

# Regional Strategy

2023 to 2024

# Introduction

I'm really excited to be able to share the Regional Strategy for the NIHR Clinical Research Network (CRN) West of England with you.

This strategy sets out our mission which aligns with that of the NIHR (*to improve the health and wealth of the nation*) and our vision as part of the CRN (*where research is an integral part of health and care for all*). It explores how we will achieve that vision and what things will look like when we do. It will be delivered until September 2024, during the transition period from the CRN to the Regional Research Delivery Network (RRDN).

This strategy comes after an unprecedented few years caused by the pandemic, where our ways of working have had to change and adapt. During this time we've also reflected on the way we measure success, moving away from metrics focused on the number of patients recruited into studies to those focused on widening participation and the experience of participants.

At the CRN West of England, we're passionate about improving access to research for everyone. Through research, we're able to find new

diagnostics, treatments, therapies and practices of care that save and improve lives. Research gives our patients and communities access to cutting-edge medicines and treatments before they're more widely available. During the pandemic we worked collaboratively and cross-regionally to offer research opportunities to the public no matter where they were. Our flexible working team, the WE ReACH team, does great work supporting research in out-of-hospital settings, again ensuring equitable access to research opportunities. Through the Participant in Research Experience Survey (PRES), we listen to feedback from participants and use this to improve the experience of taking part in research. We've also made efforts to increase our community engagement work, recognising that this is a big step in making research more inclusive and accessible.

We're also passionate about supporting and developing our research workforce. Supported by our broad range of learning and development opportunities, we promote and champion research delivery careers and we showcase and

share successes and best practice. In March 2022, we held our first CRN West of England Awards to celebrate and showcase all the incredible achievements of those working in research throughout the region. We plan to hold a second awards ceremony in 2023.

This commitment to the research workforce and to participants and the public is reflected in our strategy. There are lots of exciting opportunities in the year ahead for us to build on the work we've already done and continue to improve the health and wealth of the region. We look forward to working together with all of you to bring our vision to life.

**Dr Kyla Thomas, Clinical Director**



**Louise Ting, Public Contributor**

There has never been a greater need for research that is inclusive, representative, and easy to access for all. The pandemic highlighted the health disparities that exist in our society, with communities most affected by Covid-19 the least likely to participate in research.

Having collaborated with the CRN for a number of years, I am excited to see and be a part of the initiatives strengthening the CRN's work in engaging under-served groups. By involving people from all kinds of backgrounds through the Research Ready Communities project, we are able to raise awareness of research in different communities whilst addressing existing barriers, which will lead to more equal access to research opportunities.

It is vital that we consider working

with the public and patients as a two-way street, where both parties benefit (which has not been the case historically) and are able to meaningfully shape the way that research is delivered. That way, we can build trust, lasting relationships, and opportunities for people with different needs to take part.

The CRN is using a variety of mechanisms to make sure that the views of patients and the public are listened to and acted upon: through the Participant in Research Experience Survey; a new training programme that is being developed for people interested in volunteering as Research Champions; and outreach work where we directly engage with diverse under-served communities. I look forward to seeing this work evolve and better research outcomes for all.

**Helen Lewis-White,**  
Deputy Director of Research,  
North Bristol NHS Trust

Research offers patients and the public the opportunity to regain or take dominion over their bodies, sometimes through interventional studies but often by participating in research aimed at understanding an aspect of health and wellbeing. For all research participants, their personal research journey is no less inspiring as it offers the opportunity to empower individuals and shape healthcare now and in the future.

To realise this opportunity, to empower and enable patients and the public across our diverse, complex, interconnected communities, is not something that any one organisation can achieve in isolation. As our healthcare delivery moves to cross organisational boundaries so must our research

delivery.

The Covid pandemic embedded an approach to collaboration which ensured the successful delivery and expansion of research, and, as importantly, embedded the collegiate, collaborative working relationships which has seen the diversity of our research participants grow to reflect an ever-greater proportion of our populations whether from cities, rural, or coastal communities.

CRN WE provides the infrastructure and platform which allows, enables, and facilitates the continuation of these relationships and practices, encapsulating within this strategy the individual organisations' research strategies, hopes and ambitions, enabling us all to move into 2023-24 knowing that each part of the network is working towards common goals.

