

NCMH

National Centre for Mental Health
Canolfan Iechyd Meddwl Genedlaethol

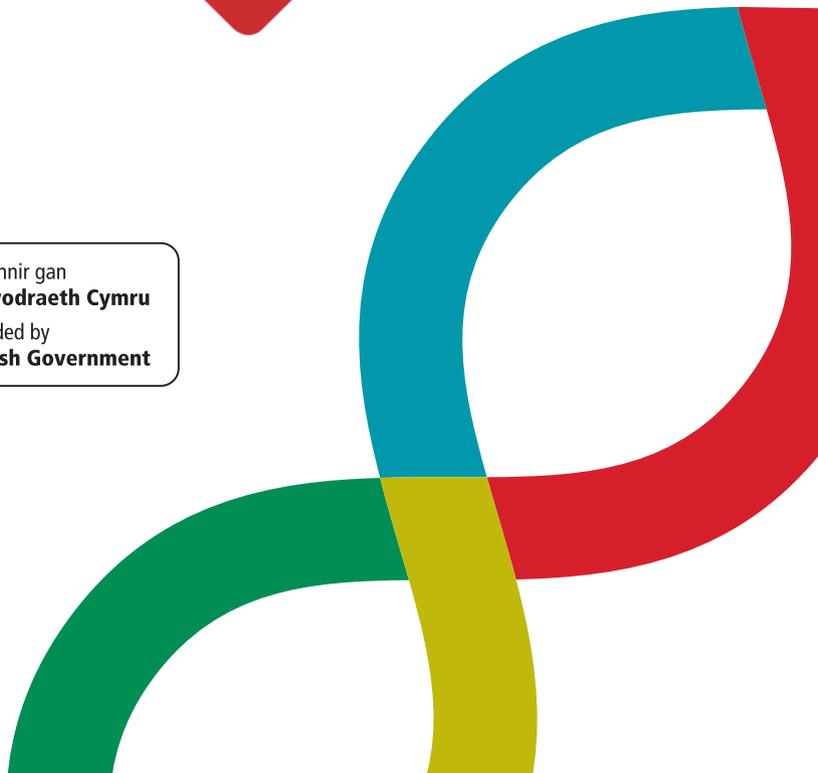


Ymchwil Iechyd
a Gofal Cymru
Health and Care
Research Wales



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

2021-22 Annual Report





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Foreword

We're pleased to present our 2021-22 annual report after another challenging year for us at the National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH).

COVID has continued to impact hugely on us all and at NCMH we have had to adapt our ways of working to the pandemic. Despite these difficulties, as illustrated in the pages to come, we can be very proud of the fantastic achievements described. This, as always, is only possible through the close collaboration of our academic partners, clinical services, the third sector and, most importantly, those with lived experience of mental health conditions. This has always been at the centre of what we do at NCMH.

You will read about surveys launched to understand the impact of COVID on people with experience of mental health conditions. New work on the mental health of new mothers and a new survey of the parents of children with ADHD. We have also re-launched our recruitment through health boards and trusts across the UK having had these studies paused through COVID. We are overwhelmed, as always, with the generosity of those who give up their time to participate in our work. Perhaps most excitingly, we have set up a new collaboration with Akriya Health which will see us look to recruit a further 10,000 participants to our cohort over the next two years.

People with lived experience are central, of course, to all that we do at NCMH. Whether this be through the (Partnership in Research) PÂR

group or our other involvement groups that help us ensure the voice of lived experience is heard in the planning and delivery of mental health research, participants who give their time to take part in research studies, or our research champions who do such fantastic work spreading the word about research opportunities and engaging with the public. You will read about our progress towards coproducing an involvement strategy that will guide our work in this area.

A major strength of NCMH is bringing together world class research groups across Bangor, Swansea and Cardiff Universities. Despite the challenging year, you can read about the progress of our SAIL work, the Centre for Mental Health and Society, and the MRC Centre for Psychiatric Genetics and Genomics. There is lots to be excited about for the future.

Our Learning Disability work goes from strength to strength with the Engage to Change programme of work continuing to make a huge impact. Perhaps the most exciting area of progress for NCMH has been our work in intervention development. You will read about the important findings of studies that are helping us understand better how to help people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

We hope you enjoy reading about our work and will continue with us on the NCMH journey.

