



# How research into preventing ill health supports effective local government decision making





## The UK Prevention Research Partnership (UKPRP)

UKPRP aims to improve public health and reduce health inequalities in the UK by researching and implementing ways to prevent non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like heart disease, cancer, stroke, and mental ill health. These rising conditions create significant costs for health services and local communities.

### Working with local government

Local government is crucial in addressing the root causes of NCDs through its influence on factors such as environment, education, employment, transport and development. Focusing on local systems can create more effective and sustainable ways to prevent these diseases and promote good health.

UKPRP researchers work with local authorities, community-based organisations, and other sectors to develop practical, co-designed strategies tailored to community needs. By bringing together knowledge from different fields through networks and consortia, we drive innovative, evidence-based approaches that address the complex challenges of NCDs at the level of local communities.

Please visit the dedicated local government association section on the UKPRP website for materials to support local authority decision making: [Prevention research materials to support local government – UKPRP](#).

## Contents

<b>SPECTRUM:</b> Shaping Public hEalth poliCies To Reduce ineqUalities and harM .....	4
<b>TRUUD:</b> Tackling the Root causes Upstream of Unhealthy Urban Development .....	6
<b>SIPHER:</b> Systems science in Public Health and Health Economics Research .....	9
<b>ActEarly:</b> A City Collaboratory approach to early promotion of good health and wellbeing .....	12
<b>GroundsWell:</b> Transforming our cities from the ground up .....	15
<b>VISION:</b> Violence, Health, and Society .....	17
<b>Kailo:</b> The shape of mental health to come.....	18

## SPECTRUM: Shaping Public Health Policies To Reduce Inequalities and Harm

Research from the SPECTRUM consortium supports decision making in the commercial determinants of health and health inequalities, focusing on tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food and drink.

### Good governance

SPECTRUM presents a set of materials focused on improving governance of commercial interactions, relationships and influence to maximise benefits and minimise risk for population health. It also gives councils a framework and tools to develop a consistent approach that aligns with their values and priorities.

The resources can be found on the Association of Directors of Public Health website: <https://www.adph.org.uk/resources/good-governance-toolkit/>



The research aims to inform policy and practice to encourage and enable healthy environments and behaviours.

They include:

- the case for using good governance to protect health
- issues to consider and evidence to support decision making about private-sector involvement in policy development (including consultation processes)
- principles and content considerations for good governance policy and process, including an example risk assessment approach and [flow charts](#)



