

## **Workshop on Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing**

### **Background**

NorthHFutures is a collaborative, people-powered research programme that brings together the expertise and resources of six universities in the North East and North Cumbria (NENC) region to provide opportunities for everyone to engage in digital health and health-tech initiatives. These universities are Newcastle, Cumbria, Durham, Northumbria, Sunderland, and Teesside. They lead the academic partners in the hub consortium.

The hub also involves global technology companies, small to medium-sized businesses, and other enterprises and initiatives that have funding to promote research and innovation. We also work with organisations in the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, with advocacy groups, and with citizens.

We are motivated to address healthcare needs in our region that are currently not being met, and work to reduce inequalities and digital exclusion.

### **Research Collaborations**

NorthHFutures will facilitate and fund new research collaborations. Collaborative teams will undertake a research project addressing specific themes:

- Promoting Health and Nutrition for Children and Young People;
- Developing Digital Surgical Pathways (about care before, during and following an operation);
- Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing;
- Living and Ageing Well with Multiple Long-term Conditions.

Each team can bid for up to £50k, and the project can be up to 12 months in duration.

We aim to address health and care needs in our region that are currently not being met, and work to reduce inequalities and digital exclusion.

**To apply for our funding, you need to attend one of our upcoming workshops to form a collaborative team and develop a new research proposal.**

### **Join a Workshop**

The workshops will bring together people from different fields to connect, share ideas, and tackle real-world challenges. They will be professionally led, making them accessible for those who are new to research to take part.

All experience and expertise relating to the topic area will be valuable; there is no expectation around prior knowledge about research, or being an expert in the workshop topic. In addition to working with others to develop ideas into a proposal, there will be supportive guidance and mentoring from NorthHFutures researchers and collaborators - on hand at each workshop.

### What does taking part in a NorthH Futures workshop involve?

We will need participants to commit to being available for the full day of the workshop. Given the focus of the workshops on collaboration, everyone will be expected to engage with each other to develop and refine their ideas. Where relevant, there may be some suggested reading or videos provided before and during the workshops to help participants explore and benefit from relevant research or other literature.

### Who can join a workshop or project team?

Everyone can apply to take part. Our workshops will be focused so we're asking interested people to demonstrate enthusiasm and interest in cross-sector, collaborative research activities.

There are funding rules from EPSRC (Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council) about who can lead a project team and how different organisations can receive funds from the award – find out more about this in the call guidance document, or get in touch with the NorthH Futures Hub Programme Manager Jen Wood: [jennifer.wood@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:jennifer.wood@newcastle.ac.uk).

### After the Workshop: Application and Assessment Process

If you apply for funding from NorthH Futures, your application will be reviewed by our Research Board. This board includes representatives from the Health and Care sector, the VCSE sector, and academics from our six partner universities.

The board uses a juried process to review applications. This means that the board members will discuss each application together before making decisions about funding. They will use specific criteria to assess each bid.

### How to apply

To participate in the workshop, applicants need to show enthusiasm and interest in pursuing cross-sector, collaborative research.

We invite expressions of interest for workshops from those in:

- Academic roles - including researchers at any stage of their research career from all disciplines;
- Professional practitioner roles (non-academic) - including NHS, industry, VCSE, local government.

**Please complete the expression of interest form: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/V2ML6JV>.**

### Contact

If you have any questions about this Call for Participation, or about your eligibility to take part, please contact NorthH Futures Manager, Jen Wood: [jennifer.wood@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:jennifer.wood@ncl.ac.uk).

## Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing: Theme Summary

[northfutures.org](https://northfutures.org)



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### Why focus on Mental Health and Wellbeing?

Mental health and wellbeing are critical aspects of individual and community life, with mental health issues being prevalent globally. Supporting mental health and wellbeing can positively contribute to a person's quality of life and reduce risk factors of physical health.

The North-East of England and North Cumbria (NENC) region consistently faces challenges in this area, with higher rates of mental health problems compared to the national average. This research workshop aims to address this disparity by supporting pre-competitive scoping studies that explore innovative solutions for improving mental health and wellbeing in the region.

Mental health and wellbeing are critical aspects of individual and community life. Supporting mental health and wellbeing contributes to a person's quality of life, enhancing longevity, and reducing risk factors linked to physical health. In addition, poor mental health and wellbeing have an economic cost and are linked to reduced productivity and increased health/social care utilisation.

A joint report from the All-Parliamentary Party Group for 'left behind' neighbourhoods and the Northern Health Science Alliance [3] finds that people in England's most deprived neighbourhoods work longer hours than those in the rest of the country but live shorter lives with more years in ill health, costing an estimated £29.8 billion a year to the economy in lost productivity. Many of these 'left behind' neighbourhoods are in NENC and Yorkshire.

## EPSRC Northern Health Futures Hub for the North East & North Cumbria

People living in LBNs are more likely to not be in employment due to mental health conditions, claiming almost double the amount of incapacity benefits due to mental health related conditions compared to England as a whole, with 4.4% compared to 4.1% in other deprived areas and 2.3% nationally.

### What health outcomes we are looking to improve?

We seek a diverse range of positive outcomes for NENC. We are open to a broad interpretation of positive impact for mental health and wellbeing, however, some indicative examples are:

- Reduced prevalence of mental health disorders;
- Enhanced mental wellbeing: fostering resilience, positive coping mechanisms, and social connectedness;
- Improved access to and use of mental health services: increasing help-seeking behaviour and promoting early intervention.

The NENC region faces challenges in this area, with higher rates of some mental health problems compared to the national average [4]. Bambra et al. (2023) [5] used anti-depressant prescribing [6] as an indicator of the prevalence of mental illness within the North-East. In November 2021, the mean number of antidepressants prescribed per person was 4.6 across England; considerably lower than the value in NHS County Durham CCG (6.8) and NHS Tees Valley CCG (6.2).

This research workshop aims to address disparity in the prevalence of mental illness by supporting pre-competitive scoping studies that explore innovative solutions for improving mental health and wellbeing in the region.

**Further Reading:** Public Health England released their report on “Public mental health and wellbeing in the North East” (2018), which provides a snapshot of data about various aspects of mental health in the NE: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-north-east-2018-public-mental-health-and-wellbeing>.

**References:** [1] Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (n.d.) Mental Health and Wellbeing JSNA <https://t.ly/LuUkp> [2] Kessler RC, et al. (2005) <https://t.ly/a18m6> [3] Munford, Mott et al. (2022) <https://t.ly/V0q6o> [4] NENC Mental Health Integrated Care System Programme Progress Report (2022) <https://t.ly/IVk81> [5] Bambra C et al (2023) <https://t.ly/LjCTe> [6] NHS England (2019) [https://t.ly/o\\_9US](https://t.ly/o_9US)

**Theme Leads:** Dr. Chris Bull, Newcastle University & Prof. John S. Young, Teesside University. Contact Jen Wood [jennifer.wood@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:jennifer.wood@ncl.ac.uk) with all enquiries.

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