



Ymchwil Iechyd
a Gofal Cymru
Health and Care
Research Wales



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

2020-2025 End of award report

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Foreword

We're pleased to present this report covering the last five years of NCMH activity.

We are proud of what we have achieved as we seek to deliver our mission of improving the mental health and wellbeing of the people of Wales. Our work is only possible through the funding we receive from Welsh Government, through Health and Care Research Wales who we thank for their ongoing support.

You will read about the wide-ranging activity that brings together centres of research excellence across Bangor, Swansea and Cardiff Universities. There have been many challenges over the last five years, not least those arising from the pandemic, but we have continued to make fantastic progress in many areas, recruiting many more people into mental health research studies and developing new interventions.

Working collaboratively is central to all that NCMH achieves, bringing together researchers, clinicians, industry and third sector organisations. Our most import collaboration, however, is with those with lived experience. Our work will ultimately be judged by the progress we make in improving the lives of those with mental illness.

We hope you enjoy the report and will continue to travel with us on our journey.

Together we 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



Meet the team

Director



Ian Jones

Deputy Director



Jon Bisson

Researchers

Amy Lynham
Catrin Lewis
Sophie Smart
Jessica Yang
Andrea Meek*

Elisa Vigna*
Zahra Jorjoran Shushtari
Amanda Marchant
Mark Atkinson

NCMH Executive Board

James Walters
Arianna Di Florio
Jeremy Hall
Ann John
Keith Lloyd
Rob Poole
Emily Peckham

Administration Team

Sarah Knott	Andrew Worsey
Mark Coles	David Vellacott
Claire Baker	Jacob Meighan*
Tyler Savory	

Public engagement and involvement

Catrin Hopkins	Julia Pearce
Ellie Short	Sarah Rees*

Data Team

Sahana Baskar
Daniel Oakes

Laboratory Team

Alexandra Evans*
Nicola Graham

Psychology and Research Assistants

Anna Simpson	Eden Cronin*
Emily Wright	Georgia Dash*
Danielle Kitney	Soumita Ramesh*
Kate Fallon	Fevin Saji*
Gabriella Dettero Snell*	Elizabeth Braithwaite*
Bronwen Thomas*	Blessing Erioghaye-
Chloe Apsey*	Omoregbee*
Sandapa Punchihewa*	Anwen Johnson*
Jordan Herrington*	Demi White*

Placement student

Janice Yun

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

There are many others who have been part of our team over the last five years whose efforts have been vital to everything we have achieved.

Thank you.



UK Research
and Innovation



Centre for Neuropsychiatric
Genetics and Genomics
Canolfan Geneteg a
Genomeg Niwroseiciatrig



Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe



Adferiad

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



Direct
funding
awarded
£4.7M

Jobs created
through direct
funding

CV
30

Grants won during reporting period

Grants won	Led by group	Group collaborating
Number	61	45
Value	£27.2M	£49.8M
Funding to Wales	£23.2M	£34.4M
Funding to group	£22.9M	£5.7M
Additional jobs created for Wales	87	56
Additional jobs created for group	86	20

565

Number of publications



Number of public
engagement events



Number of public
involvement opportunities

Key achievements



The success of NCMH over the 2020-25 award has been driven by our commitment to involving and engaging patients, carers, health care professionals, and the wider public to deliver high-impact and internationally recognised research.

Health and Care Research Wales' investment has enabled mental health research in Wales to become truly world-leading. Over the next few pages, we have summarised some of our key achievements over the last five years.

Supporting Wales' international leadership in genetic research

Through new NCMH recruitment and curation of existing participant cohorts, Wales contributes the largest samples in global genetic studies of schizophrenia (around 30%) and bipolar disorder (around 20%), with major contributions in other areas e.g. PTSD, ADHD, depression. This has allowed us to maintain our worldwide leadership in psychiatric genetic research.

Further notable successes in this area include the renewal of our Medical Research Council (MRC) programme grant in schizophrenia and psychosis (2023-24), as well as major EU funding received through the PsychSTRATA grant (2022-23).

We have also successfully brought National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding to Wales through two major grants: Cardiff is the European lead for the Psychiatric Genomics Consortium (2020-21), and WeSeq - Cardiff being one of three international institutions that will gather 150,000 cases with genomic data in partnership with Regeneron (2022-23).



Using funding to build a strong research infrastructure

We have built an infrastructure that not only supports existing areas of strength but also helps us grow and develop new areas of research excellence.