There is much still to do but together we really can make a difference for mental health.



Professor Ian Jones
Director



Dr Sarah Knott
Centre Manager

Who we are

The National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH) brings together leading researchers from Cardiff, Swansea and Bangor University

Funded by Welsh Government through Health and Care Research Wales



Our mission

To improve the mental health and wellbeing of the people of Wales

Aims

- To advance mental health and learning disability research in Wales
- To engage with patients, their families, the wider public and third sector organisations in Wales to increase understanding of mental illness and the need for research
- To change the research culture in health and social care services



Who's who

The NCMH team is made up of academics, clinicians and professional support staff from three of Wales' leading universities - Cardiff, Swansea and Bangor.



Ian Jones
NCMH Director



Jon Bisson
NCMH Deputy Director

NCMH Executive Board

- James Walters
- Michael Owen
- Keith Lloyd
- Stephen Beyer
- Jeremy Hall
- Ann John
- Rob Poole
- Peter Huxley
- Arianna di Florio
- Alka Ahuja

Administration Team

- Sarah Knott
- Mark Coles
- Claire Baker
- John Tredget
- Catrin Hopkins*
- Sarah Rees
- Naomi Marfell
- Tyler Savory
- Andrew Worsey

Recruitment Team

- Lawrence Raisanen
- Andrew Beazer
- Natalie Richards
- Holly Pearce
- Alice Roberts
- Danielle Kitney
- Claudia Evison
- Chloe Apsey*

Laboratory Team

- Ngoc-Nga Vinh*
- Alex Evans
- Patrick Weller

SAIL Team

- Marcos del Pozo Banos
- Sze Chim Lee

Data Analysts

- Katie Lewis
- Catrin Lewis
- Amy Lynham
- Leon Hubbard
- Elen Thomas

Engage to Change

- Andrea Meek*
- Elisa Vigna*
- Jacob Meighan*

Placement Students

- Leah Bailey
- Patrick Parry
- Ellie Daniel

* Not directly employed by NCMH, but part funded in some cases

Core Metrics

Reporting period: **2021/2022**

**Health and Care
Research Wales
infrastructure award
to the group**

 Direct
funding
awarded
£1.2m

Jobs created
through direct
funding

 CV
30

Grants won during reporting period

Grants won	Led by group	Group collaborating
Number	11	9
Value	£2.6m	£21.1m
Funding to Wales	£2.5m	£18.3m
Funding to group	£2.4m	£1m
Additional jobs created for Wales	15	3
Additional jobs created for group	15	2


192

Number of publications


10

Number of public
engagement events


27

Number of public
involvement opportunities



Cohorts and smart assessments

This year we reached our 23,943th participant.

This incredible number of volunteers has enabled us to build the NCMH cohort as a world-leading resource for mental health research.

It underpins our research programmes aimed at better understanding biological, psychological and social factors contributing to mental health problems.

Volunteers are asked questions around a range of topics, including mental and physical health, lifestyle, employment and education.

Expanding the cohort

There have been several important developments this year. This includes expanding our research investigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals with lived experience of a mental health diagnosis. 3,000 participants completed baseline and follow-up surveys.

We have also received approval for and launched other condition specific online surveys. These include a maternal mental health and wellbeing survey investigating the impact of life experiences (including the COVID-19 crisis) on wellbeing for women during the perinatal period.

We have approached 22 NHS sites about recruiting to the study in addition to online promotion. To date we have had 584 women participate in the survey.

We have also launched recruitment to a survey for parents of children with a diagnosis of ADHD.

Perhaps the most important work this year in the smart cohort has been the setting up of a major collaboration with Akkrivia Health, which will see an initial £1.37m investment into Cardiff University over the next two years.

This funding will support our NCMH cohort development with a target of 10,000 participants with interview, linked electronic health data, and genetic sequencing data.

This collaboration has resulted from the recruitment infrastructure and track record of success we have developed with Health and Care Research Wales' support, and we believe will be a major game changer regarding our future recruitment plans.



Understanding the impact of life experiences on the mental health of new mums

The NCMH maternity study is looking at the role that maternal wellbeing, mental health and life events plays on the perinatal period.

The aim is to understand the role that these factors have on pregnancy outcomes such as:

- prenatal bonding
- childbirth outcomes such as the physical and mental health outcomes relating to the birth
- postnatal outcomes such as mother-infant interactions.

