

Annual report 2022-23

North Wales
Regional Innovation Coordination Hub



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NORTH WALES SOCIAL CARE AND WELL-BEING
SERVICES IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVE

Summary

The hub aims to coordinate health and social care research, innovation and improvement activity in North Wales.

In 2022-23 we evaluated innovative ideas, such as the [Community Catalysts micro-care project](#) and [RITA devices](#) to support reminiscence, rehabilitation and interactive therapy activities for people living with dementia. We look forward to sharing the positive impacts these projects have made during the next year.

To support the new regional Digital, Data and Technology Board, we held workshops and began mapping the innovative digital projects taking place in North Wales.

We worked closely with the Developing Evidence Enriched Practice (DEEP) to improve the ways we collect, talk about and use research evidence. This includes story-telling methods of collecting evidence and using a method called [Community of Enquiry](#) to reflect on evidence we'd gathered to support the work of the Regional Partnership Board Children's Sub-Group.

We supported regional programmes with searches to identify research evidence about topics they're working on. This included searches around [digital inclusion](#), [children who do not attend school](#) and [young carers of adults with mental health issues](#).

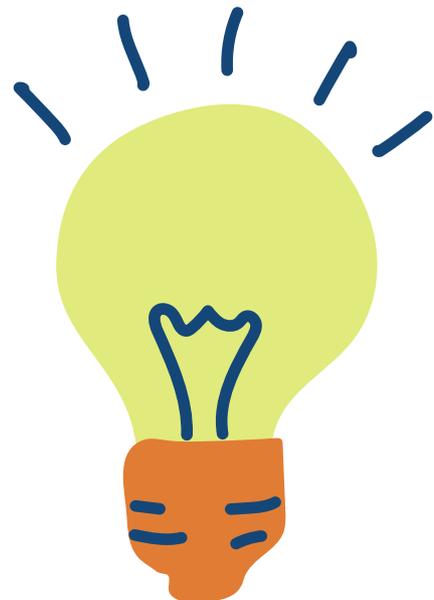
As Census 2021 data has begun to be published, we've produced a series of reports about the initial results for North Wales including demography and equalities data.

Working closely with the other regional hubs and national organisations, we shared, promoted and developed new ideas, including membership of a new North Wales Innovation Network.

By the end of the year we had increased our Twitter followers to 400 and had 170 subscribers to the RIC hub mailing list.

Please follow us on [Twitter @_NW_RICH](#), [sign up to our newsletter](#) and visit the [RIC hub webpages](#) for more information.

In 2022-23, the hub rebranded as a Regional Innovation Coordination Hub (previously Research, Innovation and Improvement Coordination Hub), part of the Welsh Government Innovation, Technology and Partnerships Programme.



The year in figures



Finding out what works

Literature searches

Our specialist librarian carries out searches to find out what research has already been carried out on a topic or examples of best practice.

During the year, we carried out 29 literature searches including pooled budgets; care inspectorate reports; strategic engagement with children and young carers needs; involving children in decision making; emergency care for those with dementia; engagement with vulnerable groups; psychological interventions for those with learning disabilities; social model and learning disabilities; young carers needs and policies; young asylum seekers; child and family outcome frameworks; communication strategies for children and engagement with children; the policy landscape for children with disability or illness; young asylum seekers needs/support; digital inclusion; young carers and glandular fever; and, co-production including system change, digital changes, older people and learning disabilities.

We've started publishing our searches as blog posts so they're more accessible to anyone interested in the subject. The latest are:

- [digital inclusion](#)
- [young carers of those with mental health issues](#)
- [school refusal](#).

If you work with the Regional Partnership Board on integrated health and social care projects in North Wales and would like to request a search, please contact [Beccy Roylance](#).

Evaluating innovative ideas

We developed an approach to carry out a rapid evaluation of innovative ideas. To pilot the approach we looked at the [Community Catalysts project](#) about micro-care models and [RITA devices](#) to support reminiscence, rehabilitation and interactive therapy activities for people living with dementia. We look forward to sharing the positive impacts these projects have made during the next year.

Supporting the Regional Integration Fund evaluation

To help identify innovation with potential for scale and spread, the RIC hub has been supporting the evaluation of the £44 million North Wales Regional Integration Fund programme. In this first year, we've been focussing on putting systems in place so that we can measure the difference made by projects to help identify what works. We're using a mix of numbers and story collection to make sure we don't miss important changes just because they're difficult to count. By the end of the year we'd analysed 60 case studies for insight into the well-being outcomes achieved for people by the programme.

See **Graham's story** below for an example.

