



## Building relationships with under-served communities through the HPRU BSE Community Involvement Project Scheme



*“Members of the public have a voice and our experiences are valuable and needed” (Community member, MAVIS project).*

*“Being able to bridge the gap between scientific research and the real world is such an important part of any study. Being involved as a public contributor means that you are playing a key part in making the research successful”.*  
*(Ross Symonds, Farmer and public contributor to the ZooTB project).*

### Research Context

It has been acknowledged in the wider literature, that establishing trusting two-way relationships with communities requires time and resources. However, challenges in practice, such as conducting research within budget and time constraints can result in brief, short-term interactions, causing frustration and disengagement from communities.

In 2021, HPRU BSE launched a community involvement funding scheme to provide

researchers with resources to develop meaningful relationships with under-served communities, offering them opportunities to actively influence both ongoing and prospective research projects.

The community involvement project proposals were judged by the HPRU BSE Programme Manager, two public involvement leads and public contributors who are members of the HPRU Public Involvement Strategy Group.

## Route to Impact

Four community involvement projects were funded;

Dr. Taru Silvonen and Dr. Hannah Christensen used questionnaires, online workshops and in person events to engage older adults from diverse backgrounds from across the four UK nations and to co-create approaches for sharing vaccine research findings with the community.

Dr. Sarah Denford and Dr. Rosie Essery held workshops with children and young people from under-served communities to develop more effective and collaborative approaches to engaging these voices in shaping public health research.

Dr. Amy Thomas and Dr. Ellen Brooks-Pollock formed a panel of four active or retired farmers to discuss their research and went on to collaborate with one panel member to co-develop the zooTB study.

Dr. Emma Anderson's Maternal Vaccination in the NHS (MAVIS) study established an advisory group of mothers from under-served communities to co-produce research design and delivery.

## Impact Outcomes

The community involvement projects have had a range of positive impacts.

**Community members** have reported improved awareness of the health-related issues and valued opportunities to have training to develop new knowledge and skills. This has increased their understanding of the value of health research to their community. Some contributors are now involved in others research projects and advisory groups.

**Researchers** reported gaining fresh insights into their research topics and an increased awareness of barriers that could prevent research uptake. They also gained understanding of how to increase inclusivity when involving the public in research.

**Research design and delivery** has benefited from engagement with community members through improvements to study materials, recruitment approaches and dissemination strategies.

## Making a Difference: Lessons for Success

The community projects were a success because we dedicated time and resources to building relationships with communities. We learned that taking a flexible approach to engagement, offering tailored training opportunities, and ongoing reflection was key for developing meaningful ways of working. These practices enabled continuous learning, skills development, and fostered equal two-way relationships. Building on this learning in future projects will enhance community involvement to bring lasting impact.

## Find out more

To find out more about this research and the work of the HPRU in Behavioural Science and Evaluation please contact: [admin-hprubse@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:admin-hprubse@bristol.ac.uk) or visit our website <https://hprubse.nihr.ac.uk>

[Funding for new Community Involvement Projects announced - NIHR Health Protection Research Unit in Behavioural Science and Evaluation at University of Bristol](#)

[Getting involved in Zoonotic TB Research | NIHR HPRU in Behavioural Science and Evaluation Blog \(hprubse.blogspot.com\)](#)