By exploring and understanding any factors that disrupt the perinatal period, or that lead to poorer perinatal outcomes, the hope is that identification, management, and treatment of these outcomes can be improved.

We know that being pregnant and raising young children during the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly challenging for new parents.

Attending antenatal appointments alone or with limited support from a loved one, being unable to introduce your new baby to family members and friends, and being isolated at home with limited practical and emotional support has had

a negative impact on women's emotional and physical wellbeing.

We want to better understand women's experiences during this challenging time in order to inform policymakers and health and social care providers about the changes that need to be put in place.

We have currently had over 700 people take part in our online study from across the whole of the United Kingdom. Anyone who is either pregnant, or within one year of giving birth is eligible to take part.

The study involves an initial online questionnaire, with a couple of follow ups through email relating to timepoints in the postpartum period.

From those that have taken part so far we have been able to begin some preliminary analysis looking at the prevalence of episodes of mental ill-health, stressful life events and physical wellbeing, and look at the effects that this is having on maternal physical and mental wellbeing relating to the birth itself.

Read more about the survey at: ncmh.info/maternal

Developing interventions

The NCMH Intervention Development Workstream was set up to facilitate the development and evaluation of interventions to prevent and treat mental health problems.

In addition to 3MDR and RAPID, two trials around Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) treatments, we are developing and evaluating a range of other interventions:

These include:

- Bipolar Education Programme Cymru
- pregnancy planning for bipolar and postpartum psychosis
- treating anxiety to prevent relapse in psychosis
- antidepressants for the prevention of depression in first episode psychosis
- MoodHwb, a digital programme for mood and wellbeing in young people
- reducing neuroinflammation to treat depression in people who have not fully responded to standard antidepressant drugs
- the Rewind Technique for PTSD
- guided self help for the disturbances in self-organisation symptoms of complex PTSD

Developing new ways to support people with Bipolar Disorder

In the last year, we have continued to offer virtual Bipolar Education Programme Cymru (BEPC) sessions.

BEPC is an award-winning group psychoeducation programme that aims to improve the quality of life for people with bipolar disorder.

The course enables individuals to better manage their condition by understanding the symptoms of bipolar disorder, identifying their triggers and monitoring their mood to help them stay as well as possible.

There are 10 sessions, each run in a group format with between 8 and 12 people.

The online BEPC course was introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic as restrictions did not allow for face-to-face groups.

We recognised that there was still a need to support those living with bipolar disorder and produced an online course which was easily accessible to participants. The online course was shortened to six weeks and ran consecutively.

The course covered the following topics; an introduction to psychoeducation and BEPC, what is bipolar disorder and causes, treatments, self-management, and an overview of the course.

A family and friends session was also introduced to help those who are supporting a loved one with bipolar disorder.

We have delivered six online courses with 33 participants completing the BEPC course with excellent take up and feedback.

During the last year, we have been finalising an online training package for those wishing to facilitate local BEPC in-person groups.

Due to the success of the online BEPC course, we have also worked on finalising a tool for facilitators from Bipolar UK to conduct the groups virtually. We hope that this will enable more people to access the course from further afield.



RAPID trial results: Guided self-help vs face-to-face therapy

RAPID was a research trial designed to determine if guided self-help (GSH) using Spring, a web-based programme, is as effective for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as face-to-face cognitive behavioural therapy with a trauma focus (CBT-TF).

Typical PTSD treatment involves 12-16 hours of face-to-face meetings with a therapist, which can take time to access due to long waiting lists. In 2005, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommended the need for more research to identify different ways to treat PTSD.

Development began in collaboration with NHS Wales on a GSH programme for the treatment of mild-to-moderate PTSD. Spring, an online GSH treatment, was developed with people with lived experience of PTSD.

The RAPID trial, led by NCMH Deputy Director Professor Jon Bisson, took place between 2017 and 2021 across multiple NHS locations in England, Scotland and Wales. 196 people with PTSD took part.

Half were given the Cardiff University-devised guided web and app-based therapy Spring,

which involved an eight-step programme with guidance and support from a therapist, while the other half had 12 face-to-face therapy sessions.

Their progress was measured at 16 and 52 weeks, including by severity of symptoms of their PTSD and depression and anxiety, use of alcohol and impact on how they were functioning in daily life.