Graham's story

Graham is in his 50's and says he is a proud man. He was referred to Community Navigator by an employment mentor because, due to stroke two years previously, he was unemployed. Since then, he has struggled with the physical demands of work, this had caused severe financial hardship.

When he first spoke with the community navigator, he said his daughter called in most days with a hot meal. He admitted he hadn't seen his GP in a long time and had discharged himself from hospital after the stroke as he thought he could cope independently.



At his second visit to the community navigator, Graham confided that his daughter didn't visit as regularly as he initially said. He became quite emotional as he described feeling very isolated and hungry. All his money was going on rent and he had struggled to make meals due to physical weakness after the stroke. He disclosed he had multiple health issues and needed a pacemaker but had failed the pre-operative assessment several times. He was feeling very low.

The community navigator worked with Graham, providing emotional support, referrals and signposting to several organisations including;

- Citizens Advice Denbighshire – support with benefit advice
- Local food share scheme
- Social groups
- Stroke Association
- GP surgery
- Social Care Practitioner

What changed?

Before meeting the community navigator, Graham described feeling shame because he was no longer able to work and support himself financially. His physical health had impacted on his mental health and wellbeing. He described feeling isolated and had a hard time accepting his situation.

When he began to discuss and reflect on things and accept support through the Community Navigator, he grew in confidence. This led to;

- Attending social groups and feeling less isolated
- An increase in weight and health resulting in Graham passing the pre-operative assessment to have a pacemaker fitted.
- Increased benefits and improved financial situation

Graham described how the information, advice and assistance he received had improved his mood and his health. After his operation, he arrived home to a letter saying his benefit application had been approved and he received a back payment. This enabled him to clear debts and 'start afresh'. He said walking into the library that day saved his life.

Sharing information about health and care needs

After completing the [Population Needs Assessment](#) in March 2022 we shared the key messages with decision makers in North Wales to help set evidence-based priorities for regional work.

We provided a range of bespoke data reports for partners on topics including older people's needs, autism and children and young people's mental health. We've produced statistical profiles for North Wales which include information about the wider social and physical environment that can impact on health and well-being for local council areas, the health board areas and Public Service Board areas in North Wales. We're also reviewing topics as part of our [focus on children and young people work](#).

We also provided data and evidence for the regional [Market Stability Report](#) which looked at the availability of care and support to meet the needs identified in the Population Needs Assessment.

During 2022-23 information from the 2021 Census started to be released. To support partners to plan and run health and care services we've produced a series of reports about the initial results for North Wales. This includes initial results, demography and migration, veterans, ethnic group, religion, language, education, sexual orientation and gender identity.

View the [statistics and research pages on the regional collaboration website](#).

About North Wales: 2021 Census results

The population structure in North Wales is **significantly older** than the national average, with a median age of 46 in 2021 compared to 42 for Wales and 40 for England. The North Wales median age has increased from 43 in 2011. Conwy County Borough has the oldest median age (49) and Wrexham the youngest (42).

There are **over 81,650 pensioner-only households** in North Wales which is about 27% of all households and high compared to national figures (25% for Wales and 22% for England). Pensioners living alone make up the majority of these households (16% or 47,700 households). Rates are particularly high in Conwy (31% of all households). Numbers and rates have increased since 2011, despite the change in definition of pensioner to match changes to the state retirement age.

Around 66,650 people in North Wales provide unpaid care which is about 10% of the population. This is similar to the all-Wales figure but slightly higher than the England and Wales average. Overall, this is a slight decrease since 2011. However, the number and proportion of people who provide 20 or more hours of care a week has increased (up from 32,750 in 2011 to 36,600 in 2021). Denbighshire has the highest proportion of unpaid carers in North Wales.

2021 Census data shows that **21% of North Wales residents identified as disabled** (as defined in the Equality Act). This is high compared to England and Wales (18%) but slightly lower than the Welsh average (22%). The rate is highest in Denbighshire (23.3%) and Conwy (22.6%), perhaps due to the older age structure of the population in these areas. **6.2% of North Wales residents said they had bad health** compared to 7.6% for Wales and 5.6% for England and Wales as a whole.

Though North Wales contains the two local authorities with the highest proportion of Welsh speakers – **Gwynedd with 64% of the population aged 3 and older able to speak Welsh** and Anglesey with 56% – it also contains Flintshire where the figure was under 12%. For North Wales as a whole, the proportion of **Welsh speakers in the population has fallen from 31% in 2011 to 29% in 2021** (18% for Wales in 2021).

