Summary of Communications plans from UKPRP Funded Projects

UKPRP Community of Practice

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Contents

Executive Summary

This document collates information about the communication strategies and delivery plans from UKPRP funded Consortia and Networks; it covers the following topics: Background; Introduction to this document; Importance of Comms; Responsibility for Comms; Comms Strategies; Activities: Impact of COVID.

Background

What is the UKPRP?

The UK Prevention Research Partnership (UKPRP) is a multi-funder initiative that supports novel research into the primary prevention of non-communicable disease (NCD) to improve population health and reduce health inequalities. Our CoP is made up of members from UKPRP funded Networks and Consortia.

What is the Community of Practice?

The UK Prevention Research Partnership (UKPRP) Community of Practice (CoP) is a forum to share ideas, opportunities, and challenges across the UKPRP Networks and Consortia. By exploring our experiences, we can learn from one another, and together, to improve our ways of working to support non-communicable disease prevention. The CoP provides a place to share our learning across key topics of mutual interest. Communities of practice are iterative and respond to the needs of the group, therefore new topics of interest have emerged as we have progressed, particularly when the new funded Consortia joined. Over time, we will continue to build a body of publicly available knowledge, methods, and tools to share learning with each other and the wider prevention research community. The website for this is https://ukprp.org/community-of-practice/.

A UKPRP Network is a new interdisciplinary community of researchers and users formed around a broad NCD primary prevention research challenge and support networking activity. Networks support interactions between diverse disciplines and users to exchange expertise, scientific insights and capability as the network generates a shared vision around its chosen NCD prevention challenge. A key focus of a Network is to develop future capacity in the UK to address NCD prevention challenges. The funded Networks are:

GENIUS's aim is to build a community working towards a more health-promoting food and nutrition system in UK schools. The ultimate vision of the GENIUS network is to harness the expertise and experience of a wide range of stakeholders to drive excellence in all parts of the UK school food system to benefit the health of all pupils.

PETRA's vision is to bring together experts in economics, environment (climate change, sustainable development, planetary health), law, public health, and public policy to look at how trade and investment agreements affect the health and wellbeing of the population in the UK.

PHASE's aim is to bring together public health and simulation experts to deliver translational research that uses agent-based models to address the complex challenges faced by decision makers in the prevention of non-communicable diseases.

MatCHNet's aim is to develop a multidisciplinary, community of public health researchers, methodologists, policy makers and service providers. This community will come together to prioritise and evaluate upstream policy interventions that potentially affect child and maternal health outcomes, using administrative data across the 4 nations.

A UKPRP Consortium is a novel combination of partners, including, where appropriate, industry (such as commercial/business partners), representing a range of academic disciplines and undertaking interdisciplinary research addressing a specific challenge in the primary prevention of NCDs. UKPRP Consortia develop research strategies with users, for example policy makers, practitioners, civil society groups, health providers, the public, who may be part of the consortium, for the generation and implementation of new knowledge. The thinking behind consortia is that drawing together teams of experts from different disciplines and sectors, and including users, should enable researchers to capitalise on a range of expertise to develop novel research into high-quality interventions that can deliver change at a population level. The funded Consortia are:

ActEarly's aim is to focus on upstream early life interventions to improve the health and opportunities for children living in two contrasting areas with high levels of child poverty: Bradford, Yorkshire and Tower Hamlets, London.

GroundsWell's aim is to create a virtuous cycle of research, data, policy, implementation, and active citizenship. By working together, we will all better understand and evidence the role of urban green and blue space within wider social, economic, environmental, cultural and health systems. We will identify and implement actions to maximise health benefits from urban green and blue space. Our democratisation of the research and decision-making process will be based on principles of co-design, co-implementation, co-evaluation, and co-translation.

Kailo's aim is to: Work closely with local partners and build strong relationships that reinforce local efforts to address the wider determinants of mental health issues amongst young people; Help build a shared and systemic view of the wider determinants of young people's mental health, which surface new perspectives, challenges and opportunities; Support work that puts young people at the centre of the process to understand their experience, design new strategies and inform decisions; Collaborate to push forward and validate sustainable systemic approaches, which can continue to play a role in driving transformative change for young people.

SIPHER's aim is to shift from health policy to healthy public policy. This means all policy sectors working together to tackle health inequalities and improve the health of the public. The conditions in which we are born, grow, live, work and age are key drivers of health and health inequalities. Preventing ill health related to these "social determinants of health" requires well-coordinated policies across many sectors, such as the economy, welfare, housing, education, and employment. SIPHER will deliver novel evidence of the costs and benefits of the complex, interlinked and long-term consequences of policy decisions. This will help our policy partner organisations identify opportunities for the strategic alignment of policies across relevant sectors and give the confidence to change the way major investment decisions are made.

SPECTRUM's aim is to focus on the commercial determinants of health and health inequalities. SPECTRUM will generate new evidence to inform the prevention of NCDs caused by unhealthy commodities, including tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food and drink. Our research aims to transform policy and practice to encourage and enable healthy environments and behaviours.

