

## Fuse Health Inequalities (HI) Research Programme Strategy

**Web:** [www.fuse.ac.uk/research/healthinequalities](http://www.fuse.ac.uk/research/healthinequalities)

**Programme Co-leads:** Dr Heather Brown, Newcastle University; Dr Natalie Forster, Northumbria University

Fuse, the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health, brings together the five North East Universities of Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside in a unique collaboration to share Fuse's mission to transform health and well-being and reduce health inequalities through the conduct of world-class public health research and its translation into value-for-money policy and practice.

In achieving our vision, we focus on three broad aims:

1. To deliver world-class public health research that focuses on generating and translating evidence for cost effective public health policy and practice
2. To build sustainable capacity for translational public health research, both in academia and in policy and practice
3. To build effective and lasting partnerships with policy and practice for collaborative co-production of public health research.

As part of our core mission of translation of research evidence into policy and practice we launched Fuse's responsive research and evaluation facility 'AskFuse' in June 2013. With the support of Fuse researchers, we help our partners to access existing knowledge or to work in collaboration to develop new research evidence that is relevant, timely and tailored to their needs and enabled them to find answers to issues that matter. This innovative model has attracted considerable national interest.

Fuse continues to build international partnerships to share research with leading scientists and organisations across the globe. In April 2011 Fuse was the founder of the first International Knowledge Exchange in Public Health Conference. The 2021 conference is being held in Newcastle in collaboration with Cornell University, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research, and Tilburg University. Plans are in place to further develop international secondment opportunities.

Fuse Communications aim to maximise the impact and effectiveness of Fuse work, to raise the profile of Fuse as a Centre for excellence in Research and Knowledge Exchange and to build a unity of purpose within Fuse, and between Fuse and our partners. This is achieved by:

1. Examining and recommending action on all issues relating to internal communications, and communications with our partners and funders
2. Having responsibility for external relations with the public and with practice & policy partners by managing the various media through which we present our message and research findings
3. Developing forms of communication which will share learning and help build research capacity.

Fuse has identified the need to develop its strategy for Public Involvement and Engagement (PIE) in research and to give members of the public an influence in the decision-making processes. Work has started to collate the PIE activity within Fuse, this will help to identify any gaps and achieve a more cohesive approach, to ensure Fuse is in a strong position when applying for continued membership of the NIHR School for Public Health Research (SPHR) and future funding opportunities.

Fuse is integral to a number of newly funded public health research infrastructures both regionally and nationally, some with similar research agendas. Fuse will work in synergy with infrastructures such as the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) North East and North Cumbria (NENC) and the NIHR Policy Research Unit (PRU) by organising co-badged research meetings with shared agendas. Collaboration opportunities will also be identified within the Fuse research programmes. Work has started to capture the use of Fuse learning and any reference to the success of the Fuse model.

Our six research programmes make substantive contributions to the realisation of Fuse's mission. They also play an important role in achieving our vision. The programmes of research are complementary and collaborative, and explicitly linked together. Some projects draw on skills and expertise from two or more research programmes. The research strategies for each of the six programmes are set out below. They share common deliverables including:

1. Organising engagement events which are a key activity in delivering the Fuse strategy. In particular, Fuse Quarterly Research Meetings which are a key opportunity for research dissemination, dialogue about the implications for policy and practice, making new and strengthening existing contacts, and building a dialogue around research results and potential future projects. All Fuse meetings are free to attend making them available to all of our members.
2. Ensuring research sections on the Fuse website are kept up to date, providing material for research case studies.
3. Highlighting research which has been initiated through AskFuse and showcasing on the Fuse website.
4. Disseminating work through the Fuse blog, research briefs and social media.
5. Developing a strategy for communication with members and maintaining regular contact.
6. Encouraging members to share their relevant existing work and update on a quarterly basis, reporting back to Fuse Research Strategy Group (RSG).
7. Supporting the career development of members through the provision of training, networking, and events to showcase work specifically of early career researchers, practitioner, policy makers, and experts by experience.
8. Meeting regularly with the Fuse Manager to review programme progress and plan for future activity.

## **Vision**

To undertake high quality, collaborative, inclusive and impactful research to reduce health inequalities and improve the health and well-being of disadvantaged and marginalised communities.