19 participants and 10 therapists were also interviewed in depth about their experiences of the new treatment, as part of the evaluation.

RAPID was funded to help determine if Spring was as effective as face-to-face CBT-TF whilst having the potential to reduce waiting times and enable flexible access.

Overall, although there was a preference for face-to-face treatment, GSH was seen as positive and helpful among participants.

The final results show that the use of guided self-help is cost-saving versus face-to-face therapy, with a saving likely to be £500 per person.



Bipolar Disorder and Postpartum Psychosis Pregnancy Planning (PREP) Study: developing an interactive guide for women at high risk

Women with bipolar disorder or previous postpartum psychosis have a high risk of experiencing severe mental illness during the perinatal period.

These women have reported difficulty in obtaining the information they need when planning and making decisions relating to pregnancy.

This project aimed to develop a guide for women with bipolar disorder and / or previous postpartum psychosis to use when planning a pregnancy.

The specific aims included determining what the critical components of the guide were, the acceptability of the guide, and the feasibility of a larger scale Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) of the guide.

A review of online information currently available to women, along with qualitative interviews with women with lived experience of bipolar disorder and / or postpartum psychosis, and professionals involved in their care, was used to inform the initial prototype of the guide.

Two pilot studies were conducted which involved women who were planning a pregnancy testing the guide and providing feedback, which was used to refine the guide alongside support from an advisory group of women.

The final prototype of the guide was an 88-page loose leaf guide with sections for women to personalise.

What did we find

Overall, our results found that the guide was acceptable to women and decisional conflict scores were reduced (representing less uncertainty) after using the guide compared to before. The guide appeared best suited to those who had received specialist professional input.

Based on the results, we recommended that the current iteration of the guide could be used to complement care within specialist perinatal mental health contexts.

Prior to conducting a larger scale trial of its use, we recommend further development work. For example, in future piloting, the guide could be trialled to be used alongside input from professionals.

Electronic data linkage

Our NCMH team based in Swansea University is led by Professors' Ann John (Primary Care and Public Health) and Keith Lloyd (Psychiatry).

It includes data scientists from a wide range of backgrounds (computer science, bioinformatics, psychology, engineering).

The team has expertise in applying psychiatric epidemiology and machine learning to mental health, suicide and self-harm prevention.

We securely and anonymously (i.e. privacy protecting) link information from surveys answered by people in the NCMH cohort to routinely collected health and social care data in the SAIL Databank- but only in those who have consented for this linkage to happen.

This means we can understand mental health issues from a social, psychological and biological perspective.

COVID-19 data

Over the last couple of years we worked (and continue to do so) to understand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of people in Wales.

With the huge capabilities of linking a wide range of data from the whole Wales population, including contacts to health services, SARS-Cov2 infection testing, COVID-19 vaccination, demographics and mortality statistics, we revealed trends in presentations to health services for mental health problems and self-harm. Professor John co-led a Global Suicide Study.

We also looked into vaccination uptake in those with severe mental illness, change in death rates for people who had previous history of self-harm, and the relationship between mental illnesses and SARS-Cov2 infection.

All our findings have been discussed with policy colleagues at Wales and UK level.

Support for autistic people in Wales

Apart from COVID-19, we, in collaboration with Professor Jeremy Hall and Dr Jack Underwood from Cardiff University, drew on linked primary and secondary healthcare records to examine how common autism spectrum disorders are in the Wales population.

We found autistic people had dramatically higher rates of all co-occurring mental health conditions compared to general population controls.

This suggests that either co-occurring conditions are not being assessed for, not diagnosed, or being overshadowed by the individual's autism diagnosis. As a result, these individuals will have unmet support needs.

We further looked at this by linking to NCMH data, and examining the relationships between co-occurring mental health conditions, autism domain trait scores, and sociodemographic questionnaire responses. Results of this work are to be published soon.

We work with DATAMIND, the HDRUK Mental Health Hub, led by Professor John and Professor Rob Stewart (King's), to ensure the FAIR use of data to improve the populations' mental health.



Centre for Mental Health and Society

An update from the NCMH team at Bangor University



The Centre for Mental Health and Society has been very busy during the last year despite continuing difficulties. Our networks and collaborations have strengthened, and we have submitted several grant proposals and published a number of papers.