# Our mission and vision

Our mission sets out why we exist and why we do what we do. As part of the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), we share a common purpose of improving the health and wealth of the nation through research, specifically achieving this by supporting the delivery of research.

Our vision describes the future we aspire towards and the impact that we aim to have on the world. The Clinical Research Network is designed to deliver a harmonised service across England, working across all regions as “One CRN”, with a vision to create a research positive culture across the NHS and all health and care settings, where patients, public and staff feel empowered and supported to participate in research. Our vision of research being “an integral part of health and care for all” is one shared across the CRN nationally.

The ways in which we set out to achieve this vision at a local level are outlined in pages 6 to 11, and are grouped into five core themes.

This work is supported by our values, which are what we hold to be important and guide our ways of working. These values are introduced on page 13.



**Our mission:**  
To improve the health and wealth of the nation through research delivery

**Our vision:**  
Research is an integral part of health and care for all



# What will people say when we achieve our vision?

## Patients and the public

The opportunity to be part of research will be easily accessible to everybody, regardless of their location, socio-demographics, or health conditions. Research will be seen as a standard and important part of health and care.

“My GP was well informed and helped me access all the research opportunities relevant to my condition.”

“I didn't think research was for somebody like me - but it was all made super easy, the research team visited me at home and they were so knowledgeable about my different health conditions”

## Research delivery workforce

Those who deliver research, or who manage and support the delivery of research, will be valued and empowered by their organisations and the wider research infrastructure.

“Research is part of our NHS Trust's core business. Our Executive Board are a real champion and investor in research - we all think that it's vital for providing the best patient care.”

“It was quick and easy to get our studies set-up and delivered; everybody across our different organisations knew what to do, the process was joined up, and everybody was truly collaborative.”

## Health and care professionals

Research will be part of the every day for everyone working in health and care, for all professions, clinical and non-clinical. Research career development will be available for all, right through from student and trainee levels.

“Research is just part of my everyday work: my Job Plan recognises the role we all play in research, and it's an important part of my career development and the enjoyment I get from my work!”

“I speak to all of my patients about research; it's a critical piece of their care plan.”

## Sponsors and funders

Research sponsors will be able to easily place their studies at any health and care provider in the country, and be able to access research ready populations and generate findings that represent the diversity of our population.

“We were able to access a wide variety of sites across the country, including those we hadn't thought of before, which provided us with a really rich and diverse dataset.”

“We'd rather bring our studies to the UK. The research landscape is so joined up, making set-up and delivery quick, seamless and efficient. It felt like we were dealing with one organisation that worked consistently across the country.”

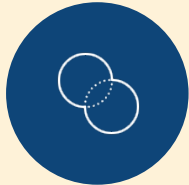
# How we achieve our vision



**Delivering people-centred research:** We provide opportunities for people to participate in research that meets the needs of our local populations, ensuring equity of access to opportunities across people, geography, speciality and setting.



**Supporting and developing our research workforce:** We attract, develop and support a research workforce that delivers high-quality health and care research.



**Embedding research into health and care:** We strive to embed research as an everyday part of health and care practice through engaging and supporting health and care professionals, organisations and the public.



**Fostering an effective and sustainable research delivery infrastructure:** We foster and grow an effective, sustainable and agile research delivery infrastructure that meets both current and future needs.



**Collaborating across the health and care system:** We collaborate with a wide range of partners, working across traditional boundaries, to shape a cohesive and internationally competitive research system.

# 1. Delivering people-centred research

We provide opportunities for people to participate in research that meets the needs of our local populations, ensuring equity of access to opportunities across people, geography, speciality and setting.

Patients and the public are at the heart of health and care research; without them, many of the discoveries and advances we make would simply not be possible.

Involving, engaging and connecting people is essential in improving the reach, quality and impact of our research. The research we deliver needs to make a difference for our local communities, and, regardless of socio-demographics, should be accessible to all.

We also need to hear the voices of, and consider the views of, those in our local area in order for our services to meet their needs, and to continue to guide the development of the NIHR.

## **We put people at the heart of research by:**

- Involving public contributors in determining, developing and delivering CRN priorities and activities.

