**Involving patients and the public during the pandemic**

1. [Patient and public involvement](https://www.invo.org.uk/find-out-more/what-is-public-involvement-in-research-2/) (PPI)during the coronavirus pandemic can be challenging. But **our team is here to help** – for information and ideas, please **email** **savitri.hensman@kcl.ac.uk**. Also in various themes, there are examples of good practice and staff with involvement skills and experience who can support colleagues.
2. During the coronavirus pandemic, Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) South London priorities and ways of working have changed. Yet **PPI remains vitally important**, across different aspects of ARC work and stages of research. Current patient and public contributors should be valued and kept informed. Other service users, carers and communities should be invited to be involved too, as appropriate.
3. Many across the ARC have experienced the value of involvement and are building on this in work focused on COVID-19 or other activities. Also the **National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)** has [highlighted](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/nihr-reaffirms-its-support-for-patient-and-public-involvement-engagement-and-participation-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/24641) **‘its continuing commitment to ensuring patients, carers and the public have a say in and help to shape health and care research during the COVID-19 pandemic**’, in [various ways](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/shared-nihr-commitments-to-public-involvement-participation-and-engagement-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/24640).
4. NIHR recently re-emphasised the [importance](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/about-us/our-contribution-to-research/equality-diversity-and-inclusion.htm) of **equality, diversity and** [**inclusion**](https://www.invo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/INVOLVE_RO_report_FINAL_180220.pdf) too. While the pandemic has deeply affected diverse South Londoners, those already facing disadvantage and discrimination have tended to be worst hit and should be heard. This includes [minority ethnic people](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronavirusrelateddeathsbyethnicgroupenglandandwales/2march2020to10april2020) facing high death rates, people with mental health issues, frail older and other disabled people and those who are economically disadvantaged
5. Worryingly, many COVID-related research proposals nationally are [omitting PPI](https://www.hra.nhs.uk/about-us/news-updates/involving-public-covid-19-research-guest-blog-bec-hanley-and-maryrose-tarpey/). While some researchers may wonder if involving people may be too difficult in a pandemic, diverse perspectives and insights may be more important than usual, if research is to benefit those currently or potentially most affected. A recent Nuffield Council on Bioethics report, [*Research in global health emergencies*](https://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/publications/research-in-global-health-emergencies) emphasised the need for an ‘inclusive approach to influencing research’, which **engages ‘seriously and respectfully with those whose interests are fundamentally affected by the emergency.’**
6. Much helpful information and advice has been published on **remote** [**involvement**](http://slginvolvement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Online-involvement-public.pdf) **and** [**community engagement**](https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/creating_and_running_virtual_events_-_april_2020_v1.pdf)**,** including[**co-production**](https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/public-engagement/2020/05/06/carry-on-co-producing-part2/). Though involving people online or by phone has drawbacks, it may be needed even as government lockdown measures ease, to keep people safe, especially if at above-average risk. It should be borne in mind that some South Londoners do not have easy internet access but many, especially with involvement experience, are used to working jointly across different locations.
7. In applying for funds and planning, it is helpful to **build in staff time and other resources** for involvement, including paying contributors (in some instances, an ‘[Enabling involvement fund for Covid-19 research](https://www.rds-london.nihr.ac.uk/patient-public-involvement/enabling-involvement-fund/enabling-involvement-fund-covid-19/)’ may assist).
8. If inviting people and groups to be involved, it is useful to consider how this might connect with their **own concerns and priorities**. Space may be needed to recognise feelings and personal and community experiences. Though power imbalances should be acknowledged, researchers as well as PPI contributors may have valuable experiential knowledge. Mutual care and respect are especially important at this time.

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