

# Celebrating six years of NIHR ARC South London



Since October 2019, NIHR ARC South London has brought together researchers, health and social care practitioners, and local people to improve health and social care across south London and beyond.

As our programme concludes in March 2026, we are sharing some highlights of how our work has helped to improve services, inform policy, create better understanding in different areas of health and care, and support a culture of more inclusive research.

## ARC South London in numbers

### Extensive research addressing priorities

- Carried out 156 research projects
- Recruited 63,305 participants
- Published 1,871 research papers
- Leveraged £59.4m of external research funding
- Delivered this research in partnership with numerous local providers of health and care services, commissioners, local authorities, universities and charities.



### Building research capacity

- Hundreds of international delegates attended our implementation science events
- 382 participants in our Applied Research Leadership Academy
- Supported 7 PhD students, funded 4 postdoctoral fellows in social care and 5 in maternity research



### Engaging with local communities

- Hosted 139 events attended by 10,969 people
- Involved 553 public contributors in our research



### Sharing our knowledge widely

- 5,740 followers on social media: X, Bluesky and LinkedIn
- 2,340+ subscribers to ARC newsletters
- 237 news stories and 115 blogs published online
- Many free accessible resources developed on improvement and implementation, public involvement, engaging with commissioners, applied informatics, digital health, capacity building and more.



## Addressing real-world problems: Our research impact

Our research tackles real-world health and care challenges, including reducing pressure on hospitals through **improved community care**, developing innovative approaches to **illness prevention** and harnessing **digital innovation**. This work has translated evidence into lasting improvements in patient and social care. We have:

### Informed national policy to drive improvements to care

#### Midwifery continuity of care



Around 8% of babies in the UK are born prematurely – higher than elsewhere in Europe. Our maternity researchers explored how health outcomes for women and babies at risk of complications could be improved.

They found women receiving continuous care from the same midwife or small team throughout the perinatal period had a

**45%** reduced risk of pre-term birth



Findings have informed key national and international guidance, including the Department of Health and Social Care's Safer Maternity Care, NICE guidance, the World Health Organisation's antenatal and midwifery-care recommendations, and the NHS Long Term Plan.



They have supported **community-based continuity models** for women at greatest risk, including those from minority ethnic groups.

#### Perinatal mental health

As many as 1 in 4 pregnant women face mental illness, and suicide is the leading cause of death after childbirth.

We investigated 'near misses' in maternal mental health and informed the development of the **Maternal Mental Health Service** – a model integrating maternity care with specialist psychological support.



Our research has directly impacted the preconception care women receive, reaching

**8,000**

people per month nationally



Findings cited in NHS England equity and equality guidance and referenced by Royal College of Psychiatrists in national report

## Transformed and co-developed new models of care to address unmet needs

### Improving care for children and young people in south London

We co-designed and tested a new model of care for children with long-term conditions in Lambeth and Southwark, connecting community, primary and specialist services.

