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Enhancing Diversity in Health Research through Research Engagement Network (REN): A Hyperlocal Community- Based Approach in North West London (NWL)

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

Communities championing their own health is crucial to providing sustainable and integrated health services of the future. However, research in integrated care has an underrepresentation of population groups, particularly ethnic minority communities, that are at increased risk of developing diseases. Community-based participatory research[1] is where community and research stakeholders have meaningful dialogue. Embodying this approach, ARC NWL[4] delivered the Research Engagement Network [2] (REN) initiative to promote diversity in research participation[3] in NWL (Figure 1), an area of over 2.4 million population through a multi-pronged approach.

Figure 1: Boroughs in Northwest London

This project aimed to engage diverse communities, foster meaningful dialogue with Community Research Champions [5] (CRCs) on research diversity, and influence research priorities through community insights.

METHOD

A bottom-up, community-based approach was employed to engage diverse populations in two ethnically varied NWL districts.

Community Research Champions from within the community were trained and led discussions on diversity in research

Health Roadshows in collaboration with local Primary Care Networks (PCNs), carried out health and wellbeing checks with an emphasis on the cost-of-living crisis.

Partnership Forum created to enhance collaboration between PCNs, statutory bodies, and academia to drive multi-agency efforts.

This multi-pronged approach was evaluated using surveys and focus group discussions with the community research champions.

RESULTS & CONCLUSION

Health Roadshows: 10 roadshows engaged more than 1,200 residents, offering 597 health checks, community services, and research participation opportunities.

Community Research Champions: CRCs facilitated discussions that increased community awareness. There were high levels of recognition of the importance of health research, and willingness to participate to enhance community engagement with research and its findings as illustrated in Figure 2.

The project's impact spanned five key areas seen in Figure 3.

Partnership Forum: Two partnership forums, through which co-chairs provided community connections, were crucial in building trust, and ensuring research aligned with community needs.

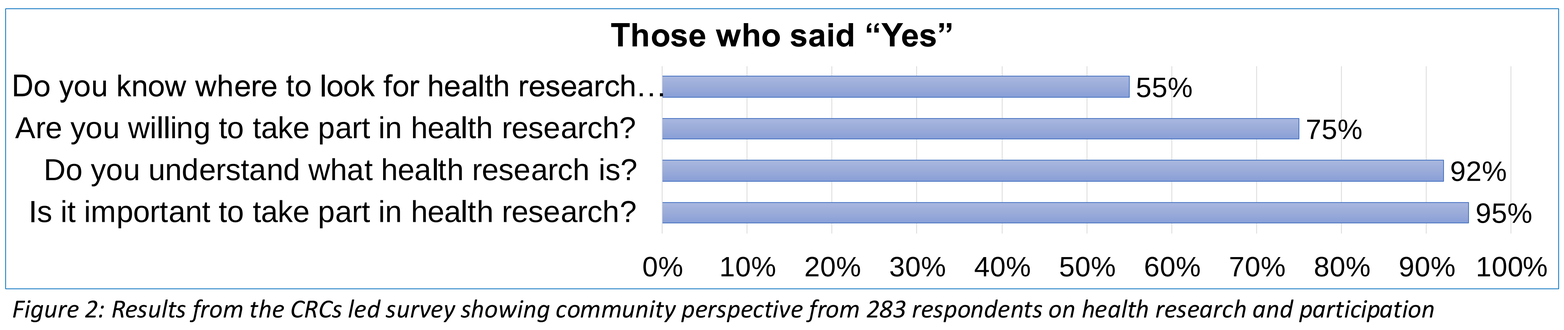
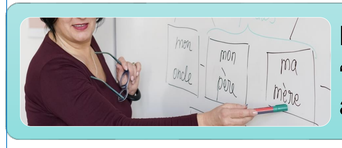


Figure 2: Results from the CRCs led survey showing community perspective from 283 respondents on health research and participation

Building Relationships and Trust with community members

"Once you build a relationship, people open up about everything, including research, because they trust you." (CRC1)

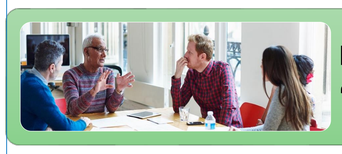


Providing language support

"A lady from India couldn't understand English, so I explained in her language. She understood and was grateful." (CRC2)

Encouraging engagement with local health and research partners

"We guided people to different stall to ensure they didn't miss anything important." (CRC1)



Providing a mechanism to understand community issues

"One 80-year-old lady mentioned she doesn't know how to use a smartphone." (CRC3)

Reducing isolation

"A lot of people are isolated and have no one to talk to. So, on Tuesday I spent time talking with three women, which brought them out into the community, which is quite nice." (CRC1)

Figure 3: The impact of the Community Research Champions role and roadshows showed 5 specific benefits

Conclusion

- **Community Engagement:** By meeting communities in their spaces and languages, the project identified barriers for ethnic minorities, improved health check access, and increased interest in health research. Notably, 75% of respondents from deprived areas expressed willingness to engage in research, proving this approach's effectiveness.
- **Community-Driven Health Roadshows and Partnership Forum:** Reached diverse groups and sparked key discussions on research needs. The Partnership Forum, through collaboration with local partners, ensured the project remained community-driven, enhancing research diversity and health service accessibility.

Where did we go next? Developed the **CRCs Handbook** SCAN ME, **the Impact story** SCAN ME and the **Ethnicity & Health Unit** brochure SCAN ME

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