UNIVERSITY of  
**STIRLING**



### Case Study: Alcohol Consumption Reduction

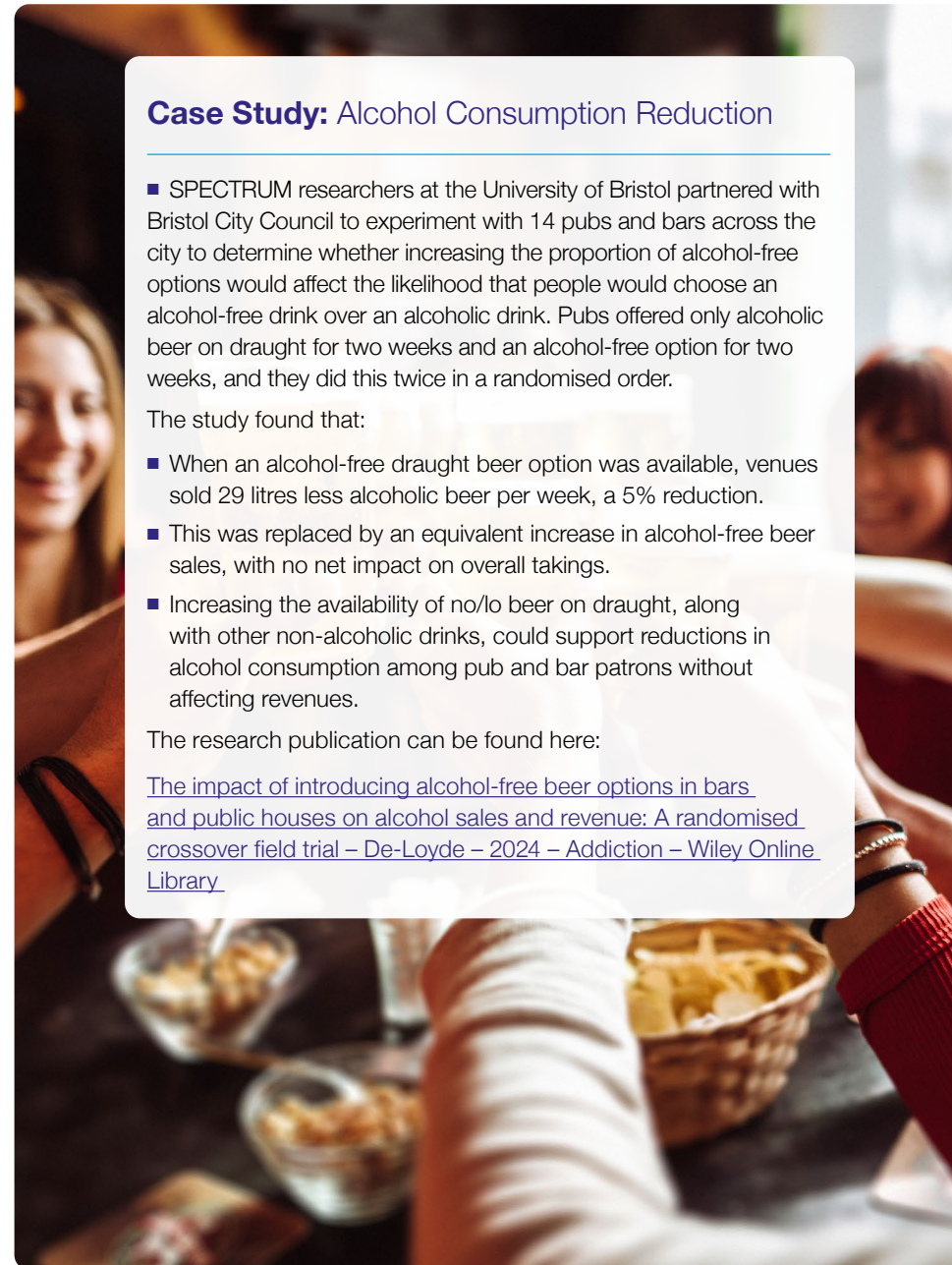
- SPECTRUM researchers at the University of Bristol partnered with Bristol City Council to experiment with 14 pubs and bars across the city to determine whether increasing the proportion of alcohol-free options would affect the likelihood that people would choose an alcohol-free drink over an alcoholic drink. Pubs offered only alcoholic beer on draught for two weeks and an alcohol-free option for two weeks, and they did this twice in a randomised order.

The study found that:

- When an alcohol-free draught beer option was available, venues sold 29 litres less alcoholic beer per week, a 5% reduction.
- This was replaced by an equivalent increase in alcohol-free beer sales, with no net impact on overall takings.
- Increasing the availability of no/lo beer on draught, along with other non-alcoholic drinks, could support reductions in alcohol consumption among pub and bar patrons without affecting revenues.

The research publication can be found here:

[The impact of introducing alcohol-free beer options in bars and public houses on alcohol sales and revenue: A randomised crossover field trial – De-Loyde – 2024 – Addiction – Wiley Online Library](#)







# TRUUD: Tackling the Root causes Upstream of Unhealthy Urban Development

The TRUUD consortium examines how urban places are planned and provides seven interventions for improving pro-health decision making across government and industry.

The consortium spans six universities, including disciplines of public health, law, psychology, management, systems engineering, environmental and health economics, real estate, planning, urban development, policy and public involvement. TRUUD's combined expertise is focused on reducing poor health and health inequalities from NCDs by tackling the way early decisions are made about the environment we live in.

TRUUD has developed several intervention and policy briefings to support decision making. Please visit their online resources: [Briefings – TRUUD](#)

Examples of resources include:

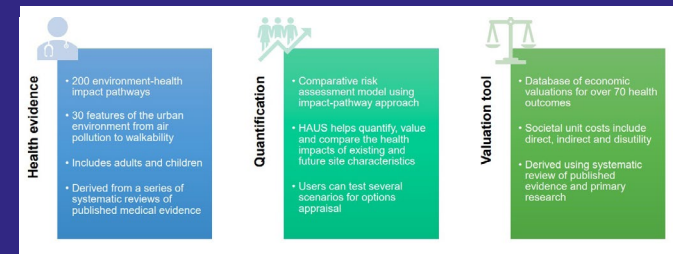
- [Working with Health Impact Assessments](#)
- The lived experience of [living in unhealthy places](#)
- Development of our [societal valuation model, HAUS](#) (The Health Appraisal of Urban Systems Model)



