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Foreword

We are delighted to share our 2025-26 annual report, marking the first year of our five-year funding award from Health and Care Research Wales.

During this first year of the new funding period, we successfully re-established the NCMH team and refreshed the Centre's priorities.

This important work has created a strong and stable foundation for the next phase of our activities, enabling us to build momentum and deliver meaningful impact across Wales and beyond.

Our mission is to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the people of Wales and beyond across three workstreams:

1. Smart cohorts



Since 2011, we have recruited over **36,000** participants to NCMH studies, creating a powerful research data resource and a vibrant **Research Community** committed to improving mental health and wellbeing.

2. Data linkage



With the permission of NCMH participants, their research data is linked with routinely collected data through the Secure Anonymised Information Linkage (SAIL) Databank at Swansea University, creating even more powerful data resources to advance our knowledge and understanding of mental ill-health.

3. Intervention development



Our Intervention Development team creates and evaluates new treatments, with a particular focus on guided digital programmes to treat people with trauma-related mental health conditions.

All of this work would not be possible without our Research Community.

We are proud to work with more than 36,000 participants helping to improve understanding, prevention, early detection, support and treatment of mental health problems.

People aged 16+ are invited to join the Research Community by completing an initial survey. They are then invited to complete follow-up surveys every 6 to 12 months.

This year, we have focused on improving participant experience, strengthening research infrastructure and increasing accessibility for researchers and the wider community. As a team, we:

- **redesigned surveys** to make them more inclusive and easier to complete, supporting long-term engagement
- **expanded and strengthened our anonymised research dataset** to support future studies
- **integrated all research data** collected since 2011 into a single database and improved systems for researcher access
- **developed a new website** launching in summer 2026, providing clearer information for participants and more transparent access pathways for researchers

Other notable achievements during Year 1:



The Cardiff Online Cognitive Assessment (CONCA) study has expanded internationally, reaching more than 1,600 participants across Nigeria and Ethiopia to support depression genetics research. [See page 18.](#)



The NCMH Intervention Development team's Spring PTSD digital programme is now used across all NHS Wales health boards. An evaluation involving nearly 500 patients confirmed its effectiveness, acceptability and scalability. [See page 13.](#)



NCMH researchers secured leadership roles in the UK Government's Mental Health Platform, Mental Health Mission and Mental Health Goals programmes, strengthening research infrastructure and capacity across Wales.

With many exciting opportunities ahead, we hope you will join us for the next stage of this journey.



Professor Jonathan Bisson
Director



Charlotte Miles
Centre Manager

Who we are

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

Funded by Welsh Government through Health and Care Research Wales



Our mission

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

Aims

- To advance mental health 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



Our team

Director

Professor Jonathan Bisson

Principal Investigators

Professor James Walters

Professor Jeremy Hall

Dr Antonio Pardiñas

Professor Arianna Di Florio

Professor Neil Harrison

Professor Ann John

Professor Keith Lloyd

Dr Emily Peckham

Administration and Operations team

Charlotte Miles

Dr Sarah Knott

Mark Coles

Claire Baker

Anna Simpson

Public engagement and involvement

Dr Sarah Rees

Julia Pearce

Catrin Hopkins*

Data team

Dr Sahana Baskar

Daniel Oakes

Laboratory team

Dr Alexandra Evans*

Researchers and Coordinators

Dr Amy Lynham*

Jessica Yang*

Dr Samuel Chawner*

Dr Kimberley Kendall*

Dr Sophie Legge*

Dr Catrin Lewis

Georgia Dash*

Psychology and Research Assistants

Chloe Apsey*

Bronwen Thomas*

Sophie Smith*

Lyvia Jehu*

Eden Cronin*

Jordan Herrington*

Blessing Erioghaye-

Omeregbee*

Fevin Saji*

Lowri Evans*

Soumita Ramesh*

Placement students

Sophia Urgosikova

Thomas Dew

Stephanie Semmons

Lily Somerville

SAIL team

Dr Marcos Del Pozo Banos*

Robert French

Bangor University

Zahra Jorjoran Shushtari

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



UK Research
and Innovation



Centre for Neuropsychiatric
Genetics and Genomics
Canolfan Geneteg a
Genomeg Niwroseiciatrig



Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe



Health and Care
Research Wales
infrastructure award
to the group



Jobs created
through direct
funding



Grants won during reporting period

Grants won	Led by group	Group collaborating
Number	19	2
Value	£28.9M	£4.8M
Funding to Wales	£16.9M	£882K
Funding to group	£16.9M	£882K
Additional jobs created for Wales	75	5
Additional jobs created for group	75	5



Number of publications



Number of public
engagement events



Number of public
involvement opportunities

Our impact ✨

Informing a historic menopause and mental health position statement

Research from the Reproductive Mental Health Programme Lead, Professor Arianna Di Florio, was cited in a menopause mental health position statement launched by the Royal College of Psychiatrists in the House of Commons.

It provided key evidence which indicates an increased risk of first onsets of psychiatric disorders during the years around menopause.

Presenting to policymakers in the UK

Over the last year, we've had several opportunities to present key findings to policymakers:

- Brain and Genomics Hub representatives attended the GW4 Alliance Innovation Showcase at Westminster
- We presented multiple NCMH studies at the Cross-Party Group Medical Research Showcase at the Senedd including the Cardiff Online Cognitive Assessment (CONCA) and the Brain and Genomics Hub B-Sprint study



Strengthening collaboration and evidence exchange across Wales

In July 2025, NCMH Partnership in Research (PÂR) group member Anthony Cope and NCMH Director, Professor Jon Bisson chaired the Wales Mental Health Research and Evidence Network launch.

It involved attendees from a range of backgrounds and sectors, including experts by experience, Welsh Government, NHS Wales, the voluntary sector, and universities.

The network aims to support the delivery of the new Welsh Government strategies by creating a community, responding more rapidly to the direct challenges that NHS Wales is facing, and by generating and implementing knowledge that can more effectively influence practice, identifying research priorities for Wales and addressing these.

Additionally, in January 2026, we co-hosted the Wales Suicide Prevention, Self Harm, Mental Health and Wellbeing Research and Evidence Network event featuring plenary sessions, interactive discussions, and themed workshops.



Informing international debates on postpartum psychosis

In early 2026, the New York Times referenced a recent review, co-authored by NCMH researcher, Professor Arianna Di Florio and former Director, Professor Ian Jones. The news article called for postpartum psychosis to be listed under the bipolar disorders chapter of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

Professor Di Florio was later interviewed by the BBC. This aired on TV, radio and online news.

Both news stories followed real-life experiences of women who had experienced episodes of postpartum psychosis, and emphasised the importance of specialist care within a timely manner for recovery.

Read the review at
bit.ly/pp-bd-review

Work package updates

Smart cohorts



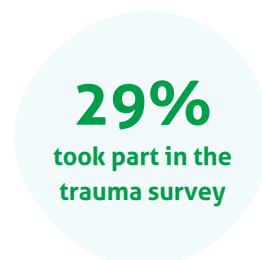
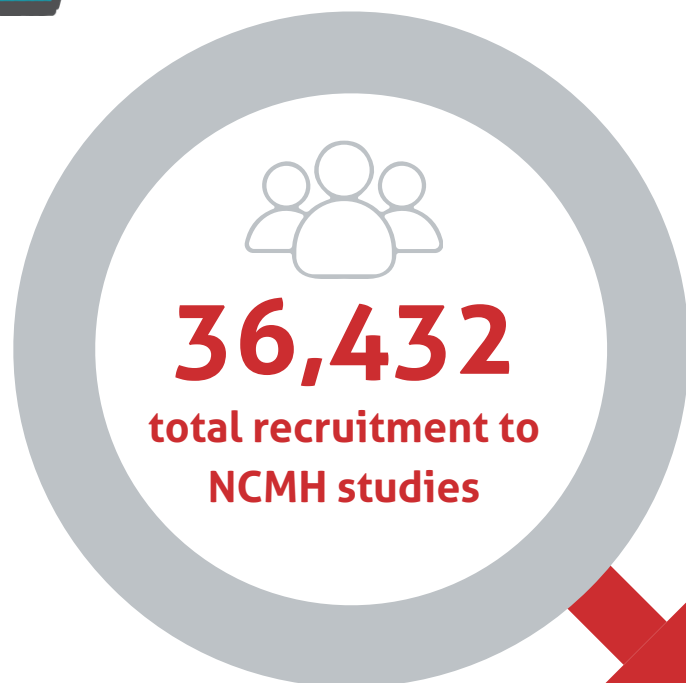
Our Smart Cohorts work package brings together volunteers in the NCMH Research Community to share information about their health, lifestyle, and experiences. Members complete follow-up surveys every 6 to 12 months, helping us build a secure, valuable data resource that supports mental health research and improvements in future care and treatment.