For example, we developed the Reproductive Mental Health programme following significant European Research Council (ERC) funding as part of the EU's Research and Innovation programme, Horizon 2020.

Led by Professor Arianna Di Florio, we launched specific programmes of work exploring premenstrual dysphoric disorder and the impact of menopause on mental health.

Another area of particular pride is the development of our intervention development work package, which supports a range of intervention studies and boasts internationally recognised expertise in the development and evaluation of guided digital self-help interventions. You can read more about our intervention development work package on page 12.

Expanding our research cohort

Over this five-year period, we strategically focussed on expanding our cohort of research participants, through the development of specific studies.

Year 1 2020-21

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals with mental health conditions.



Year 2 2021-22

Maternal mental health and wellbeing mental health of parents of children with ASD, and student mental health and wellbeing.



Year 3 2022-23

Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) and postpartum psychosis.

Read more about our cohort work on page 11.

Translating research into policy and practice

Our ultimate goal is to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the people of Wales and beyond. Therefore, translating research findings into clinical benefits for patients is at the heart of what we do.

To achieve this, it is vital that our work has impact beyond academia - informing health policy, shaping clinical guidelines, influencing service delivery, and supporting evidence-based decision-making at local, national, and international levels.

A standout accomplishment in this regard has been our work on the 'Engage to Change' (E2C) project - a £10m Lottery-funded initiative, focused on increasing employment opportunities for individuals with LD and autism spectrum disorders.

In March 2025, Eluned Morgan declared that the lessons learned of Engage to Change are integral to shaping future

job coaching practices and policies in Wales and from 2027 the new Welsh government employability support programme will include specialist job coaching services. You can read more about our learning disabilities activity on page 14.

Another example of our research driving societal benefit is our work on maternal mental health. Our research improved understanding of the risk factors for severe postpartum episodes enabling women and their clinicians to individualise risk and help make the difficult decisions around pregnancy and childbirth.

Our work demonstrated the need for specialist perinatal services, and we have worked closely with our third sector partners, Action on Postpartum Psychosis and the Maternal Mental Health Alliance, in a campaign that has delivered over £400 million in new funding to develop new perinatal services across the UK.





Forming partnerships to share knowledge, drive impact and innovation

Partnerships and collaborations have been at the heart of our success throughout the last five years.

We've worked closely with academic institutions, industry partners, international networks, and community and third sector organisations to expand our impact, share knowledge, and drive innovation across our research activities.

For example, we co-produced a training package with Action on Postpartum Psychosis (APP) that we have jointly delivered to over 650 clinicians from 30 perinatal mental health teams across the UK.

Additionally, we have a longstanding and productive relationship with Bipolar UK. Together in Year 4, we launched the Bipolar Commission: an initiative aiming to transform health care for people with bipolar disorder.

Furthermore, we have continued to

strengthen our relationship with the NHS, engaging with over 80 teams in 26 health boards and trusts to facilitate recruitment into mental health studies.

Additionally, Professor Bisson sits on the Strategic Programme for Mental Health Board, providing a further link between NHS services and the research community, and ensuring our research addresses.

Through our Cardiff University Psychiatry Service (CUPS), we have developed novel NHS clinical services and quality improvement initiatives in areas such as Women's Mental Health and Canopi: a mental health support service for NHS and social care staff across Wales.

We also developed our new Psychiatric Genomics Service (AWPGS) which provides assessment, genetic counselling, and when appropriate, genetic testing for individuals in Wales who have mental health or neurodevelopmental conditions. This pioneering service, the only one of its kind in the UK, represents a significant advancement in mental health care in Wales.

Workstreams: Cohorts and Smart Assessments

We have now reached our 32,731st participant. This incredible number of volunteers has enabled us to build the NCMH cohort as a world-leading resource for mental health research.

Over this five-year period, we have successfully expanded our cohort through the development of specific studies, including:

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals with mental health conditions
- Maternal mental health and wellbeing
- Mental health of parents of children with autism
- Student mental health and wellbeing
- Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) and post-partum psychosis.

Our cohort of research participants not only helps us explore how biological, psychological, and social factors affect mental health, but it also plays a key role in attracting research funding, building new partnerships, and supporting innovative work in personalised medicine and population health.

An example of this is our partnership with Akrivia Health, on a programme of work to establish a precision neuropsychiatry data and bioresource called 'UK Minds'.