The population of **North Wales is much less ethnically diverse** than across England and Wales as a whole. There has been little change in the last decade in the overall proportions within each high-level ethnic group. 97% of the total population identified as “White” (94% in Wales and 82% in England and Wales) the proportion was highest in Anglesey at 98% and lowest in Wrexham at 96%

The population of **North Wales is also less religiously diverse** than national averages. A total of 12,350 people or 1.8% of the population identified with a religion other than Christian. This compares to 3.6% for Wales and 10.6% for England and Wales as a whole. Just under half of the population (49.8%) identified as Christian (down from 64% in 2011) and 42% said they had no religion (up from 27%).

For more information see our [Census 2021 webpages](#).



Innovation: using evidence to improve services

The new Regional Partnership Board Children's sub-group began with a challenge. The group are responsible for issues facing children and young people across the age range from babies to young adults. Priorities including children's mental health, disabled children, young people cared for by their local authority and preventing violence against children. The group includes representatives from children's social care, health, education and police.

With such a diverse portfolio of responsibilities, they needed a way to focus in on some of the priority areas, learn from children's experiences and views and share good ideas.

We agreed that every two or three meetings we'd clear the agenda for an in-depth focus on one of priorities. For each priority the RIC hub pulls together lots of information including statistics and data, feedback from children and young people and examples of what's working well in other areas.

To facilitate the first meeting, we asked Nick Andrews, from the Developing Evidence Enriched Practice (DEEP) project for help. Nick introduced a method called Community of Enquiry. It's a method where a group of people come together to reflect on evidence and generate questions together about what they've learned, which they discuss as a group. We begin with a presentation about the evidence we'd found, usually illustrated by videos that reflect the main messages.

The method was a great way to get everyone talking and sharing ideas about how we can improve the way we support children and young people across the region.

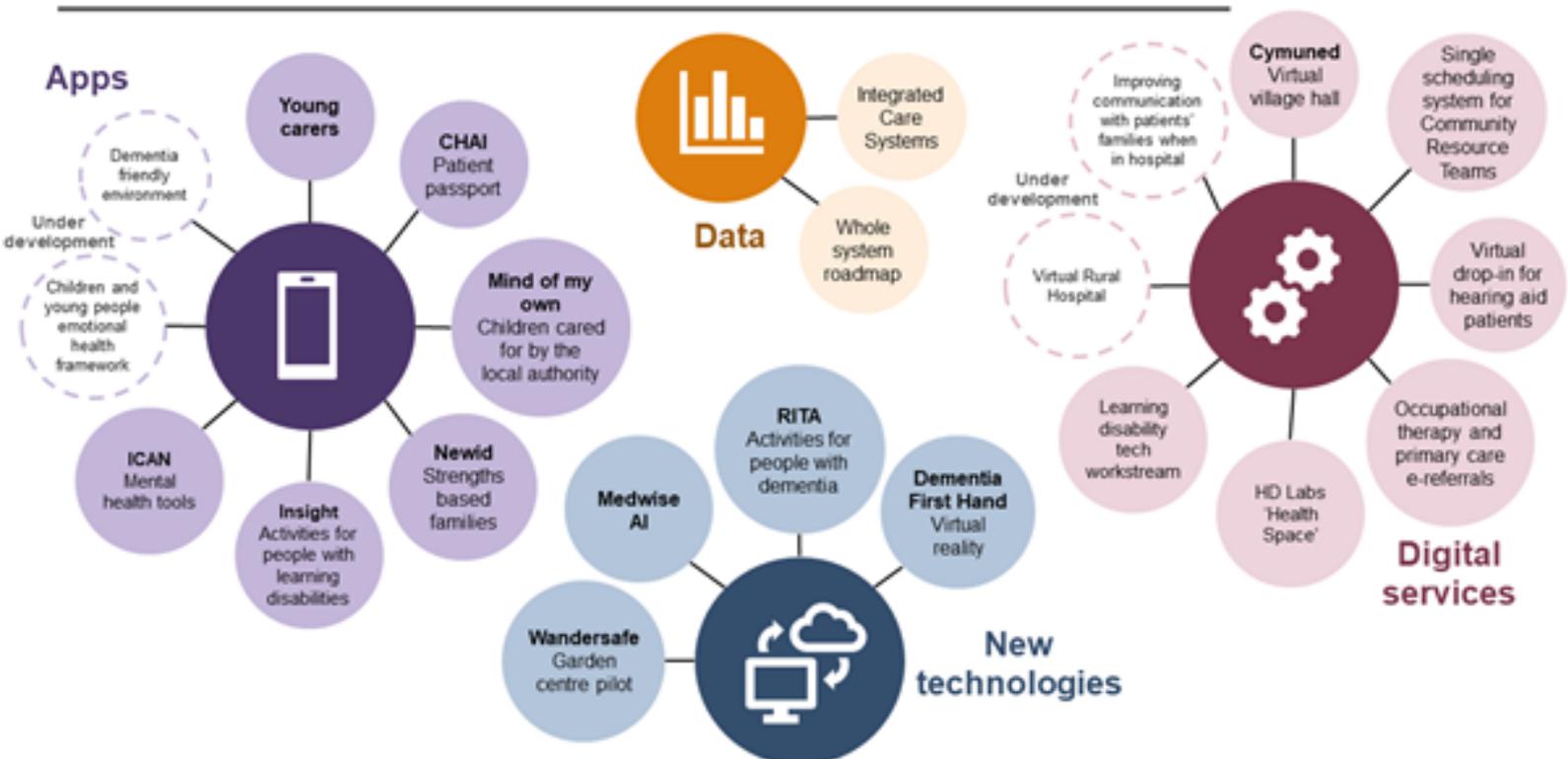
More information about our focus on children and young people work

