

How to engage with planning and commissioning to maximise knowledge transfer and the impact of your research and evaluation

What is commissioning? The Commissioning Cycle

It is important to understand the cycle and processes of commissioning. Commissioning is the process of assessing needs, planning and prioritising, purchasing and monitoring services to get the best health and care outcomes for the population. It is important to consider how robust research can support commissioning at each stage of the commissioning cycle to help inform decision making and policy development, drive improvement and inform quality improvement.



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Who are the commissioners and commissioning authorities?

Identify your key commissioners and commissioning authorities. The best way of meeting commissioners is to do initial exploration in your area of interest or expertise. Go along to relevant forums or events to meet commissioners, service users and providers of services and identify commissioning policies. A number of organisations are responsible for commissioning, for example NHS England (NHSE), Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), Integrated Care Board (ICBs), local authorities, schools or colleges, provider organisations, Public Health, primary care networks (PCNs)

It is important to engage commissioners in research design, the research itself and the implementation and dissemination of research to maximise the ability to deliver and sustain service change as well as informing transformation and making an impact.

Why is research important for those commissioning services?

The use of research evidence to support the right decision making can help commissioners to commission the right services in the right place at the right time for the right people.

Research evidence can inform key strategic and commissioning decisions to improve quality (safety, effectiveness, experience) and impact of services, to help transform and innovate health and social care delivery, and to support a continuous cycle of evaluation and improvement.

Tips for researchers on how to engage with planning and commissioning to maximise knowledge transfer and the impact of research and evaluation

1. Build relationships with your commissioning colleagues

and engage commissioners right at the beginning of any research.

2. Engage commissioners in helping co-design the research questions

by understanding how any research proposals align with national, regional and local strategic priorities and the needs of the wider system (eg ICB strategies, Health and Wellbeing Plans, Joint Strategic Needs Assessments, Joint Forward Plans etc).

3. Involve commissioners in research governance

(for example, task and finish groups, reference groups, steering groups or research stakeholder boards).



4. Offer to present to key strategic boards

(eg Health and Wellbeing Boards, ICB Boards, Community Transformation Boards, Local Authority Committees, Regional Boards). Even better – jointly present with commissioning colleagues if possible!

5. Understand the commissioning structures you are collaborating with – where does accountability lie, where and who are responsible for key strategic decisions?



6. Develop practical toolkits or learning reviews

(eg case studies, guidance etc) to help scale and spread evidence base and innovation and to support implementation and dissemination.



7. Build in economic impact and cost benefit analysis within your research, if applicable. Any return on investment is useful to help with future commissioning and sustainability of services/ interventions.

8. Embed voices of lived experience

in research design, delivery and implementation of research. These voices are essential to share with commissioners.

9. Understand timescales – timely sharing of findings is important (for example, linking to re-procurement of services, policy development or transformation of pathways, service redesign).



10. Share research outputs and review evidence with commissioners.

Regular reports and reviews of progress are essential and can support future funding investment decisions and demonstrate impact.

11. Consider identifying or costing in commissioners as key contributors to research, when developing research bids.

12. Be ready to move quickly

Sometimes funding needs to be allocated quickly. It can be helpful to have a single page summary of your research pre-prepared to submit quickly when funding opportunities arise.



Further useful guidance: [Maximising the Benefits of Research: Guidance for ICBs](#)
[Research, Evaluation and Evidence: A Guide for Commissioners](#)
[Find out about the NIHR Mental Health Implementation Network](#)