

## **Fact sheet 18: How and why do I involve service users and other stakeholders?**

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This fact sheet aims to give you information to help you to understand:

- The importance of service user involvement in research and evaluation, and
- A summary of approaches to service user involvement.

### **1. Why is service user involvement in research and evaluation important?**

Involvement means that people who use services are active partners in the research or evaluation process rather than the subjects of research. It is important to involve users when conducting research, evaluation or insight work, as users (or potential users) of services will have experiences that could be vital to your investigation into practices or services.

Members of the public bring perspectives and skills that are not always the same as those of researchers and health and social care professionals. Their involvement helps to ensure that the entire research process is focused on what is important to people and is therefore more relevant and acceptable to the users of services.

The 'Involve' website provides a great deal of useful information relating to service user involvement in research <http://www.invo.org.uk/>,

If you intend to apply for funding for your research project, you need to bear in mind that many of the funding organisations view service user involvement as extremely important and will ask you to demonstrate in your application how you are involving users. For these kinds of organisations it is usually not enough just to say that users will be involved in focus groups, as this will not be seen as enough involvement.

### **2. When do we need to consider service user involvement?**

Involvement can occur during any or all of the stages of research or evaluation process, including setting the research agenda, commissioning research, undertaking research, interpreting research, disseminating the results of research and putting findings into practice.

When designing a research project it is useful to engage with users to clarify the issue or research question and how it affects the target population. Engaging with users also ensures that your approach and methods are appropriate and the language you use is understandable by all the audiences involved (e.g. survey materials, consent letters). Involving stakeholders at the planning stages will assist you with recruitment strategies and any potential problems you may encounter when you engage with the target group.

When you have carried out your research, evaluation or insight work, the stakeholders involved will be able to help you consider the most appropriate means of communicating findings and disseminating your findings in an accessible way to the target and if appropriate the wider population.

It is important to remember to involve not just current users but potential users, carers and stakeholders. Stakeholders are people, groups or organisations who affect or can be affected by the service or research. This may be a local community organisation who represent people like your users i.e. Wirral Older People's Parliament.

### 3. Approaches to service user involvement

There are many different ways that we can involve the public in research and evaluation.

Setting up a working group at the beginning of a research or evaluation project of which a member of the public or a service user is a member will mean that you will have their input when deciding how the project will run. This is a positive way of working with the public and involving them in the decision making process. They may be able to advise on the best way to communicate with other users/public members, where to recruit participants and on the types of materials that would be best used e.g. the type of questions used in a survey.

Members of the public and service users may be involved in the research or evaluation itself by providing their views, opinions and experience of a service or care they have received. By inviting their participation you are involving them in improving the quality of their own care and in influencing service improvements and future planning. The public and service users may be invited to take part in a survey or focus groups or attend interviews to discuss a service. This is the simplest form of service user involvement and it is good to aim to go beyond this. See also [Fact sheet 15 What are the best research evaluation methods to use?](#)

When you are disseminating the findings of the research or evaluation you may again want to consult with the public and service users about the best, most appropriate means of doing this. It may be that a public meeting or producing written communication is appropriate. You may wish to engage and involve the wider public or users that have not taken part in the study and use it as a forum to raise awareness of current practice or services and allow the public to be involved in their care/services. See [Fact sheet 19 How do I disseminate the findings from my evaluation or research project?](#)



#### More on this topic and further reading

##### King's Fund

The King's Fund is an independent charitable foundation whose goal is to improve health, especially in London, through focusing on tackling health inequalities and social injustice, enabling health and social care staff and organisations to work in partnership across traditional boundaries, promoting cultural diversity in health and encouraging service user and wider public involvement in health and health and social care.

<http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/>

##### INVOLVE

INVOLVE is a national advisory group which supports greater public involvement in NHS, Public health and social care research. INVOLVE is funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). INVOLVE was established to promote public involvement in research, in order to improve the way that research is prioritised, commissioned, undertaken, communicated and used.

<http://www.invo.org.uk/>