- [Focus on young carers](#)
- [Focus on refugees and asylum seekers](#)

Innovation: Digital, data and technology

To support the Regional Partnership Board to have better oversight of digital innovation and developments across the region, we pulled together a list of projects currently underway. This has informed the workshops we facilitated with the new board which will include looking at digital inclusion, innovation and getting the basics right so practitioners have seamless secure access to systems and information where they need it.

North Wales digital, data and technology projects



Communication and engagement

In 2022-23 we continued to meet lots of people and make connections to help share new ideas and good practice across the region and beyond. This included an opportunity to present our work at the national RIC hub network day, the DEEP Conference and to speak to students at the Bangor University Social Care Policy course. We continued to strengthen links with the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) Research and Innovation Team, with a member of the RIC hub spending a day a week with the team to support innovation projects.

Engagement network

We worked with health board colleagues to launch a regional engagement network meeting. The network brings together colleagues from across health, social care and other sectors to learn from each other and better coordinate the work we do. The [engagement directory](#) we set up last year is supporting the group to share what they've learned from engagement activities.

North Wales innovation network

We're founder members of a new North Wales Innovation Network bringing together the RIC hub, BCUHB Research and Innovation Team, Agor IP, M-Sparc and Life Sciences Hub.

Website

We continued to develop our webpages including a new statistics and research section, the collection of good ideas and engagement database. After the home page, the North Wales Population Assessment is the most visited page on the regional collaboration website, with 2,200 unique page views in 2022/23. The Regional Innovation Coordination Hub homepage is also in the top 5 most visited pages on the site, with 680 unique page views, an increase of 43% on the previous year.

Newsletters

We shared 9 newsletters during the year full of information about research, innovation and improvement activities and the number of subscribers increased to 170.

Twitter update

Over the year followers on our Twitter accounts increased by a third to 400. The Twitter accounts have been used to share good ideas, ongoing projects, innovations from across the UK, relevant events and live tweets from conferences. They have also been used to promote the support our team and other organisations can offer, to help with health and social care projects in North Wales.

Feedback from partners

We recently started to collect information from partners about the impact of our work as well as compliments received. We often provide support in the early stages of a project, so we follow-up a few months later to find out about the difference we've made and how we can improve. Initial survey responses say we helped to save time and money, improve quality, reduce duplication, identify/stimulate innovation and improve coordination.

"This is exactly what we were thinking of, it's really helpful and succinct. The inclusion of the data is also really helpful."

"Just a massive thank you for the info sent today - it's already been a big help as the report from Warrington is a great example of the type of activity and feedback we could do quickly and also the Oxfordshire website is fantastic. So clear and easy to navigate. Really helpful so a big thank you."

What's next

In 2023-24 we will:

- Build on our successful **focus on children and young people** pilot by supporting action plans on the completed topics and identifying further priorities that can benefit from this approach. The next one planned will look at early years.
- Support the **North Wales Digital, Data and Technology Board** including identifying challenges, mapping digital, data and technology projects across the region and identifying projects that can be scaled and spread.
- Share the findings from **evaluations** we've completed and use the approach we've developed to rapidly assess more projects so that we can promote successful models. Explore ways to use story collection to learn from and share what works to improve health and social care.
- Continue to **enable innovation and promote what works** including involvement in the North Wales Innovation Network and adding to our online collection of good ideas.
- Provide **data, insight and intelligence** for the Regional Partnership Board and RPB Children's sub-group including improving systems, Census 2021 analysis and regular topic reports.
- **Improve access to evidence** by promoting the support available from the Specialist Librarian to access evidence about what works in health and social care and working closely with Social Care Wales and Developing Evidence Enriched Practice (DEEP) programmes to support the use of evidence within social care.

Contact us

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