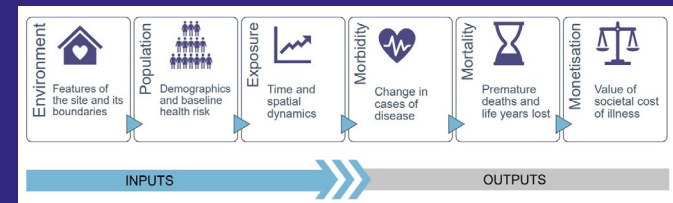
## Case Study: Understanding the costs of unhealthy urban places

*“If we change one or more elements of an area where people live, what will be the impact on health, and how can we value this?”*

TRUUD is developing a model that will help policymakers, planners, and developers understand the health implications of their development proposals far more comprehensively. The **Health Appraisal of Urban Systems Model (HAUS)** quantifies and values the health impacts of different urban environment characteristics.



HAUS includes indoor conditions as well as those around our homes, such as the natural environment (including air pollution and green space), transport, socio-economic factors (such as crime or deprivation), climate change (overheating and flooding) and community infrastructure (such as public transport and access to healthy food). Users will be able to estimate the societal value of health changes resulting from changes to the urban environment.



*For instance, there is clear evidence that green spaces can provide various health benefits, including reducing the risk of diabetes and weight gain. However, green spaces can also contribute to childhood asthma and poor perceived quality and safety of open spaces could reduce life satisfaction. By adjusting scenarios, planners will have a tool for measuring the likely health impacts of increasing or decreasing the amount and quality of green spaces.*

The model has been used in TRUUD transport and spatial planning case studies and is currently being tested with government and industry partners.

## Case Study: Working with Health Impact Assessments (HIA)

Health Impact Assessments (HIA) – used by many local authorities as a requirement for planning consent – can be a valuable tool to influence the health of communities across many generations.

Supported by the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities and the Local Government Association, TRUUD has produced a series of films presenting insight and experiences using HIAs from a wide range of planning and health practitioners.

HIAs can include consideration of issues such as local availability of healthy food, indoor space for family or communal dining, safe spaces for play and measures to mitigate climate change.

TRUUD research identified that just 38% of Local Plans have a policy requiring the submission of an HIA.

A series of workshops with local authority planners and health officials revealed that officers were looking for examples of their use and guidance from their peers. Contributions to the films highlight the need to:

- Create usable green spaces rather than taking a ‘tick-box’ approach.
- Build confidence and buy-in between developers and planners.
- Future-proof communities for generational living.
- Prioritise teamwork between public health and planning personnel and get senior-level buy-in to a health-based approach.
- Avoid technical language and use HIAs to promote better community engagement.



## SIPHER: Systems science in Public Health and Health Economics Research

The SIPHER consortium is a collaboration of academic and policy experts working to explore how systems thinking and modelling can help inform public policy design. It creates evidence-based tools and resources for use in the policy areas of Inclusive Economies, Housing and Public Mental Health.

SIPHER uses systems approaches to understand how local and national government policies affect health inequalities.

This innovative systems approach offers a powerful framework to explore the complex real-world relationships and interdependencies that shape population health and wellbeing. SIPHER’s resources will be particularly interesting to local authorities interested in promoting economic inclusion and/or tackling health inequalities

SIPHER resources can be found here:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/sipher/products/>

They include:

- 13 inclusive economy indicators, with associated trend data and an interactive mapping function that describe the extent and nature of economic inclusion across all local authorities in Great Britain.
- A Synthetic Population dataset and interactive dashboard that provides access to a ‘digital twin’ of the adult population in England, Scotland and Wales. Combining census and survey data, this tool provides unique insight into the population’s health, socio-economic and living circumstances at high spatial resolution.
- A layered systems map combining published evidence and lived experience perspectives on the relationship between housing and health.





## Case Study: Informing housing strategy: participatory systems mapping with private rented sector tenants and landlords.

■ SIPHER researchers, in collaboration with Sheffield City Council (SCC), conducted participatory systems mapping workshops with tenants and landlords in Sheffield's private rented sector (PRS). The goal was to help SCC revise its housing strategy by identifying key areas for improvement to support vulnerable households better and to provide evidence on how the PRS can promote better health outcomes. This is especially important as low-income and vulnerable households in the PRS have increased significantly across the UK in the past 15 years.