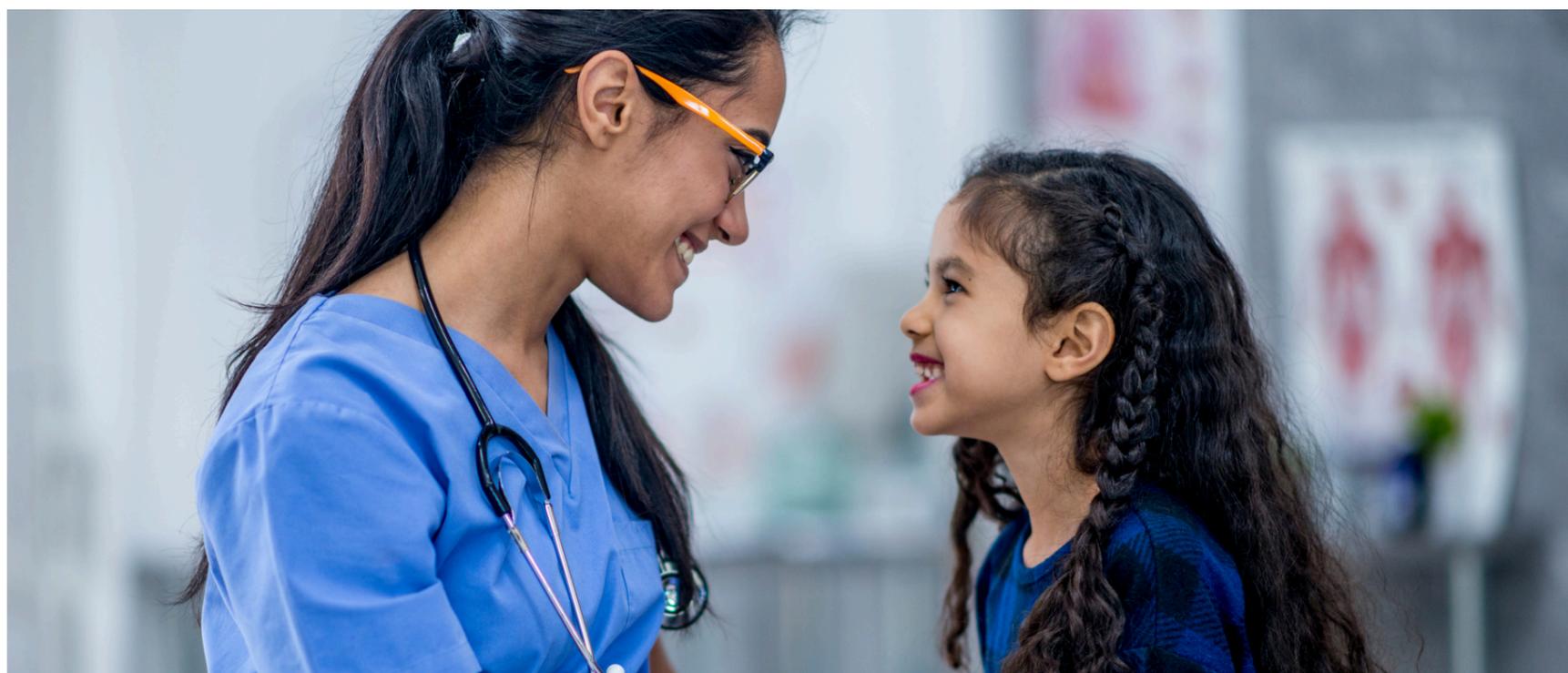
**50%** of triaged patients had advice provided back to the referring GP, **strengthening community care**



For children with **preventable conditions** (asthma, eczema, constipation), the model significantly improved health outcomes within weeks of care

**49%** reduction in emergency department contacts for asthma patients seen by the service

**30%** long-term cost savings for commissioners



### Transforming management of breathlessness in advanced illness

Our researchers gathered evidence on effective treatments for breathlessness, including non-drug interventions. This work led to one of the UK's first integrated breathlessness services for advanced illness, combining physical, psychological and social care.



Service allows patients to be assessed and receive support at home, **supporting community-based care**



Improved quality of life scores across multiple conditions



Provided a rapid response framework during Covid-19



Non-drug therapies (e.g. handheld fan) now widely used in UK palliative care

## Developed innovative solutions to prevent sickness and reduce pressure on the NHS and social care

### Supporting African and Caribbean adults who have diabetes

Our researchers worked with the Health Innovation Network South London to develop a **new online programme (HEAL-D)** specially designed to support adults of African and Caribbean heritage living with type 2 diabetes.



The proportion of patients experiencing 'diabetes-related distress' reduced from **49% to 23%** after attending

**78%** of those who completed the programme reported weight loss

**98%** strongly agreed or agreed that HEAL-D Online has helped them manage their diabetes

The programme is now available across south London and is being piloted in other parts of the country including Birmingham and Manchester.

### Improving care for people with alcohol addiction

We evaluated **Alcohol Assertive Outreach Treatment**, a community-based approach for people with serious alcohol addiction who rarely access traditional services. Our trial shaped national implementation across multiple high-need areas.

**50%** reduction in hospital admissions

Improved quality of life and reduced drinking among participants after 

**£10,470** saved per patient, with a return on investment of £3.34 for every £1 spent

 Reframes addiction care as **community-based**, not hospital-based



## Supporting inclusive research: our patient and public involvement (PPI)

Involving patients, service users, carers and members of the public meaningfully has been central to our research and its impacts. From the start, we brought lived experience into every stage of our work, from shaping research priorities and co-designing studies to interpreting findings and influencing implementation.

Alan Quarterman, PPI member, welcomes attendees at ARC South London's launch in 2019



Guided by a collaboratively developed **Involvement Strategy**, we created inclusive structures such as the **Involvement Advisory Group**, the **Public Research Panel** and the **Involvement Learning Network** to strengthen participation and share good practice across our areas of research.

### Engaging with local people and communities

We have held a wide range of public events to engage local people and communities around our work, including our annual **Active Involvement in Research events (AIRD)**, **Knowledge Exchange Events** and **Inside Research seminars**.

