviews and practical advice help leaders quickly access trusted evidence, supporting improved services and filling knowledge gaps across our region.

Children and young people's acute mental health crisis support

This year, we teamed up with NHS Sussex to find better ways to support children and young people in urgent mental health crises.

After reviewing 15 studies, we discovered that the most effective help is easy to reach at any time, suitable for different ages, and provided by highly trained staff. Support works best when it's available at home or in the community, and when parents, schools, and organisations get involved early to prevent crises. Young people prefer quick, private options like texting, but staff need special skills to help this way.

The research highlights how there are still gaps, especially for those with autism, eating disorders, or from LGBTQ+ backgrounds, who often need more support.

Our findings are helping NHS Sussex improve services, showing what works, what needs fixing, and how to plan for the future—benefiting young people, families, and mental health professionals across Kent, Surrey, and Sussex.

[Read More](#)





Building research skills

Our Academy helps people in Kent, Surrey and Sussex to get involved in health and care research, making it open and accessible to everyone.

Working with universities, hospitals, and local communities, we support researchers at every career stage, offering advice, mentoring, and practical resources.

So far, we have handed out over 70 Individual Development Awards (IDAs) to help health and social care staff grow their research skills and carry out real projects.

These grants are mainly for mid-career professionals and can be used for training, mentoring, or time to develop new ideas.

In 2024 alone, we awarded 17 IDAs across Kent, Surrey and Sussex, including 10 Springboard Awards (for short projects) and 7 seven (1-year) Future Research Leader projects, focusing on topics like menopause and skin health, suicide prevention for autistic adults, adapting eating disorder treatment for ADHD, and social prescribing for new mothers.

Recipients from the NHS, universities, and councils received mentoring to help turn their research into local improvements.



50+

Mentoring partnerships

Helping professionals grow in research and care.



Eva Eastman is an occupational therapist with the Sussex Eating Disorder Service working in collaboration with Sussex Partnership Research in Eating Disorders (SPIRED) and a recipient of a Future Leader IDA. Her research focuses on improving treatment for people who have both eating disorders and ADHD.



Dr Oluwatoyin Sorinmade is a Consultant in Old Age Psychiatry and has spent about 20 years helping people with mental health problems. Receiving an IDA Springboard Award has given him the chance to study this important area further.

Strengthening adult social care research

We currently fund individuals across Kent, Surrey and Sussex to develop research projects that improve adult social care.

The programme supports professionals from universities, care providers and local authorities with up to 18 months of funding, mentoring and learning.

Projects include asylum-seeking care worker recruitment, safeguarding in social work, wellbeing in care homes, and a new care model for older adults. The awards aim to strengthen research that benefits people receiving care, their families and communities. This year, we funded 3 social care fellowships to help develop research skills in social care.



Alison Charles, ARC KSS Social Care Fellow, tested a care planning tool, gained research experience, and contributed to advancing person-centred care practices.

"This was my first fellowship application, so I'll admit that it was a learning experience but one with a very positive outcome."



Lucinda Kalupka, Director of Home Counties Carers, evaluated the Hatha Helper role to support older adults' independence and wellbeing.

"Even if you don't think research is your area, it's fascinating to see what's happening—and you might be surprised by how much you learn and how much you have to offer."

Fellowships help boost dementia research



Our dementia fellows work on projects that focus on practical solutions, to improve the lives of those affected by dementia. To date, we have funded 5 fellows to research topics such as: living alone with dementia, care access, and safe data use.

Alessandro Bosco joined as a Dementia Fellow in August 2024 to lead research on emergency dementia care. His work focuses on improving crisis response for people with dementia, particularly in rural areas like East Sussex.

Our PhD Students

Since 2019, we've supported 43 PhD students across 8 key themes, with 5 graduates already making an impact and more on the way.



Stevie Creasy studied maths at the University of Surrey and became interested in using it for medical questions. He completed a PhD focussing on using computers to spot heart rhythm problems and his research was published in a medical journal. Stevie now works as a Countermeasures Engineer, using his skills to solve industry problems.