As of March 2026, a total of 36,432 people have taken part in NCMH studies. Of this total, 1,651 were recruited in April 2025 to March 2026.

A total of 813 participants were recruited by NHS England and Wales:

- NHS England: 698
- NHS Wales: 115

Recruitment to our trauma survey and brief assessment were most fruitful, accounting for 29% and 28% of total recruitment respectively.



Data linkage



Our Data Linkage work package involves linking information from many different sources, such as data from surveys, biological samples and routinely collected health, education and social care records. It is led by researchers at Swansea University, Professors Ann John and Keith Lloyd.

By bringing researchers from these different areas and disciplines together around these data, we can ask new questions, connect evidence across fields, and develop insights that would not be possible from any single approach alone.

Over many years, people taking part in NCMH studies have generously shared detailed information about their lives, health and experiences.

By combining the rich information shared by those individuals with administrative data for the whole population of Wales, we can assess how far those experiences reflect, differ from, or help explain patterns in the wider population.

We expect that people experiencing the greatest mental health difficulties, social adversity or service exclusion are less likely to take part in long-term studies.

Linking the cohorts with whole-

population data helps ensure that these people are not invisible in research, policy or service planning.

Research in Wales has a global impact

Through the activities and partnerships developed within NCMH, we have been able to advocate for an increase in UK health research funding to be directed to Wales, to drive forward mental health data infrastructure, research and service improvement.

This includes substantial investments for the DATAMIND* programme and the DATAMIND Trusted Research Environment.

These resources help ensure a focus on issues most relevant to Welsh people, making Wales a leader in quantitative approaches to mental health research in the UK and internationally.

Our studies this year show how linking records across services can reveal who needs support, when risks emerge, and where care systems may still miss people.

**DATAMIND is a research hub that helps researchers get access to mental health data. It is funded by the Medical Research Council.*

In children and young people, we observed a nearly five-fold rise in annual Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) contact, while separate linkage of education and health records found school exclusion was associated with later suicide risk, marking it as an important signal of unmet need.

By following up individuals over time, we were able to show that racism in adolescence is linked to poorer mental health in adulthood.

In adults, linked GP records with hospital, prescribing and demographic data were used to examine differences in routine care by mental health status, showing cardiovascular risk factors such as blood pressure, cholesterol (lipid levels) and heart disease risk scores (QRISK) were more likely to be recorded for individuals with depression.

In a separate study, we showed that more than a quarter of people with severe mental illness were removed

from incentivised physical health check reporting at least once, demonstrating that routine health check systems may fail to reach some of the people they are designed to support.

At every stage of our data linkage and research, we consider the views of the people whose willingness to share their data makes this research possible.

This includes people who actively share information through studies, and people whose routinely collected records may be used under secure governance arrangements. Their views help shape how datasets are processed to preserve privacy, the prioritisation of research questions and the assessment of the potential public benefit from proposed work.

Our work with 1,765 young people, including those with and without a history of self-harm, shows broad support for using health data for research that benefits the public.

Those young people with a history of self-harm and who had contacted health services were even more likely to support the use and linkage of their data than those without such experiences, suggesting that those closest to these issues may be especially aware of the potential for safe, well-governed data use to benefit others.



Intervention development

The Intervention Development work package focuses on designing and improving new ways to support people with mental health difficulties. By working closely with people with lived experience, clinicians, and researchers, the team develops and tests practical interventions, treatments, and support tools that aim to improve mental health, wellbeing, and access to care.

Evidence for the effectiveness of our Spring programmes: digital guided treatments for trauma-related conditions

Spring for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

In 2025-26, further evidence for the effectiveness of the Spring PTSD programme was found through a large-scale NHS service evaluation - drawing on data from almost 500 participants. The paper is available at: bit.ly/springptsd

Spring for complex PTSD (C-PTSD)

The team completed a pilot study of Spring C-PTSD, which demonstrated encouraging qualitative and quantitative outcomes. The manuscript is currently under peer review.