TRUUD's aim is to work with decision makers and communities to prioritise health in urban decision-making processes. We are particularly focused on how non-communicable diseases (NCDs) can be prevented by changing the way that urban development decisions are made. We are focusing on major new infrastructure and transport systems in our case study areas of Bristol and Greater Manchester. We are working with senior decision-makers, related stakeholders (including community partners), and advisors at national, regional and city level. With them, we will identify

where the most influence on decision-makers lies (e.g., land disposal, procurement, regulation, economics), then develop and test ways to prioritise health.

Vision's aim is to improve the measurement of violence to support the investigation of causal pathways, to develop a theory of change, and to evaluate interventions, in order to reduce the violence that harms health. Gender and other inequalities are mainstreamed throughout the analysis. The Consortium draws on multiple disciplines across the social and health sciences, including sociology, criminology, health, and economics. We will work with data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, Third Sector specialist services, police, health services and much more. We will integrate and analyse data to build a theory of change and evaluate interventions.

Importance of Comms

Research can provide the knowledge to enable change, and for UKPRP funded group's activities and research to be able to make a change in the field of public health and NCD prevention, it is essential to effectively disseminate and communicate to a range of stakeholders and decisions makers in policy and practice. Therefore, incisive, and efficient communication is a crucial part to enabling UKPRP and the funded groups to make the desired impact.

Methods

The communication strategies and delivery plans for consortia and networks were collated and reviewed. All UKPRP funded Consortia and Networks were subsequently invited to participate in a round-table virtual workshop. The workshop participants described their communication activities and commonalities, synergies, and shared learning about communications planning for multi-institutional research groups, which are synthesised in this report.
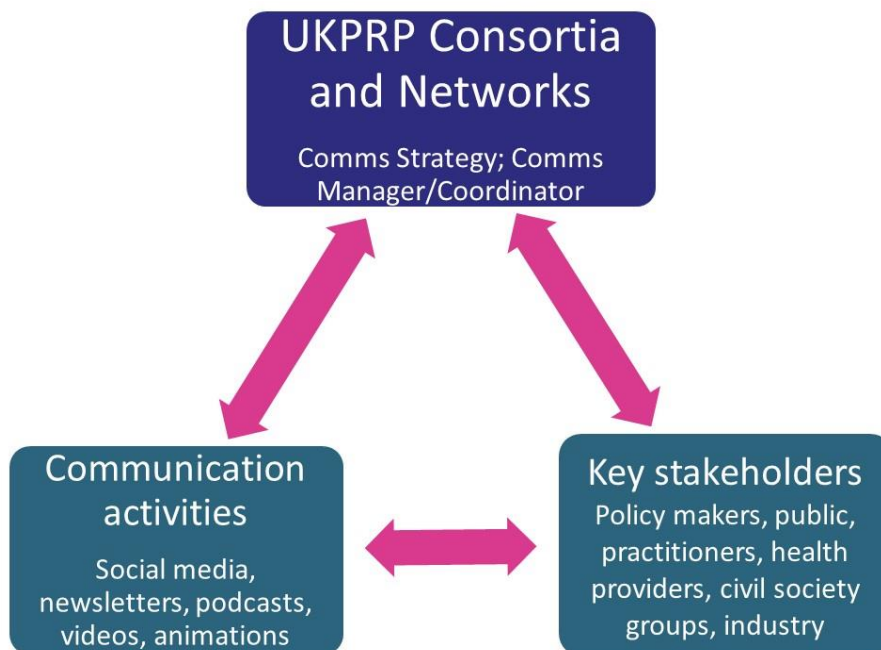

Figure 1: The key elements to who is invlovled within promoting research findings

Responsibility for Comms

Of the 11 groups currently being funded by the UKPRP, a number have appointed one person specifically dedicated to cover most, if not all, Comms activity for their group. Despite one of these individuals suggesting that they can generate more proactive content as a result of solely focusing on Comms activities, another Comms specific individual in a Consortium suggested it is quite challenging to organise Comms in such a big group and across groups, and so relies heavily on the Coordinators and Directors to pass on information and content. There are also some groups who have one or more people in place to carry out their Comms activity, however this responsibility is alongside another role (e.g. Network Coordinator, Programme Manager or Admin support). Some of these individuals have expressed how challenging it is to do this effectively as there is limited time to dedicate to Comms activities alongside their other responsibilities. This appeared to be considerably more difficult for members of Network groups due to less funding and their members' prioritising the work loads of their funded roles. Others in a similar position expressed how they do receive some support from their institutions' dedicated Comms department or spread out the Comms responsibilities among several people.

Comms Strategies

All groups expressed that they have or are creating a Comms strategy/plan and members frequently referred to having a Comms plan as a useful tool to help guide their activities and keep a specific focus as well as identifying their target audience

The CoP has already produced a 'Management Toolkit', the aim of which is to provide new (and existing) research collaborations with templates and guidance that could be useful when setting up and managing these kinds of research endeavours. The purpose is to share learning and provide a starting point from which groups can build solid management foundations to support networking and research activity in academia. The resource provides a set of general guidance to enable project managers and leadership teams to consider all options & scenarios and subsequently adopt their governance and management approaches that are most appropriate to their needs. The Toolkit enables others to develop governance, contracting, policy and strategy documents that meet the needs of their groups a little quicker and easier than might have been possible alone. One of these strategy documents is guidance on writing a Communications strategy.