For example, Sadia Nafees has secured funding to evaluate substance misuse interventions in HMP Berwyn (£325,000) and Wulf Livingstone is the deputy project leader for a project evaluation for the Tests of Change Scottish Drugs Death Task Force (£70,000).

Peter Huxley and colleagues are involved in several systematic reviews. One of them extended the seminal work of Richard Warner on recovery from schizophrenia.

We have successfully hosted internship students last year, who contributed to the systematic review looking at the first two filters of the Goldberg-Huxley model of the pathway to psychiatric care and host some more students this year.

Our international SASHI (South Asia Self-Harm Initiative) project has been extended for another 12 months, allowing us to make up for some lost time during COVID-19 lock-down.

Colleagues are working on or have published books or book chapters focusing on a range of issues such as clinical practice, research methods, and addiction and social care.

We recently submitted a consultation response to the Senedd Health and Social Care Committee inquiry into mental health inequalities and Prof Poole was invited to provide oral evidence in May this year.

To read more about the Centre's work at Bangor University, visit: cfmhas.org.uk

With a background in clinical psychology and psychotherapy, I joined CFMHS in September 2021, to work with Prof Rob Poole and Prof Peter Huxley, investigating social determinants of mental disorders.

Dr Ali Khoshferat



Genetics and mental health

The MRC Centre for Neuropsychiatric Genetics and Genomics (MRC CNGG) at Cardiff University conducts world leading research into how genetics can help us better understand mental health conditions and their causes.

This work would be impossible without the large and well characterised datasets brought together by NCMH such as the NCMH Cohort.

The Centre continued to rise to the challenges introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic and our research has continued through the hard work of all our teams, from our early career researchers to our core lab and administrative support staff.

Considering the continued constraints on how we conduct our research we have had a number of exciting developments within the Centre.

A £3.6m grant was awarded to Professor Marianne van den Bree who will lead a four-year project to investigate the links between physical and mental health problems. The international team aims to gather 760,000 participants, thanks to funding from the Medical Research Council and the National Institute for Health Research.

In the last year, we have also led the largest genetic studies of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, thanks to our global collaborations through the Psychiatric Genetics Consortium.

Our work in these areas had led to discovering further genetic risk factors (both common and rare genetic variants) for schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

Picking up our public engagement activity again, our researchers were pleased to be able to return to face-to-face events. Dr Sam Chawner led the Share Your Rare project, which brought together scientists and artists with people living with rare genetic conditions.

The project used art and poetry to share people's experiences of their conditions and the impact of the pandemic.

Professor Ian Jones and Professor Arianna di Florio spoke as part of the Cardiff University Research Showcase this year discussing the under-researched area of the link between the reproductive cycle and mental health.

I had the opportunity to join a panel at the Dubai Expo 2020, where we discussed the advances in Mental Health Digital Science alongside colleagues Professor Ann John of Swansea University and Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist Professor Alka Ahuja MBE.

Some of the best news in the last year has been the success of our early and mid-career researchers.

These highlights have included Dr Sam Chawner who was awarded a Medical Research Foundation fellowship enabling him to study the intersection of eating disorders and rare genetic conditions in children and adolescents, and Professor Arianna di Florio who was awarded a personal chair this year.

Our commitment to training and supporting the next generation of researchers has thus continued and we are looking forward to welcoming the students to our MRC CNGG Centre Summer School in July this year to take this forward.



Professor James Walters
Director of MRC CNGG

Learning Disability research

Our Learning Disability (LD) Research Team evaluates the work of the Engage to Change (E2C) project which aims to create and support employment opportunities by working with young people and employers across Wales.

E2C has worked with a total of 1195 young people (16-25) who are learning disabled and/or Autistic, providing 414 paid placements and 306 paid jobs, achieving an overall employment rate of 26% (compared with the UK figure of 5.1%*).

A report on *E2C: The first four years* was completed this year together with *Coronavirus and People with Learning Disabilities Study: Wave 3 Results* which was co-produced with other researchers, third sector organisations and self-advocacy groups and delivered a national study of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning disabled people.

The Research Team also delivered an Impact Study on E2C for Cardiff University's 2021 Research Excellence Framework submission.