Spring for military PTSD (M-PTSD)

The team completed a pilot study of Spring M-PTSD, with findings indicating promising outcomes across both qualitative and quantitative measures.

The military veterans who took part showed meaningful improvements in PTSD, anxiety and depression symptoms, and reported that the programme was relevant and useable.

Spring for prolonged grief disorder (PGD)

Prolonged grief disorder is a condition where intense grief after the death of someone close continues for a long time and significantly affects a person's daily life.

Health and Care Research Wales funded a randomised controlled trial for a guided digital programme designed to help prolonged grief disorder called Spring PGD. It has been successfully completed and analysis of trial outcomes is currently underway.



Bangor University: social approaches to mental health

Supporting inclusive physical activity for people with severe mental ill health (SMI)

People living with SMI experience a significantly reduced life expectancy, often due to preventable physical health conditions. Physical activity can play an important role in improving both physical and mental wellbeing, but many people with SMI face barriers to taking part in community activities.

The Co-SPACES project (funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research - NIHR), was established to support community physical activity providers to create more inclusive environments for people with SMI.

Working collaboratively with people with lived experience, healthcare professionals and community

organisations, the project developed practical resources to improve accessibility and inclusion.

This included:

- a co-produced leaflet offering guidance on creating inclusive spaces for physical activity
- a companion video sharing experiences from people with SMI, community providers and NHS staff

The resources have generated strong interest nationally, with the team invited to contribute to training events and conferences focused on inclusion in community physical activity.

You can find the leaflet and video at spacesproject.co.uk

Improving oral health support for people with severe mental ill health

Another major area of work focuses on improving oral health outcomes for people with SMI. In collaboration with colleagues at University College London and funded by NIHR, researchers have co-produced an oral health intervention designed to be delivered by mental health professionals.

The intervention aims to support people with SMI to better manage and maintain their oral health, addressing an area of significant physical health inequality. The team is currently conducting a feasibility study to explore how acceptable and practical the intervention is for both service users and mental health professionals.

This work builds on previous research that developed a consensus statement outlining what people with SMI should expect from oral healthcare services.



Developing the SAVER Programme

Following completion of her PhD in 2024, Dr Emily Bebbington led the Bangor University Innovation and Impact Award-funded SAVER project (Self-harm and Violence Presenting to Emergency Care Registry), alongside Dr Anne Krayner.

The project examined how self-harm and interpersonal violence are recorded across emergency care services in North Wales, helping lay the foundations for a real-time registry to support prevention and patient care.

A 2025 stakeholder workshop in Portmeirion brought together partners from academia, the NHS and the third sector, leading to the establishment of the SAVER collaboration group and further capacity-building activities.

The programme has generated several publications, with additional papers in development. Building on this work, Emily has submitted fellowship applications to support the development of a next-generation self-harm registry for Wales with Professor Ann John. She also contributed a chapter on suicide and violence to the book 'Preventing Suicide', published by Cambridge University Press.

Public involvement, engagement and collaborative work

Patient and public involvement (PPI) continued to play a central role across NCMH research activities this year.

Strengthening PPI in research: Online drop-in sessions

The PÂR lived advisory group was awarded Research Culture Funding from Cardiff University to deliver a series of online drop-in sessions supporting researchers and PhD students to strengthen PPI in mental health research.

The sessions brought together staff and students from a wide range of disciplines and provided opportunities for discussion, collaborative learning and lived experience input into funding applications and research projects.

Training researchers at Cardiff University

PÂR members also contributed to researcher training within the Department of Psychological Medicine and Clinical Neurosciences,

co-designing and co-delivering sessions on social media, blogging and creative methods in PPI alongside researchers and postgraduate students.

NCMH's partnership with the NHS Strategic Programme for Mental Health continued to grow, with lived experience representation embedded throughout the Wales Suicide Prevention, Self Harm, Mental Health and Wellbeing Research and Evidence Network and the development of new Research and Knowledge Development and Exchange Groups.

This collaborative approach has helped ensure that lived experience perspectives remain central to the design, development and implementation of mental health research in Wales.



In 2025-26, public engagement continued to strengthen connections between researchers, people with lived experience, healthcare professionals and communities across Wales and beyond.

