

Ecological Collective Flourishing Patient and Public Involvement, Engagement and Participation Strategy 2022 – 2027

1 Overview of E-Co-Flourishing PPIEP Strategy

Our research **co-develops programmes in nature** and green spaces that benefit both human and planetary flourishing. We call this E-Co-Flourishing (Ecological Collective Flourishing). 'Flourishing' means physical, psychological, emotional, moral, and relational wellbeing. A special **focus is on groups under-represented in research** with multisystemic disadvantages and at risk of being excluded and/or marginalised in nature-based prescribing programmes. Consequently, our strategy emphasises facilitating, co-developing, and evaluating PPI in our research across diverse age groups, different ethnicities, and various 'green contexts' (such as affluent vs. deprived areas, gardens vs. 'wild' nature).

Our methodology combines **bottom-up and top-down** approaches, developing in iterative stages, driven by the concept of co-research. This is enabled through capacity building, co-design workshops, focus groups, (auto)ethnographic methods, and participatory action research. **Dynamic feedback loops** ensure continuous improvement and shared decision-making throughout the research process.

Our theme's strategy extends the OH BRC strategic objectives with a **distinctive co-researcher model** that goes beyond traditional public and patient involvement (PPI). This approach builds on insights from the NIHR Research-Ready Communities pilot, allowing us to integrate a more collaborative and community-driven process. We are equally committed to developing cultural competence to provide researchers and staff with the skills they need to engage effectively with diverse populations – '**community-ready researchers**'¹. This approach fosters equitable and diverse research practices, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued.

Trust building

Trust is the most crucial aspect of building successful PPIEP relationships; it takes a long time to establish and can be quickly lost.

We cultivate trust by meeting PPIEP members in their environments, adapting as much as possible to their needs, and practicing active listening. We evaluate and mitigate barriers and risks, approach our work with humility, and stay self-reflective, always mindful of potential power imbalances. Achieving the right balance between researchers and co-researchers may require adjusting the ratio of responsibility, ensuring that tasks are properly delegated and distributed.

¹ We produced a separate list for community ready researchers' skills.

To foster open communication, we reduce reliance on written documents, focusing instead on meaningful conversations, which often have a greater impact than reports, articles, or summaries. Building trust involves taking time, tapping into networks, attending meetings, giving workshops, and even meeting informally for coffee. This approach helps establish strong, lasting relationships with PPIEP participants².

Interconnectedness and systems thinking

Our PPIEP strategy uses Bronfenbrenner's Conceptual Model (phase 3) to inform our Flourishing Mechanisms research, emphasising the importance of context and proximal processes for successful interventions. This strategy incorporates the concept of nested models, reflecting the interconnectedness of various social, cultural, and environmental systems. By adopting a complex systems thinking perspective, we aim to understand the broader context in which interconnections, interrelations and interventions occur, enabling us to design more effective and sustainable green (and blue) solutions.

Outcomes to monitor

- Initial Community Survey Report: Documenting needs and opportunities.
- Measure the level of participation from underrepresented groups in nature-based programmes and research activities.
- Evaluate the benefits derived from E-Co-Flourishing programmes, focusing on improvements in physical, psychological, emotional, moral, and relational wellbeing. Consider the effects on both human participants and broader ecological health.
- Assess the benefits of E-Co-Flourishing programs, emphasizing improvements in physical, psychological, emotional, moral, and relational wellbeing, while considering impacts on human participants and broader ecological health.
- Trust-Building Activity Report: Summary of outreach events, workshops, or other activities aimed at building community trust.

2 Diversity and Inclusion

To ensure inclusive opportunities for public members in delivering our PPIE plans, we offer a range of intergenerational programmes, organise meetings and activities accommodating various mobilities and neurodiversity, a flexible meeting format (formal and informal) and diverse scheduling (including evenings and weekends), various communication methods (including email, social media, and text messages) to reach people with different preferences and technology access, where possible facilitate spaces with reduced noise, lighting adjustments, and other accommodations for those with sensory sensitivities or neurodiversity, and provide research material in accessible language.

² Cf. from "The five most common impact mistakes in NIHR applications" <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/the-five-most-common-impact-mistakes-in-nihr-applications/21320>

Different ways of knowing

Our research approach is deeply rooted in holistic worldviews and sustainability practices, emphasising a broader understanding of the interconnectedness between humans and nature. Our approach recognises that ecosystems have inherent value and should be protected. We embrace community and collective responsibility, recognising that place-based knowledge holds significant insights into local environments.

Furthermore, we advocate for interconnected health, seeing the well-being of people and nature as intertwined. The importance of cultural diversity as a component of biodiversity is highlighted, reinforcing that a variety of cultural practices contribute to the richness and sustainability of ecosystems.

Challenges and barriers

Key challenges and barriers in our research include differing schedules between academics and community members, illness-related delays, and varied training needs. Academics, who are compensated for these activities, may not fully understand that community members must fit research tasks around their primary work, leading to potential misunderstandings about availability. Illness can also cause unexpected delays, as participants with lived experience may need time off or additional support. Training needs differ based on the stage of research, with exploratory research requiring distinct PPI skills compared to later stages. Addressing these barriers requires flexible scheduling, support for those affected by illness, and tailored training programs (BRC1.5). A more detailed barrier analysis is available in a separate document.