### The work had two key impacts:

1. Directly contributing to SCC's housing strategy development.
2. Introducing SCC's housing team to qualitative system science tools for research and analysis.

### Key Findings:

- Quality of repairs and maintenance is central to tenant wellbeing.
- Cultural segregation, discrimination, and racism significantly affect neighbourhood experiences.
- Tenants and landlords need more support and guidance to foster trust and positive relationships.
- A sense of control over housing is essential for tenants' mental wellbeing and overall health.

### Further Resources:

- [A digital version of the housing-health systems map created by tenants.](#)
- [Video demonstrating how to use the map.](#)

## The wider social determinants of mental health in Scotland

Public mental health policy focuses on preventing and treating mental health issues while promoting mental wellbeing, with an emphasis on socio-economic factors like poverty, unemployment, housing, and stigma. These factors span multiple policy areas, requiring a systems approach to develop effective, cross-cutting interventions. Since 1999, many policy areas related to mental health have been devolved to Scotland, where improving mental health and reducing inequalities have long been national priorities. The 2023 Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy emphasises a shift toward a preventative, whole-systems framework to address these socio-economic determinants.

SIPHER is collaborating with Public Health Scotland, the Scottish government, and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) to support this strategy.

SIPHER researchers have reviewed Scotland's recent mental health policies and compared them with how people describe their lived experiences.

This review supports the overall approach but highlights three key areas for further focus:

- The role of stigma in linking socio-economic factors to mental health.
- The importance of place and neighbourhood beyond housing.
- The need to strengthen policy engagement, especially in disadvantaged communities.

SIPHER is currently conducting systems mapping to illustrate how social determinants influence mental health and wellbeing. The team also leads an evidence synthesis, analysing research patterns to guide future investigations.

### Next Steps:

- Refining the system's focus using a framework that considers issue severity, stakeholder priorities, and available resources.
- Hosting participatory workshops with stakeholders to explore systems and bibliometric maps.

This ongoing programme will inform the next delivery plan for Scotland's [Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#), ensuring that policy development is supported by evidence and systems thinking tailored to the needs of local communities.



## ActEarly: A City Collaboratory approach to early promotion of good health and wellbeing



The ActEarly consortium focuses on upstream interventions to improve the life chances of children by enhancing the environments that influence their health.



### Giving independent advice about research evidence to the people making decisions and policy

ActEarly is working with the West Yorkshire Scientific Advisory Group (WYSAG), which is also supported by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) Yorkshire and Humber, on behalf of the [West Yorkshire Combined Authority](#) and [West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership \(WYHCP\)](#).

WYSAG provides local and regional policymakers with academic expertise and research summaries on topics jointly chosen by the Combined Authority and WYHCP. The group reviews existing research to inform policy decisions and highlight areas needing further study. Their advice covers health, the environment, costs, fairness, and regional context.

The WYSAG Talks series offers insights into current challenges and research-based solutions:

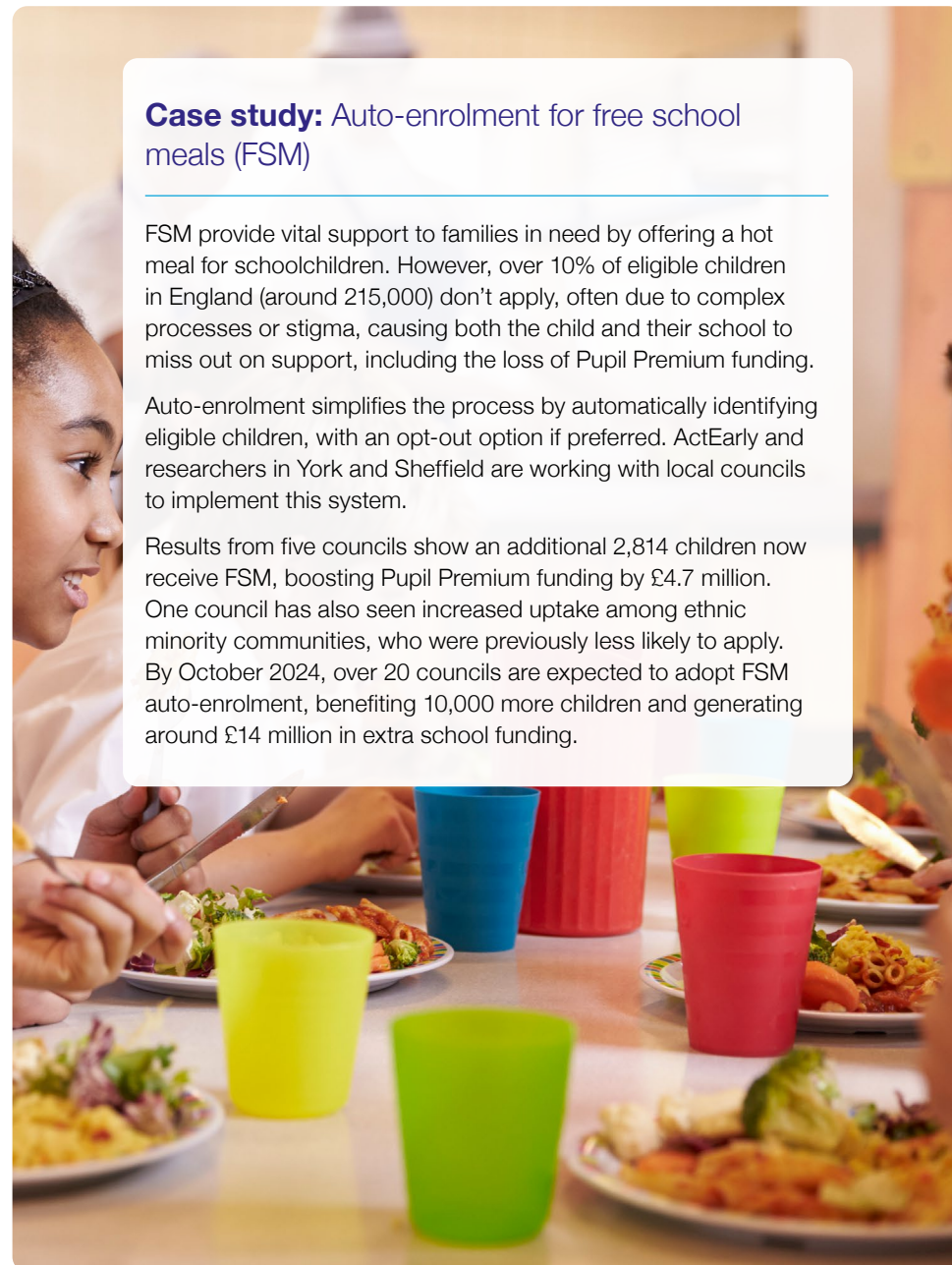
- **Pollution: What's the problem?** by Rosie McEachan describes the impact of pollution and explores the solutions of how urban and transport planners can work with health and education providers and communities <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnFBXBZsO4o>
- **Improve Livelihoods for a Robust Economy and Society** by Kate Pickett explains interventions and policies which can reduce economic inequalities and tackle health disparities <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pi8p5Duu5-I>

### Case study: Auto-enrolment for free school meals (FSM)

FSM provide vital support to families in need by offering a hot meal for schoolchildren. However, over 10% of eligible children in England (around 215,000) don't apply, often due to complex processes or stigma, causing both the child and their school to miss out on support, including the loss of Pupil Premium funding.

Auto-enrolment simplifies the process by automatically identifying eligible children, with an opt-out option if preferred. ActEarly and researchers in York and Sheffield are working with local councils to implement this system.

Results from five councils show an additional 2,814 children now receive FSM, boosting Pupil Premium funding by £4.7 million. One council has also seen increased uptake among ethnic minority communities, who were previously less likely to apply. By October 2024, over 20 councils are expected to adopt FSM auto-enrolment, benefiting 10,000 more children and generating around £14 million in extra school funding.







## GroundsWell: Transforming our cities from the ground up

### Case study: Healthy Urban Places (HUP)

- HUP is a new research programme created by the ActEarly Healthy Places theme.
- It will look at how places make a difference to our health and what changes we can make that will help to keep us healthy.
- Local councils, communities, and researchers will work together using data on health, geography, and history to learn more about the features of the places we live and work in that shape our health.
- Researchers will follow the lives of people living in Bradford and Liverpool over time to see how their environment affects their health, which people are hit hardest by, and whether changes in the environment make health better or worse.
- Communities will be at the centre of HUP, and ActEarly will build 'Community Collaboratives' to guide and co-produce the research.



The GroundsWell consortium comprises a team of researchers, local community members, and policymakers in Belfast, Edinburgh, and Liverpool working together to create a collaborative cycle of positive action.