- Providing opportunities for health and care organisations to become research active, particularly in emerging and under-served settings or geographies.
- Understanding our local populations and their needs through data and community engagement.
- Leading initiatives to increase research opportunities for under-served populations, identifying and addressing barriers to access.
- Engaging with communities to promote research awareness, activation and participation.
- Collecting and acting on feedback from research participants to improve the research delivery experience.



## 2. Supporting and developing our workforce

We attract, develop and support a research workforce that delivers high-quality health and care research.

We fund and support over 800 research delivery colleagues across the West of England. Only by attracting, investing in, and retaining a diverse workforce are we able to offer and grow health and care research opportunities for the public.

Developing and valuing an expert and confident workforce is key to delivering high-quality research and creating a positive research experience for our participants.

By bringing together a united workforce across settings and geographies, we encourage collaboration and provide a support network that facilitates learning and development, continuous improvement and resilience.

### We support and develop our workforce by:

- Providing a broad range of learning and development opportunities for research delivery and management staff.
- Facilitating opportunities for networking and peer learning, making use of our network to support connection and sharing of best practice.
- Advocating for the research delivery workforce at local, regional and national levels, promoting and recognising the diversity of professions in health and care.
- Recognising and showcasing successes and best practice, both in terms of research delivery and in people support and development.
- Enabling and developing a network of facilitators and champions to draw on our collective knowledge and foster local engagement.
- Promoting and championing research delivery careers, and supporting research delivery and management staff in their career development.
- Driving and facilitating innovation in workforce models for research delivery, making use of opportunities for cross-organisational collaboration and harmonisation.





# 3. Embedding research into health and care

We strive to embed research as an everyday part of health and care practice through engaging and supporting health and care professionals, organisations and the public.

Research as part of core business for all health and care organisations enables more opportunities for staff to engage with research and provides a seamless experience throughout the research journey for both participants and research sponsors.

By embedding research, we increase the awareness and accessibility for participation in research, providing participants with timely access to cutting-edge treatments and care.

Even for those individuals not participating in research, there is evidence to demonstrate that research-active hospitals provide better patient-care outcomes than those not research-active.

### We embed research into health and care by:

- Facilitating the awareness of research and its importance amongst all health and care staff, including students, non-clinical roles, support departments, and temporary staff.

- Supporting cultural change in organisations that facilitates research being an integral and expected part of patient care.
- Building partnerships to embed research in public health and social care.
- Advocating for research delivery within the health and care system, especially at leadership level.
- Providing opportunities for health and care professionals to learn about research and get involved in research in their organisation.
- Leading and supporting initiatives to engage with the public and promote research as part of the patient experience.
- Drawing on the expertise and support of our specialty and settings leadership, including specialty leads and champions.



## 4. Fostering an effective and sustainable research delivery infrastructure

We foster and grow an effective, sustainable and agile research delivery infrastructure that meets both current and future needs.

The CRN West of England distributes around £15m of funding each year to facilitate the delivery of health and care research. Ensuring the effective utilisation of resources within the region is pivotal to equitable research activity delivery and the sustainability of the industry.

As demonstrated during the pandemic, agility is key in enabling a quick and effective response to urgent national and local needs, and emerging challenges and opportunities. This is supported by our focus on innovative working and continuous improvement, which strengthens our practice and makes us globally competitive.

### **We build, maintain and grow an effective research delivery infrastructure by:**

- Facilitating return on investment and meaningful scientific results through study performance monitoring and support.
- Supporting local Chief Investigators in designing and leading high quality, deliverable portfolio studies.
- Funding partner organisations (including NHS Trusts, GP practices and hospices) through our annual model and strategic development funding, balancing stability and growth.
- Acting as an ally and champion for Research and Development management and leadership, acting as a critical friend in maximising efficiency of local operations.
- Identifying and supporting a future talent pipeline, including engagement with trainees and students.
- Adapting in a timely, pragmatic and sensitive manner to changing external factors and government priorities.
- Facilitating a smooth transition to the new Regional Research Delivery Networks.
- Developing relationships with industry partners, maximising the diversity of income streams for Partner Organisations.
- Offering a Direct Delivery Team that can deliver research in non-NHS settings and can respond flexibly to evolving needs.