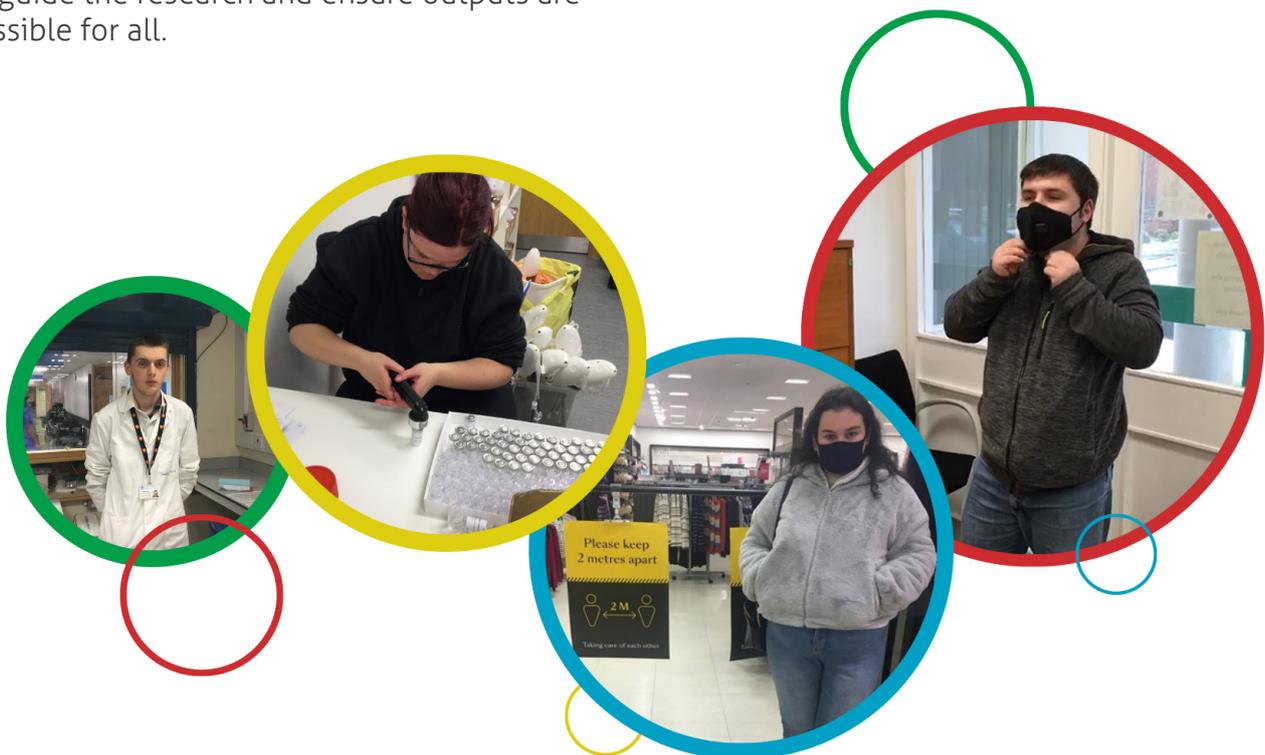
Public involvement is central to this work and the LD team have engaged closely with a national self-advocacy group and project participants who guide the research and ensure outputs are accessible for all.

Our LD Research Team continued to raise the profile of supported employment by using E2C data to inform policy through membership of Welsh Government's Disabled People's Employment Group, and through presentations to Welsh Government policy and Learning Disability and Autism Strategy groups.

The team also co-produced a young person led workshop entitled "Neurodiversity: Our lived experience" exploring the concept of neurodiversity through lived experience, focusing on abilities and strengths.

This was presented at a national conference in addition to over 120 staff members. This work led to a nomination for Andrea Meek and Elisa Vigna who were shortlisted for a Celebrating Excellence award for Excellence in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

*BASE. 2022. Employment Rates for People with Disabilities 2020-21. Available at: base-uk.org/employment-rates





Involvement

NCMH has further invested in its public involvement over the last year, widening the range of activities we have undertaken and increasing opportunities for those with lived experience to shape our research.

We have a new part-time administrator in post to help support the coordination of our public advisory groups, and are looking to increase the groups' membership in the coming months.

Over the last year, public contributors have worked with our researchers on a range of different projects and funding bids.

A notable achievement in March for members of our Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Public Advisory group was presenting in person at the inaugural Traumatic Stress Wales conference in Cardiff.