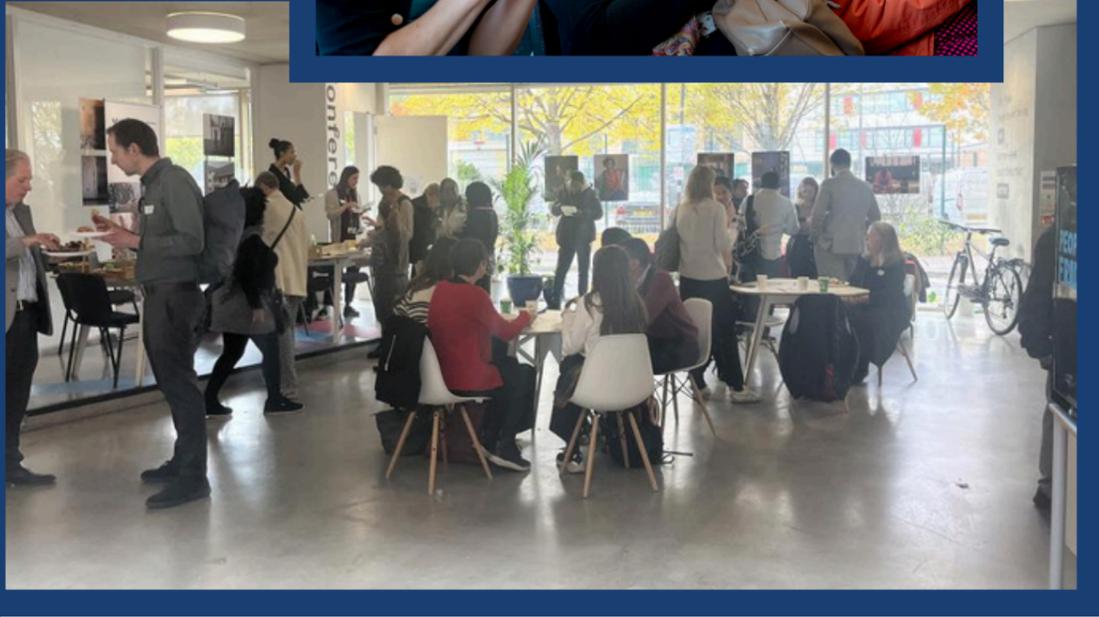
These events, alongside ongoing collaboration between public contributors and researchers, have helped ensure our research is relevant to local communities and grounded in real-world experience.

Participants at the first ever **AIRD** event in 2020, held online due to pandemic restrictions





# Public and community events, 2022-2026





## Maternity and perinatal mental health

Our maternity and perinatal mental health theme has consistently championed public involvement, establishing an inclusive culture, embedding their work in the community and working in partnership with women to improve services and lives.

Evidence shows there are major disparities in maternal health outcomes for women belonging to ethnic minorities. Our maternity researchers brought together a diverse **patient and public involvement and engagement (PPIE) Network and Advisory Group** to inform their research addressing these disparities. They have provided advice, modelled good practice in PPIE and provided training on PPIE and co-production.



Public involvement members, peer and academic researchers, and ARC South London's maternity theme leads share insights and call for change at multiple public events

Together they have co-written **blogs, papers, reports and presentations** sharing learning and experiences of healthcare and public involvement and successfully showcased their work at **popular events**.

“It's about addressing the elephant in the room. People often see the problem, but don't know how to discuss it. We need to always have open and honest conversations about problems and solutions.”

**Brooklyn Masters, lived experience advisor, Holistic Approaches to Inequalities Conference**

## Mental Health Implementation Network

ARC South London also co-led the NIHR-funded **Mental Health Implementation Network (MHIN)**, which brought together service users, local communities, health and care providers, commissioners and other stakeholders to deliver evidence-based service change across mental health services.

PPI members have been central to the MHIN's three core projects, helping to improve **access to mental health services for minority ethnic communities**, evaluate **parent-led cognitive behavioural therapy in schools** and implement proactive **community support for people with alcohol dependence**.

“The work I do now is about making sure the system can support people with severe mental illness to be able to make a meaningful contribution using their experience. Mental illness does not have to be a burden. It can be an experience that people can flourish from.

**Jason Grant, PPI lead, MHIN**

## Creative engagement with local communities

Alongside our structured involvement programmes, ARC South London has supported more informal, community-focused engagement with our research, designed to welcome people from all backgrounds and with a range of lived experiences.



Activities such as our **'Tea Dance'** event in Catford, annual **Dementia Community Research Network** involvement events brought research conversations into familiar, social settings, often combining interactive elements such as group singing with relaxed opportunities to explore research topics. These events helped build relationships, spark curiosity and ensure local voices shaped research in meaningful ways.