## 5. Collaborating across the health and social care system

We collaborate with a wide range of partners, working across traditional boundaries, to shape a cohesive and internationally competitive research system.

Research is a collaborative endeavour and every study relies on effective partnership working and trusting relationships.

Our joined-up, harmonised working as part of the NIHR is designed to create a user experience that is simple, effective and replicable, reducing silos and duplication between regions and different stages of the research pathway. Collaborative working also allows us to truly understand the needs of our population and services in order to effectively plan and place research, and perform to the highest standards.

Partnering with industry is a key priority for the CRN, as we develop a globally competitive offering and provide world-leading opportunities for our partners and our local population.

### We collaborate with others by:

- Identifying and nurturing opportunities for sharing best practice, learning and collaborative working across partner organisations and within specialties.
- Facilitating the integration of research across settings (e.g. between secondary and primary care, between NHS and non-NHS) to match patient care pathways.
- Linking with other elements in the research pathway, such as design (e.g. RDS/RSS, HEIs), early phase research (e.g. BRCs, CRFs) and implementation (e.g. AHSN, ARCs).
- Working nationally across CRN regions and NIHR arms to share best practice, avoid duplication, and create connections.
- Building and maintaining effective relationships with current and future commercial and non-commercial sponsors.



# Measuring our performance

The CRN West of England is governed by a series of documents and objectives set by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), known as the **Performance and Operating Framework** (POF).

Published annually, this sets out our objectives, measures and targets, and defines mandatory operational structures, processes and systems and sets standards to ensure consistency across LCRN regions.

The performance of the NIHR CRN in meeting its purpose is measured against the CRN **High Level Objectives** (HLOs). We aim to meet and, if possible, exceed the HLO “ambitions” set on an annual basis by DHSC.

In addition to national objectives, we set local goals to enable successes that meet the needs of our region. This includes Local Specialty Objectives for each of the thirty-one research specialities, and strategic and operational plans for workstreams such as Communications, Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement, and Workforce Development.

*High Level Objectives, 2023/2024*

| High Level Objective   | Measures  |
|--|---|
| <b>Efficient study delivery</b><br>Deliver NIHR CRN Portfolio studies to recruitment target  | Percentage of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closed commercial studies which achieved target</li> <li>• Closed non-commercial studies which achieved target</li> <li>• Open commercial studies predicted to achieve target</li> <li>• Open non-commercial studies predicted to achieve target</li> </ul> |
| <b>Participant experience</b><br>Demonstrate to participants that their contribution is valued through collecting their feedback and using this to inform improvement in research delivery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of Participant in Research Experience Survey (PRES) responses</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Expanding work with the life sciences industry</b><br>Sustain or grow commercial contract research  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of new commercial studies entering the CRN Portfolio as a percentage of MHRA (Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency) clinical trial approvals for Phase II-IV studies</li> </ul>  |

# Our values

## Impact

- We understand and appreciate the bigger picture, wider context and political environment so that we can have greater societal impact.
- We utilise data to assess our impact and inform our future direction.
- We direct our resources to high quality activities to ensure impactful outcomes.

## Excellence

- We are dedicated to workforce and researcher development, investing in our people to build an exceptional workforce.
- We foster a culture of excellence within our team and with our partners, working with honesty, transparency, and ensuring good governance.
- We embed Continuous Improvement in our approach and culture.

## Inclusion

- We embrace diversity in our workforce and incorporate a wide range of experiences into our decision making.
- We utilise data to identify unmet needs and let this lead positive change across our working.
- We welcome the opinions, experiences and knowledge of everyone we connect with.

## Collaboration

- We listen to and value the contributions of current and future partners, recognising their unique outlook and priorities.
- We engage in proactive outreach to increase connectivity with other organisations “in our world”.
- We are One NIHR and part of a harmonised CRN.

## Effectiveness

- We foster a supportive environment, sharing learning and celebrating success.
- We are curious and reflective, looking for ways to improve and have a culture of change to benefit effectiveness.
- We pride ourselves on our consideration for public resources entrusted to us, and in our commitment to ensuring value for money.