Activities

Social media

Twitter was a very popular platform for the funded groups to disseminate activities and create links and contacts with external individuals. It was found that tagging and engaging directly with other Twitter accounts helps to boost engagement and especially if they engage with an account that has many followers. Accounts belonging to researchers and Co-Investigators of project, funders, other similarly funded projects (e.g. other Networks & Consortia), Department/Unit/Institutional Comms teams, partner organisations and key stakeholders were all identified as accounts that could be tagged in their tweets to help maximise engagement and reach. Keeping their account alive helps to generate interest – the content doesn't need to be directly from the funded group but instead retweet and quote-tweet other researchers' work, projects and content that are related to the groups' subject of interest. Some example tweet content could be:

• A series of tweets around what your research is and why people should join - Alongside tweets about the aims/vision of the funders.

• Meet the Team – all members to provide a photo and a short "I do this" with Uni/work webpage, Twitter, and any other relevant links.

• Specific work that your group is involved in – series of tweets about how you're different from others in your research area.

• Key members – introduce new members as appropriate and tweet member's achievements, publications, and activity in the subject area

• Tweet and retweet on key dates relevant to subject area e.g. Mental Health Awareness Week

The aim here is to circulate anything that will help generate the conversation around the topic. Tweeting around meetings or presentations that are ongoing (known as live tweeting) helps to engage audiences and make them feel part of discussions. Researchers should be aware that some subjects do attract more trolling – members agreed that a good strategy is to just never engage with such individuals. Researchers should also be aware of not tweeting about certain subjects, such as politics, and never immediately re-tweet something, always investigate what it is your tweeting and the source it's from. The Management toolkit also has advice on writing a social media policy.

X accounts of all funded groups:

GENIUS PETRA PHASE MatCHNet ActEarly GroundsWell Kailo SIPHER SPECTRUM TRUUD Vision

Newsletters
Not all funded groups have a newsletter as they could not justify producing one on a regular basis due to not having sufficient content. MatCHNet have come up with a possible solution to this however, as they try to publicise their events and publications via existing external newsletters. MatCHNet operate in the domain of maternal and child health and so examples of newsletters they utilise are: 'Social and Public Health Sciences Unit stakeholder', 'Scottish Perinatal Network' and 'Children in Wales'. However, the groups that do suggest it can be useful if there is enough content available. Newsletters tend to be externally focused and vary in frequency (monthly/quarterly) and some groups also produce an internal brief that is circulated more frequently and includes such things as the latest publications.

The platform groups used for their newsletter varies, with Campaign Monitor, Mailchimp and Dotdigital all being suggested.

Other Comms-related software such as Notionhq was mentioned as an internal platform to organise projects and work packages, however Microsoft Teams was a more common platform to do this.

Podcast
Several groups have produced some inventive ways of disseminating their research or facilitating discussions around their topic, such as a podcast. SIPHER's director (Petra Meier) hosts an external guest speaker every 2 months. The episodes have been well received and the task of composing podcasts is said not to be that onerous for those involved. SIPHER host theirs via Zoom and participants can be asked to re-say things, for example, if there was background noise. The editing is simple too as it is just a case of editing the recording and taking the silences away and any mistakes. The questions were sent over and agreed in advance and the recording would take about 40 minutes, with the podcast lasting 20 minutes. The editing takes about an hour. It's worth noting that anyone can upload podcasts to popular sites such as Spotify or Apple for free.

Website Resources

A main communications avenue for many funded groups is through their website. SPECTRUM have created an Insights page on that hosts a number of blogs and topical discussions as well as an 'In Conversation' series of interviews that aim to facilitate candid discussions around the lives and careers of various members of their research team. Focusing on one guest in each interview, the conversations provide insights into the routes that individuals have chosen, and any associated challenges and successes that they've experienced during their academic journeys to date. Each interview is hosted by a SPECTRUM early career researcher.

A few groups identified animations as a possible method to disseminate their research or activity to a different kind of audience. There are a few issues with producing these however, for example one consortium identified that it is difficult to find a cost-effective supplier on the approved supplier list for their university. SIPHER have produced several videos that help to explain the aim of the Consortium.

MatCHNet host recordings of their lunchtime webinar series that showcases their completed projects from across the 4 UK nations as well as the work that's currently in progress.

Impact of COVID

Most funded groups appear to have adapted well to moving all their activities online due to the pandemic. This has worked well for PETRA as a lot of their stakeholders are spread apart geographically and so moving their activities online has enabled more international involvement. ActEarly have also discovered that online meetings and workshops work very smoothly, with breakout groups and also tools such as Jamboards/Mentimeter. There's a belief that people don't stay as engaged in online meetings as they can easily be working on other things. However, there is an acknowledgement that it will always be a mix now as online meetings are much more convenient for busy schedules with TRUUD stating that they are also exploring hybrid communications and how to work within this new paradigm.