In Year 4, we secured Medical Research Council (MRC) funding for a Mental Health Platform Research Hub. Cardiff is leading the Brain and Genomics Hub, which is one of five UK mental health hubs, representing UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) largest single investment in mental health research to date.

The Brain and Genomics Hub will support the creation of a new cohort of 600 participants diagnosed with psychosis, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or schizoaffective disorder.

By collecting a wide range of information (including developmental history, clinical assessments, cognition, brain imaging, genetic data, and measures of physical health) the project aims to better understand the causes and mechanisms of these serious mental health conditions, ultimately leading to more accurate and informed diagnoses.



Workstreams:

Intervention Development

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

Our wide-ranging portfolio of intervention activity, includes:

- Bipolar Education Programme Cymru, supported by the Big Lottery Fund
- Treating anxiety to prevent relapse in psychosis, supported by Health and Care Research Wales
- MoodHwb, a digital programme for mood and wellbeing in young people, funded by Health and Care Research Wales through UK-wide NIHR competition
- Spring, funded by the NIHR Health Technology Assessment programme
- Guided self-help for the disturbances in self-organisation symptoms of complex PTSD, supported by NHS funding via Traumatic Stress Wales
- Antidepressants for the prevention of depression in first episode psychosis (funded by National Institute for Health Research)

Trauma-focussed guided self-help for PTSD

Our flagship programme, Spring, a digital trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT-TF) guided self-help programme for PTSD, has proven highly impactful, contributing to changes in clinical guidelines, improving service delivery, and making a meaningful difference in the care and outcomes for people affected by trauma.

In a randomised controlled trial (RCT), Spring was shown to be non-inferior to standard face-to-face therapy and to require less than a third of the therapist contact time. As a result, CBT-TF was recommended as a treatment for PTSD in the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies

(2018), Matrics Cymru (2023) and NICE treatment guidelines (2018).

Spring also received a conditional recommendation by NICE for the digitally enabled treatment of anxiety disorders (2023) and is being used to treat people with PTSD in all seven NHS Wales Health Boards.

We are now developing and evaluating guided digital self-help interventions for other conditions to continue this impactful work.





Workstreams: Electronic Data Linkage

Our NCMH team at Swansea University which is led by Professors' Ann John (Public Health and Psychiatry: pictured above) and Keith Lloyd (Psychiatry), is recognised internationally as leaders in data science and electronic data linkage.

The work of our Swansea team allows us to harness the power of data linkage by securely and anonymously linking information from surveys answered by people who have consented for data linkage to routinely collected health and social care data in the SAIL Databank. This means we can understand mental health issues from a social, psychological, and biological perspective, improving the quality and impact of research, while having peoples' privacy protected.

The team work with DATAMIND, the HDR UK Mental Health Hub, funded by the MRC, and led by Professor Rob Stewart (from KCL) and Professor Ann John, to ensure FAIR use of data to improve populations' mental health.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we utilised data linkage and machine learning methods to investigate the impact of the pandemic on mental health service use, self-harm presentations and vaccination uptake among those with severe mental illnesses, providing valuable insights shared with policymakers to inform public health decisions.



We also conducted the first study for any medical disorder to combine genetic data, administrative health records and sociodemographic data held in the SAIL databank, which identified concerning health inequalities, including increased rates of neurodevelopmental disorders and cardiometabolic conditions among individuals with schizophrenia, which has major implications for the clinical care of patients.

By Year 3 (22/23), our research expanded globally, with NCMH co-leading a study on suicide rates across 33 countries, which found no significant increase in suicide rates during the early pandemic months.

Findings were published and discussed with policymakers in Wales, UK, and WHO levels. In Year 4 the group's research into suicide prevention gained further momentum, with studies highlighting that nearly 60% of individuals who died by suicide had sought emergency care within a year. Professor John presented these insights to policymakers to enhance mental health support systems.

These examples demonstrate how our work has helped advance mental health research and support evidence-based policy changes, leading to a more compassionate and proactive approach to mental health care.

Learning disability research

Our Learning Disability (LD) research team has achieved a tremendous amount over the last five years through the Engage to Change (E2C) project.

E2C was a £10 million project awarded by the Lottery Community Fund in partnership with Welsh Government, following evidence provided by Cardiff University on the benefits of supported employment.

E2C set out to get young people with learning disabilities into paid employment. They used a person-centred approach to support each young person and their employer with a comprehensive package including one-to-one job coaching, job matching, and CV and interview training.