**The NIHR shares  
five core operating  
principles that guide  
the way in which we  
work.**

# Our priorities for 2023/2024

As we emerge from the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of our key priorities is supporting the DHSC-led **Research Reset** programme. This programme aims to free up capacity across the research system to make CRN portfolio delivery achievable within planned timelines and sustainable within current NHS capacity.

2023-2024 will also be the last year of the CRN before the launch of the **NIHR Research Delivery Network**. Supporting this transition will be a key priority for our organisation.

As well as working as One CRN on a shared Annual Business Plan, we have identified a number of priority projects that we will locally pursue this year. These are presented in line with our five strategic themes.

## People-centred research:

- Growing our research infrastructure in hospices and care homes.
- Reporting on the disparities between local health and care needs and the local research portfolio.

- Expanding our community organisation collaborations and our co-production funding initiative.
- Increasing the diversity of studies that deliver the Participant in Research Experience Survey (PRES), and leading continuous improvement projects to respond to participants' feedback.

## Our workforce:

- Developing and recognising the Clinical Research Practitioner role, supporting registration and developing a community.
- Refreshing and refining our research delivery competency frameworks.

## Embedding research:

- Assisting secondary care partners with the identification and resolution of difficulties in accessing support services for research activity.
- Focusing on growing the number of Associate Principal Investigators (API) and increasing the number of West of England led studies registered for the API scheme.

- Developing a specialty leadership review and appraisal process, ensuring support for colleagues and value for money.

## Infrastructure:

- Overseeing and locally managing the national Research Reset Programme.
- Evaluating the impact and effectiveness of strategic pump-prime funding.
- Supporting the smooth transition to the Regional Research Delivery Network.
- Overseeing and managing the local implementation of the Pre-Funding Feasibility programme.

## Collaboration:

- Hosting a supra-regional social care event to create links with more research naive organisations in our region.
- Working as "One CRN" nationally to support the government's strategic partnerships with commercial sponsors.

# Appendix: How we got here

## The role of a regional strategy

This local strategy, collaboratively developed in late 2022, will be delivered until September 2024 during the transition period from the LCRN to the Regional Research Delivery Network (RRDN).

The aim of this strategy is to provide clarity and direction for the CRN WE and our Partner Organisations in delivering against the national NIHR and CRN ambitions at a local level.

As part of a national harmonised network, our work is aligned with that of the other LCRNs and CRN Coordinating Centre. Our aspiration is to be nationally collaborative and internationally competitive. Our ways of working and performance measures have moved away from regionally competitive gains to nationally cohesive successes.

## Key strategic documents

This strategy has developed within the context of the following national strategies and plans, which the CRN West of England supports and with which we align our work:

- Best Research for Best Health (2021), the National Institute for Health and Care Research's strategy, with seven identified areas of strategic focus.
- Saving and Improving Lives: The Future of UK Clinical Research Delivery, a DHSC policy paper outlining a vision and strategy for UK clinical research delivery.
- NIHR Clinical Research Network (CRN): Primary Care Strategy.
- Life Sciences Vision, a policy paper outlining the government and life science sector's ambitions for the life sciences sector.

## Our process

- This work was led by a Steering Group, which included representatives from the LCRN and three Partner Organisations (POs). This formed part of our local Continuous Improvement Programme.
- We collated strategic aims from all Partner Organisations and, considering these alongside national strategic direction, identified and refined the 5 strategic pillars introduced in this document.
- We carried out idea generation exercises and invited consultation on draft versions from a number of our governance and operational groups, including public representatives and regional colleagues.
- Appreciating the short timeframe of this strategy, a key driver has been that both process and output should be proportionate.

### Key acronyms:

AHSN: Academic Health Science Network  
ARC: Applied Research Collaboration  
BRC: Biomedical Research Centre  
CRN (WE): Clinical Research Network (West of England)  
DHSC: Department of Health and Social Care  
HEI: Higher Education Institution

HLO: High Level Objective  
LCRN: Local Clinical Research Network  
NIHR: National Institute for Health and Care Research  
PO: Partner Organisation  
PRES: Participant in Research Experience Survey  
(R)RDN: (Regional) Research Delivery Network  
RDS: Research Design Service

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## NIHR CRN West of England

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