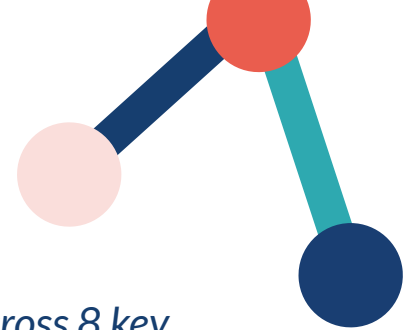
Roxana Pomplun is currently studying how social media affects teenagers at the University of Kent. She talks to young people to hear their stories, looking at both the good and bad sides of social media to help everyone understand the online world children live in today.



Amaani Al-Azzawi is studying for a PhD at Brighton and Sussex Medical School, looking at how to help people with dementia who experience hallucinations. She has led several research projects and hopes to become a Clinical Psychologist, combining research with helping patients.



Samiat Oshodi, is a PhD student at the University of Kent, studying how cultural parenting practices in Black African families interact with children's social services. Inspired by her own experiences, she wants to make services better for families and communities.





Championing public involvement & research inclusion

Our 41 public members have made a real difference in our work across 12 governance groups. They've helped us talk more clearly, created useful case studies, and come up with ideas to better involve the community.

Their input has improved how we include people, made it easier for researchers to find volunteers, and helped us choose key leaders. One public member now sits on our Executive Group, making sure local voices are heard. Their honest views and real-life experience keep us focused on what matters most to the people we serve.

We have also made how we fund our projects fairer by including trained public members on our funding panels. Their feedback ensures projects meet community needs, improves inclusion and equality, and makes funding decisions more transparent, accessible, and relevant to local people.

Our online Public and Community Involvement and Engagement (PCIE) How-to-Guide has been updated and now includes sections on research inclusion and community partnerships, providing accessible advice and further reading.

With over 800 visits, it's supporting researchers to involve the public and improve their studies' impact.

[Download Here](#)



Empowering young people as research leaders

Empowering young people as research leaders has had a real impact in Kent, Surrey, and Sussex.

Through our Youth Research Partnership Programme, we were able to fund 3 projects in the region to support young people to co-produce and co-design research that directly impact how children and young people's mental health is delivered.

In Sussex, young people ran projects that set up support groups in schools, launched awareness campaigns, and held "digital detox" events in youth centres to help their peers use technology in a healthier way.

In Surrey, neurodivergent young people worked as peer researchers, leading to schools creating quiet rooms and using visual aids, making classrooms more inclusive.

In Kent, young people's research led to lunchtime movement clubs, anti-stigma campaigns, and peer mentoring to help with the move to secondary school. These projects show that when young people are involved in research, real improvements happen—and thanks to extra funding, these positive changes will continue.



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Meet our public members



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Jade Davies Public Contributor

Jade contributed to a study that examined links between surgery, illness, and opioid use. Motivated by her experience with a long-term health condition, she joined to understand medication research and support work that benefits others.



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Jason Grant-Rowles Board Public Advisor

Jason applies his lived experience and professional expertise to advance mental health research. After navigating the mental health system, he's spent a decade driving service improvements. From journalism to peer coaching, Jason now researches informed consent in schizophrenia at King's College London, inspiring change with empathy and resilience.



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Jean Boddy Theme Public Advisor (Social Care theme)

Drawing on her extensive background in health and social care, including roles as a social worker and strategic commissioner, **Jean** brings a strong commitment to co-design and public representation in research. Her personal experiences navigating the healthcare system as a parent inspired her to advocate for more inclusive and practical approaches to service development.



A personal journey

Stuart Warren, a research assistant at Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, leverages his personal experience as a carer to improve support and services, as part of a study investigating how smartphone technology can make dementia consultations better.

This report was funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS).

The views expressed are the outputs from the ARC KSS research and their authors and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.

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