The project introduced 12-month Supported Internships to Wales for the first time. By the end of May 2023, it had delivered services to 1075 young people, and a further 202 entered a Supported Internship.

Of these, 475 young people entered paid work placements and 429 entered paid jobs.

Through the hard work of the team working tirelessly to raise the profile of supported employment, the project directly influenced Welsh Government policy in relation to use of job coaching in apprenticeships, traineeships and supported internships.

In March 2025, Eluned Morgan declared that findings from E2C will be used to shape the new Welsh Government Employability Support Programme and that it was committed to mainstream job coaching and supported employment provision in Wales.

This is an incredible achievement for the team and project and thank to numerous resources which will service people with learning disabilities, their families, schools, local authorities, policy makers and employers, the impact and legacy of E2C will live on to continue to advance the field of supported employment in Wales and beyond.



Centre for Mental Health and Society



The Centre for Mental Health and Society (CFMHAS) is based in Bangor University and led by Professor Rob Poole (pictured right) CFMHAS brings together experts from social science and health backgrounds to explore how social factors and support affect mental health.

The group have been incredibly active over the past five years, building strong partnerships and networks and making important contributions to Welsh Government and UK national policy.

For example, CFMHAS has led a major programme of clinical innovation and research into the use of high dose opioid medication in the treatment of chronic pain. A team of clinicians and researchers have worked on several projects that have resulted in publications and contributions to NICE consultations. The group also led an initiative in Betsi Cadwalader University Health Board (BCUHB) that will result in unique surveillance data on high dose prescribing in Wales.

Another key area of focus has been a growing portfolio of self-harm and suicide prevention research. CFMHAS played a major role in leading international collaboration on the Global Challenges Research Fund-South Asian Self-Harm Initiative (GCRF-SASHI): a large project involving partners in Mysore, Karachi, Manchester, Oxford and Edinburgh, that looks to develop a public domain manual to guide the establishment of self-harm

registers at low cost. Building on experience of the GCRF-SASHI project, Dr Bebbington later secured funding to develop a Welsh self-harm and violence register, aiming to use novel insights to help prevent suicide in Wales.

CFMHAS have maintained strong links with Betsi Cadwalader University Health Board (BCUHB), who have demonstrated their support by match-funding a research post to explore social inequality using NCMH data. In addition, CFMHAS secured long-term funding from BCUHB to support a second research role. In 2024, CFMHAS partnered with BCUHB to deliver an international conference on 'Person friendly services: what do they look like?' where the agenda was set and attended by public members with lived experience.

Over the last five years, the team at CFMHAS has seen the appointment of prominent researchers including Dr Emily Peckham, Dr Heidi Hales and Dr Zahra Jorjoran Sushtari. This has led to increased grant applications and awards, publications, and diversification of the type of research undertaken at the centre. An example is Dr Peckham's work in complex interventions with the SPACES study which aims to co-produce and test an intervention to increase physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviour in people with severe mental ill health.

The group is one of the few active social psychiatry teams in the UK with an international reputation, and it aims to expand further over the next five years to become a major hub for social psychiatry.



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

Learning from the experts with experience

Over the past five years, we've been working hard to make sure people with lived experience of mental health are involved in everything we do - not just on individual projects, but across our whole research programme.

Shaping our direction

We moved beyond project-level involvement to embed lived experience in our overall approach. Members of our PÂR (Partnership in Research) group co-produced our involvement strategy and now contribute through a Strategic Advisory Group. We also appointed a Lay Lead to strengthen links between the public and our leadership team.

Building skills and support

A dedicated administrative support role was funded to support our growing network of public advisory groups. Our Public Involvement Lead has worked on capacity building through mentoring other staff in public involvement roles, coaching researchers for successful grant panel interviews, and working with public members to identify how we can support their development goals - through training, and opportunities such as presenting.

Creating inclusive and representative groups

We prioritised inclusivity by establishing new advisory groups and expanding existing ones to represent a wide range of lived experiences. This included establishing a Youth Advisory Group (YAG), working on a project level to include individuals with lived experience of specific conditions and refreshing membership of our existing groups to ensure diverse representation.

Leadership and ownership

Our public members haven't just been involved – they've taken the lead. Our Traumatic Stress Patient Advisory Group have organised the annual Traumatic Stress Wales conference (2022, 2023 and 2025) and we have appointed a new chair of our PÂR group. We're proud to support future leaders with lived experience.