## Spotlight on peer research

Peer research models are increasingly important for addressing research inequities by enabling people with lived experience of the issues being studied to lead research, making it more impactful and inclusive for those often excluded. ARC South London researchers have supported peer research in several projects, including:



### Exploring whether Covid-19 exacerbated ethnic health inequalities

The peer research project looked at adults with serious mental and physical health conditions, producing two papers and a powerful film 'A Life Less Safe' which was screened to a full-house at the Ritzy cinema in Brixton.

### Using photography to understand maternal experiences

Maternity researchers worked with peer researchers on the **Maternity Opportunities Research Engagement (MORE)** study using Photovoice, where people are trained to use photography as a research method. Participants were encouraged to 'speak' through photographs, connect with others in their community and advocate for change.



### Increasing diversity and participation through 'research cafes'

Research cafes are informal spaces where diverse communities can talk about their experiences of health and care. As part of this project, peer researchers and university researchers interviewed voluntary organisation leads, health researchers and public members to understand the key issues for equity and diversity in research and identify what actions are needed to develop peer research methods.

## Building research skills capacity

We offered a diverse range of training and capacity building for health and care practitioners, researchers, managers, policymakers, patients and service users designed to provide the skills to put research evidence into practice.

### Developing implementation and improvement science

Implementation science explores strategies to promote the uptake of interventions that have proven effective into routine practice, with the aim of improving health and care.

Our researchers expanded implementation capacity and expertise through events and training attended by hundreds of participants worldwide, including:



- An annual **Implementation Science Masterclass**
- The launch of the **UK's first international conference dedicated to implementation science**
- Bespoke training and advice for researchers, health and care practitioners, policymakers and non-researchers, including an **online module**.

### Developing leadership skills

In 2022, we launched the **NIHR ARC South London Applied Research Leadership Academy**, bringing together health and social care professionals, researchers, and public involvement members from across England to develop leadership skills and build research careers.

**97%** rated their overall experience of the course as 'Excellent', 'Very good' or 'Good'

“What I liked most was the chance to connect with others at a similar stage, share experiences honestly, and learn from different perspectives. The supportive environment made it easy to reflect on my own leadership style and think clearly about where I want to take my research.” **Academy participant**



# Building research capacity across conferences, workshops and events



## Spotlight on building capacity in social care research

With NIHR funding, we supported social care practitioners to develop skills and knowledge to use research to inform and improve services.

We worked with Kingston University, and the NIHR Policy Research Unit in Health and Social Care Workforce to provide training and support to innovative projects and 11 social care practitioners. This included:



- A project aiming to understand the role of **Advance Nurse Practitioners in care homes** and how they can support NHS work, by reducing hospital admissions.



- A study exploring factors contributing to the poor attainment and underachievement of **Black and Minority Ethnic students in London schools**.



Our social care theme developed a dedicated **Day Centre Resources Hub**. Designed to support day centre operation and encourage collaboration across the social care sector, the hub features 35 detailed case studies.

## Spotlight on leadership in palliative care research

Working closely with colleagues at ARC East of England, we co-led a national NIHR forum for improving palliative and end of life care services. The forum connected specialist palliative care researchers and clinicians and helped to generate, share and implement research evidence across the country.



Our palliative webinar series featuring insights and discussions with leading experts attracted more than **1,600** registrations.

# Legacy for change

As ARC South London concludes, we celebrate the lasting impact of our collaborative research. The connections we have forged and the knowledge created together will continue to shape better health and care services for years to come.



Whatever the future holds, I deeply value my years at ARC South London. Patient, service user, carer and public contributors, community partners and fellow staff in the ARC and connected organisations, have helped me reflect and grow. I do not intend to hover around passively, hoping somehow that public health and wellbeing will improve of their own accord, but rather to work with others in some way, in seeking a more just and compassionate world.” **Savi Hensman, ARC South London involvement coordinator**



I am positive that the expertise, impact and learning developed at ARC South London will continue to inform policy, influence services and be evident in our future work, wherever we are based.” **Professor Ingrid Wolfe, Director, ARC South London**

Thank you to everyone involved for your commitment to research supporting a healthier and more equitable future for people in south London and beyond.



## A new pan-London ARC

While ARC South London will be concluding, a new opportunity for applied health, public health and social care research bringing together partners from across London has been announced by the NIHR. Members of the ARC have helped to develop a collaborative proposal with colleagues at University College London, Imperial College London and across London.

If successful, the NIHR Pan-London ARC will start in **July 2026**. Stay up to date by visiting the [National NIHR ARCs website](#).

To find out more about our projects, resources and impact, visit the [ARC South London legacy webpage](#).