Members ran a workshop session on co-production in traumatic stress research,

highlighting examples of their excellent work in co-producing animations and leaflets.

Our PÂR lived experience group continues to support the mental health research community to incorporate public involvement in its work through the freely available research clinics.

The group has also been working hard behind the scenes over the last year on strategy and governance issues.

Having an involvement strategy for NCMH that has been co-produced with public contributors will ensure that the voice of lived experience is embedded in our processes.

We are always looking for members of the public with lived experience of mental health conditions to join our advisory groups, and some exciting new opportunities will soon be advertised.



A psychologist by background, my primary research interest is mental health and wellbeing. I am the Intervention Development Coordinator at NCMH. As part of my role, I am the Public Involvement Lead for the centre.

Dr Sarah Rees
Public Involvement Lead



Innovative events

While much of our activity continued to be held online during 2021-22, we were pleased to have the chance for some face-to-face engagement with the public.

In the summer of 2021 we were thrilled to take part in the Subatomic Circus organised by Cardiff Council and Cardiff University as part of the Summer of Smiles activities.

Cardiff University researcher Dr Sam Chawner was running a project to share the stories of people with rare genetic conditions and their experiences with their mental health and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the project, we also supported and hosted a number of workshops and discussions to involve the rare genetic community at every stage.

In the autumn, the NCMH team hosted a webinar to mark ten years of research at NCMH, bringing together the teams from across Cardiff, Bangor and Swansea to share with the public and other key stakeholders the research developments in the last ten years.

We also hosted a webinar for those involved in the RAPID Trial – a UK-wide study that looked at whether virtual guided self-help could be as effective for PTSD recovery as in-person talking therapies – and we welcomed staff and participants to hear the results from the trial's lead researchers.

We were pleased to run a successful Winter

School in Psychiatry which saw more than 60 students from Cardiff, Swansea, and Bristol universities (as well as a few global attendees) attend talks and workshops from our experts in the field.

Before the end of 2021, Professor Ian Jones, director of NCMH, and Professor Arianna Di Florio, from the Division of Psychological Medicine and Clinical Neurosciences, spoke as part of the Cardiff University Research Showcase, discussing how their work hopes to improve the current approach to diagnosis, prevention and treatment for the mental health challenges women face in key life stages.

In early 2022, we supported Dr Katie Lewis with two workshops and talks at the Grange Pavillion based on sleep and mental health. Katie hopes to run a public engagement project around this topic with young people in 2023 and was involving the young people's group at the pavilion to have their feedback and input to her funding application.

As part of University Mental Health Day, we partnered with the Cardiff University Student Wellbeing team to hold a stand in the new Centre for Student Life, offering the opportunity to take part in research and raise awareness of the support available at the university.

Visit [youtube.com/NcmhInfoWales](https://www.youtube.com/NcmhInfoWales) to watch webinars and animations from this year's research and events.

The way forward

We are very proud of what we have achieved but are aware that this is the result of close collaboration with all involved with NCMH – our academic partners, clinical services, the third sector and, most importantly, those with lived experience of mental health conditions.

As we slowly move beyond the pandemic, we recognise there is much still to do. Our challenge over the coming years is to deliver the NCMH mission of improving the mental health and wellbeing of the people of Wales.

Over the coming years we will continue to develop our activity in three key ways:

- 1.** We will link our activity more closely with the priorities of NHS Wales, focusing recruitment, policy and intervention work in areas of new service development that map onto our areas of research excellence.
- 2.** We will move to less labour-intensive models of recruitment and assessment that work at scale, at distance and at lower cost.
- 3.** Last, but certainly not least, we will increase focus on translating our research activity into real world impact, building on our excellent track record of intervention development to improve the health and wellbeing of those in Wales and internationally.

Mental illness is complex, multifactorial, and there are no easy answers. We recognise the challenges and difficulties we will face but will continue to focus on translating our research activity into real world impact.

We will build on what we have achieved, working together, to understand biological, social and psychological factors in mental health and to translate this understanding into interventions that will truly make a difference for mental health.

Together we can make a difference for mental health.





NCMH
National Centre for Mental Health

**Mental Health Research:
Help us change lives**



Ymchwil Iechyd
a Gofal Cymru
Health and Care
Research Wales



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
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