Sharing knowledge and working together

We've made it easier for people to connect and share ideas through:

- Research clinics to advise researchers and help shape research projects
- Conference talks and workshops, led by public members
- Public speaking engagements, including webinars and short films
- Cross-centre collaborations with other advisory groups
- Online drop-ins, funded to support PhD students and researchers interested in public involvement.

Real world impact

Thanks to this work, research projects are more relevant, funding applications are stronger, and new mental health services are being shaped by the people they're meant to support.

We're proud of how far we've come, and we're just getting started. Lived experience will stay at the heart of everything we do.





Innovative events and sharing our research

We were very pleased with the enthusiastic response to our events and campaigns during the 2020-25 period.

It saw our Communications and Engagement team adapting to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in new avenues to disseminate our work and better ways to work together remotely.

Whilst we have hosted and attended over 300 events over the past five years, here are some of our favourite and most effective activities:

A Bitesize Bipolar webinar series

In 2020, an online taster session of our Bipolar Education Programme Cymru (BEPC) programme reached more than 400 people live on Zoom and has since been viewed more than 6,100 times.

Condition-focused webinars

Other public webinars have focused on conditions that we're investigating, including postpartum psychosis. Through our partnership with Action on Postpartum Psychosis, we have had great success in reaching wide audiences with a number of

webinars to raise awareness of the condition and share the latest research, encouraging attendees to take part. In total, the recordings from sessions in 2022, 2023 and 2024, have been viewed more than 13,500 times.

Art and science collaboration

Cardiff University researcher Dr Sam Chawner and art duo, Phenotypica, together with NCMH, created Share Your Rare: a project sharing the stories of people with rare genetic conditions, their experiences with their mental health, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic through poetry.

Animation to enhance understanding of mental health conditions

To mark Premenstrual Disorders Awareness Month in April 2023, we launched an animation about Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder. We worked with Professor Arianna Di Florio, PMDD charities, and people living with PMDD so that the video was based on evidence and personal experience. It has since had more than 6,900 views. These have built on the success of our Let's talk about ADHD animation which has surpassed 630k views since launching at the end of 2019.

Mental health and psychiatry podcast

We have continued to develop our podcast, Piece of Mind: Mental Health & Psychiatry as a means of engaging the public with mental health research.

Our podcast provides opportunities for people with lived experience to discuss research directly with academics, and builds awareness about research progress and opportunities.

After 16 episodes, we have reached 70k downloads, with another six episodes in the pipeline. ncmh.info/podcast

Annual summer school

NCMH is also working to inform and inspire the researchers of tomorrow. In partnership with the Centre for Neuropsychiatric Genetics and Genomics, we host an annual Summer School for Brain Disorders Research.

Each year, we welcome more than 40 clinicians and researchers for a four-day introduction to genetics, psychiatry, neurology, and neuroscience at Cardiff University. And between 2021 and 2024, we have hosted more than 150 clinicians and researchers from across the globe.





Final word

We hope you have enjoyed reading about our work over the last five years.

Although we are proud of what we have achieved, we are very aware that there is much more that needs to be done. We are grateful to all who have travelled with us on our journey: funders, academic and industrial partners, clinical services, third sector partners and most importantly, those with lived experience of mental health conditions.

We are delighted that the journey continues, with NCMH funded for the next five years. We can't wait to tell you about the exciting plans we have - please keep in touch through the NCMH website and social media.

I have been involved with NCMH since it started and for over a decade, I have had the privilege of leading such a fantastic team. The time has come, however, for me to retire but I'm delighted that Professor Jon Bisson, current Deputy Director and lead for our Intervention Development work package, is taking on the role of NCMH Director. I can't think of a better person to hand over to, and I am sure that NCMH will go from strength to strength.

It will be exciting to see how NCMH develops and continues to make a difference for mental health.



Professor Ian Jones

Director



NCMH

National Centre for Mental Health

Mental Health Research:
Help us change lives



NCMH

National Centre for Mental Health
Canolfan Iechyd Meddwl Genedlaethol

Ymchwil Iechyd Meddwl
Helpwch ni i newid bywydau



Ymchwil Iechyd
a Gofal Cymru
Health and Care
Research Wales



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Mae'r adroddiad hwn hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. I ofyn am gopi, cysylltwch â info@ncmh.info