GroundsWell aims to identify and implement actions to maximise health and wellbeing benefits from urban green and blue spaces (UGBS) such as parks, community gardens, canals and rivers. From collecting data and conducting community research to creating policies and supporting active citizenship, GroundsWell's research reveals more about how UGBS impacts economic, social, cultural, environmental, and health systems.

The communities and the systems which desire, design, develop, and deliver UGBS are fragmented and siloed.

Similarly, research programmes and disciplines lack integration and coherence. The challenge is to augment current systems approaches in public health to address these shortcomings. GroundsWell's innovation is applying and integrating systems methods, and approaches that incorporate co-production, data sharing, and community engagement.

The team has also applied a systems approach to the development of the consortium, its wider community and the programme of work to achieve a shared and common understanding of the aims and desired outcomes of the programme and its completeness and coherence.





## Case study: Urban Green and Blue Space (UGBS) in climate action policies

We face a triple planetary crisis: climate change, nature degradation, and pollution, all impacting population health and inequalities. Little research exists on effective policies and interventions to address these issues. In 2022, Northern Ireland's Climate Change Act emphasised nature-based solutions (NBS), and the Northern Irish government is undertaking public consultation on carbon budgeting and developing a climate action plan.

The [Connswater Community Greenway \(CCG\)](#) in East Belfast is a prime example of an NBS addressing these challenges. In partnership with Belfast City Council, the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), and other stakeholders, the GroundsWell team integrates learnings from CCG to inform climate action plans. The CCG opened in 2017 and features 16km of walking and cycling infrastructure, river remediation, flood alleviation, and community programmes, particularly benefiting some of Northern Ireland's most deprived communities.

Underpinning research from GroundsWell is informing NI policy and influencing its climate action plan by showcasing UGBS as exemplars of NBS and informing multi-sectoral policies at the nexus of health, climate action, and inequalities.

GroundsWell has been building on research on the CCG since 2010, making it one of the longest-running evaluations of an NBS intervention. The current five-year study explores health, social, economic, environmental, and climate impacts, focusing on inequalities and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The consortium has developed a reference model for the ongoing sustainability and maintenance of the CCG. This systems approach has had the following impacts to date: Enabled the CCG team to identify new stakeholders required in the sustainability and maintenance phases; identified key indicators for the five-year follow-up evaluation; identified priorities for action such as anti-social behaviour and the conflicting use of spaces between user groups which are part of a suite of intervention development projects. This work highlights the potential of UGBS as a model for NBS, informing local government policies that connect health, climate action, and social equity. Each GroundsWell city contributes to this effort by developing climate-resilient greenways, biodiversity projects, and sustainable transport solutions.



## VISION: Violence, Health, and Society



The VISION consortium is a collaboration of epidemiologists, economists, data scientists, primary care physicians, criminologists, evaluation experts, psychiatrists and more from 10 universities partnering with people with lived experience, peer action researchers, and representatives of community and voluntary sector organisations and health and justice service providers.

VISION is working to improve how data on violence is defined, collected, integrated and analysed across government and third sector health and justice systems.

Violence is common across the life course, harms health and is recognised as a crime in law.

VISION's research on health and justice data measurement and integration promotes system-wide, joined-up strategies.

VISION's resources will particularly interest policymakers and practitioners on violence reduction and health recovery.

Please visit the VISION website for

- [Our Research – City Vision](#) – information on the VISION research project
- [Publications & Events – City Vision](#) – A directory of publications such as peer-reviewed papers, events to share research findings, and news about the team over the first three years of the VISION project





## Kailo: The shape of mental health to come

Kailo is a framework that helps local authorities, health, and community partnerships design preventative policies and practices to improve young people's mental health and wellbeing.

The approach enables local partnerships to understand and address the social determinants of young people's mental health within their context. It involves systemic co-design, creating strategies, policies, and practices for systemic change.

**Get involved**

In autumn 2024, Kailo is seeking new health and local authority partners across the UK to implement the framework locally, supported by new resources:

- Social Determinants Mapping Tool
- A Practice Tool to support co-design
- Coaching and support for partners

For more information and to get in touch with the team, please visit <https://kailo.community>



### Further information



Explore prevention  
research materials  
for local government



Find out more about UKPRP



Explore what we fund





Find out more about UKPRP

[www.ukprp.org](http://www.ukprp.org)

✉ [UKPRP@mrc.ukri.org](mailto:UKPRP@mrc.ukri.org)

✕ [@UK\\_PRP](https://twitter.com/UK_PRP)