## **Background**

Substantial socio-economic and spatial inequalities in health, morbidity and mortality continue to persist in the UK and elsewhere. Inequalities in health outcomes and access to health services also exist between different population groups in terms of ethnicity, age, gender and sexuality for example. Major gaps remain in our knowledge of the causes of health inequalities and the most effective approaches to reducing them. In addition, we are currently living in very turbulent social and political times, with regular changes in government, an increasingly divided society and cuts to public service funding all posing challenges for addressing inequalities.

This programme explores a range of health inequality outcomes and their determinants throughout the life-course, attending to multiple and complex dimensions of exclusion and marginalisation. We draw on expertise from across sectors (including voluntary and community organisations), and from range of academic disciplines, and take a cross-cutting approach to develop synergies with the five other Fuse research programmes.

## **Aim**

To work collaboratively with researchers, practitioners, members of the public, and policy makers to reduce health inequalities and improve the health and well-being of disadvantaged and marginalised communities.

## **Objectives**

We will achieve this aim through the following objectives:

- To provide a platform for sharing knowledge and findings from projects undertaken by health inequalities members.
- To help facilitate the use of research evidence in policy and practice.
- To provide a vibrant communication forum where collaborations are facilitated, that could lead to further research and impact.
- To actively involve members of the public and experts by experience in the programme, in order to set the direction of future research undertaken and ensure this has the potential to impact meaningfully upon their lives.
- To build research capacity among members through the provision of training and networking opportunities.

## **Programme themes**

Work undertaken by the programme is articulated around four themes, derived through consultation with health inequalities members about their current and planned research activity. These themes are detailed below.

### **Theme 1: Social and economic determinants of health inequalities**

This theme investigates the broad and intersecting determinants of inequality across a range of health outcomes (including health behaviour, mortality rates, suicide, mental health and wellbeing), as well as researching interventions to address the social and economic determinants of health. This includes work undertaken on poverty, food insecurity, housing, and workplace health.

### **Theme 2: Methodology**

This theme aims to advance theoretical and methodological understanding in how we can best measure and evidence health inequalities, as well as evaluate interventions and initiatives to address them. We draw here on the interdisciplinary nature of the programme, benefiting from members' expertise in using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, as well as their breadth of perspectives spanning sociology, health economics, geography, psychology, epidemiology, and the wider humanities and social sciences. This theme incorporates approaches such as peer-research, embedded research, creative engagement, realist evaluation, economic evaluation, social return on investment, health equity audit, intersectionality and social harm.

### **Theme 3: Health systems and practice innovation**

The third research theme focuses on health systems and practice solutions to addressing inequalities. It explores the barriers to accessing health services and information experienced by disadvantaged and excluded groups, and the ways that health services and approaches can be improved to promote equity in access and quality of care. This includes work on asset based and community development approaches, family based interventions, school-based interventions, screening, social prescribing, commissioning, values-based care, systems change, systems leadership, developing a trauma informed workforce, and public health models of palliative care.

### **Theme 4: Marginalised Individuals and communities**

The final theme examines the health impacts of intersecting dimensions of exclusion and marginalisation, including those experienced as a result of ethnicity, gender, country of origin, or limiting long term health conditions. Ongoing work addressing this theme includes that exploring the health inequalities experienced by people with multiple complex needs, people with learning disabilities, military veterans, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, and Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

## **Meetings**

The Health Inequalities programme will convene regular meetings (rotated around North East England) in order to foster communication and collaboration between members. We also plan to hold virtual meetings (e.g. webinars) and to draw upon the expertise of our members to provide training events.

### **Deliverables in addition to common deliverables (as listed above)**

- We will invite all Health Inequalities members to send a list of their relevant existing work, and plan to update this on an annual basis. This will be used to generate a map of current programme activity that can be accessed by members in order to promote knowledge sharing and collaboration, as well as facilitate the use of research in policy and practice.
- Health Inequalities theme events will be member driven, informed by interests and learning needs identified at the re-launch and actively involving our members.
- We will work in collaboration with the SPHR Health Inequalities and ARC Health Inequalities and Marginalised Community programmes to ensure that Fuse has good representation within these programmes of work.
- We will seek to match members with potential grant opportunities and AskFuse queries, based upon their expertise and interests.