Throughout the year, the NCMH Communications team, researchers lived experience representatives took part in a wide range of public events, training sessions, workshops and conferences to share research findings and promote conversations around mental health.

This included:

- hosting webinars on cognition and mental health, and premenstrual dysphoric disorder
- hosting the 15th annual Summer School in Brain Disorders Research

Digital engagement also remained an important area of activity, with online events, resources and social media helping NCMH reach wider audiences and support greater understanding of mental health research and its impact.



6,802

podcast downloads



15.3k

blog views



In 2025-26, we:

- supported recruitment sites by developing promotion guides for NCMH studies
- refreshed our mental health condition leaflet library in collaboration with lived experience experts
- continued to deliver fresh, new episodes of the 'Piece of Mind: Mental Health & Psychiatry' podcast available on Spotify, Apple and Acast.

Together, these activities along with a range of media appearances, presentations and blogs have helped strengthen public trust, increase collaboration and ensure that lived experience remains central to mental health research in Wales.

Looking ahead to Year 2, we're currently working towards the launch of the NCMH Research Community, including the development of new digital and printed materials, and an event.

Visit our Youtube channel to access the latest webinars, animations and video resources:

youtube.com/@thencmh

We continued to support collaborative research across mental health and cognitive science, including international genetics, women's health, and digital mental health studies.

NCMH researchers hold key leadership roles in UK-wide consortia, with the NCMH Research Community and its data playing a vital role in securing major UK Government funding for programmes including the Mental Health Platform, Mental Health Mission, and Mental Health Goals.

Cardiff Online Cognitive Assessment (CONCA)

DepGenAfrica

DepGenAfrica CONCA continues to support the DepGenAfrica project, which is examining the genetic architecture of depression in participants living in Nigeria and Ethiopia. As of March 2026, cognitive data has been collected from 904 participants in Nigeria and 696 participants in Ethiopia. The study protocol was published in Wellcome Open Research.

MIND-Fog

CONCA has also been incorporated into MIND-Fog, a pilot study investigating brain fog among women going through menopause. Data have been collected from 20 participants to date.

CONNECT Digital Study

The CONNECT Digital Study, exploring digital tools to identify relapse markers in psychotic disorders, has recruited 671 participants across six sites, including 102 by the Cardiff team. Recruitment has expanded into south-west England through collaborations with Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health

Partnership NHS Trust and researchers from CONCA and the Brain and Genomics Hub.

Intervention Development Centre for Vision Services Research

The Intervention Development team is also working in collaboration with the Health and Care Research Wales Centre for Vision Services Research to develop an adapted version of Spring PTSD for individuals with visual impairment, helping to improve accessibility and inclusivity. This is funded by the Medical Research Council Impact Acceleration Account.

Cardiff University School of Psychology

The team is collaborating with colleagues in the School of Psychology on a Wellcome Trust-funded project exploring the development of targeted memory reactivation (TMR) as a novel intervention for PTSD and depression.

Read about our current projects at ncmh.info

Final word

I am delighted with the way the first year of the new funding period for NCMH has gone. I am very grateful to the talented and committed NCMH staff team, to the NCMH stakeholders, and especially to the members of the NCMH Research Community for their fantastic contributions.

We have built on the existing strong NCMH platform to create a direction of travel that will maximise the future success of NCMH in a sustainable way. The annual report describes some of the exciting things we have achieved this year, and I am very confident that we will be able to report positively about our progress next year.

A major focus in 2026-27 will be recruitment to the NCMH Research Community.

We are committed to giving as many people as possible the opportunity to join the Research Community. To support this, we are strengthening existing partnerships and building new collaborations with organisations and individuals who share our goal of growing a diverse and representative community.

A key priority for us is to work more closely with the third (voluntary) sector to increase participation in our Research Community.

I am very grateful to you for taking the time to read our annual report, hope you have enjoyed doing so and feel enthused to support us to grow the NCMH Research Community.

Help us raise awareness of the Research Community by sharing information and our sign-up link with your networks: ncmh.info/community



Professor Jon Bisson
Director





Ymchwil Iechyd
a Gofal Cymru
Health and Care
Research Wales



The National Centre for Mental Health is funded by Welsh Government through Health and Care Research Wales.

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



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/walesmentalhealth