Outcomes to monitor

- Measure the variety and frequency of flexible meeting formats, diverse scheduling, and communication methods. Monitor feedback on accessibility, including sensory accommodations and the use of accessible language in research materials.
- Track the number of intergenerational programs, meetings, and activities held, and evaluate the diversity of participants.
- Evaluate the influence of the research approach on promoting holistic worldviews, sustainability practices, and interconnected health.
- Examine how effectively the research team addresses key challenges and barriers.

3 E-Co-Flourishing stakeholders and Target Groups

Our research approach involves a wide range of stakeholders, including researchers, public members, patients, experts by experience, community leaders, educators, and various organisations. We target diverse groups such as younger and older populations, educators, clinical staff, and individuals from diverse backgrounds. We aim to build on our existing contributor pool of people with lived experience of mental health difficulties, carers, and public members with an interest in mental health to ensure inclusivity and diversity (BRC1.1).

We are in the process of establishing an Older Adults working group with the support of the Dementia Theme PPIEP lead (BRC1.2) and are developing relationships with our contributors while effectively communicating their value to them (BRC1.3). To facilitate broader public engagement, we maintain a dedicated website that is updated regularly, providing resources for the public and collect feedback to improve the overall website, particularly regarding the concept of E-Co-Flourishing.

We contribute to the quarterly BRC email, linking to featured content on the OH BRC website, and participate in quarterly "meet and greet" sessions with researchers and public contributors, complete with refreshments to show appreciation. In addition, identify barriers to research participation among underrepresented communities (BRC1.5), introducing a systematic check for barriers (with a separate dedicated document).

We continue to build on existing partnerships with Blackbird Leys Community Development Initiative, Clockhouse, and Oxford Community Action—three local communities representing young people, older adults, and minority ethnic groups exposed to social disadvantage and inequalities (BRC1.6). We are further working with six local Living Lab sites, along with a single digital site (Last Haven). The physical locations include Worcester College, Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum (OBGA), Cherwell School, and Wytham Woods, and the Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU). The latter is in collaboration with the NHS Arts Partnership. In Blackpool, we are also in the process of building a collaboration with BeingBoing, the Blackpool City Council (HDRC), and local co-researchers.

Outcomes to monitor:

- Terms of Reference document reviewed and agreed on by PPIEP.
- Size and diversity of E-Co-Flourishing contributor pool (database), i.e, people with lived experience and/or interest in mental health research.
- Attendance and feedback of the focus groups and other PPIEP activities documented and evaluate.
- Evidence of sustained engagement with Blackbird Leys Community Development Initiative, Clockhouse and Oxford Community Action, creation of new involvement opportunities and growth of the wider contributor pool.
- Monitor delivery and implementation annually.
- Number of hits on E-Co-Flourishing webpage.

4 Contributor roles

Lived experience of mental health challenges from patients, service users, their carers, advocacy groups, and public members is central to our PPIE co-researcher approach. We aim to increase the involvement of underrepresented individuals and communities who are often overlooked in research activities. To achieve this, we offer training, induction, and development opportunities for both new and existing PPIE contributors. Our commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion underpins our entire PPIE strategy, fostering meaningful engagement at every level.

Our PPIEP framework is organised into several sub-groups which serve different purposes:

'YOPAG' – Umbrella Advisory Group: We've created a cross-generational and cross-theme group comprising both younger and older members (YOPAG) as an adaptation of the PPIEP Champion pair model. This diverse mix of experiences fosters creativity and innovation. The group connects across the E-Co-Flourishing WPs and across the BRC themes. Its purpose is to help align and integrate diverse skills, knowledges, and requirements, fostering a more cohesive and interdisciplinary approach. Two of the members are part of the overarching BRC PPI Methods Group, providing consistent high-level integration of PPI. This approach effectively connects the "bottom-up" input from individual themes with the broader BRC framework.

Place-Specific PPIEP: This approach involves recruiting individuals from specific locations, such as school teachers, estate services staff, and local community members, to be involved in E-Co-Flourishing activities. This seamless integration of PPIEP with local infrastructure ensures that community needs and perspectives are met. For example, we collaborate with NHS staff and the Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit to co-produce a therapeutic garden.

All place-based PPIEP projects will have components that are unique to their specific contexts and others that can be scaled up or across different settings. This reflects a fractal approach, where our project identifies the "self-similarities" that connect PPIEP and Living Lab benefits to the larger system.

Place-Independent and Theme-Specific Group: These focus on particular topics or themes without being tied to a specific location. This flexibility facilitates targeted recruitment and expertise, allowing for the exploration of specialised topics, like providing feedback on a peer-reviewed paper draft related to the E-Co-Flourishing concept. For example, we have established a PPI Education Working Group, named Helios, that leverages skills and potential from three BRC themes (5, 6, and 8) to co-produce PPI output for theme 8, focusing on molecular targets.

YPAG – Beyond the BRC: The Young Advisory Group includes junior members (ages 14–18) and senior members (ages 19–25). The senior members play a key role in fostering effective peer-to-peer exchange, providing guidance and mentoring, and promoting knowledge sharing and skill development. By including people from diverse backgrounds, we foster an inclusive environment that promotes a sense of belonging and builds a community of young co-researchers. The cross-generational structure also helps expand networks, offering more opportunities for interaction and collaboration.

Outcomes to monitor:

- Review and implement a suite of documents to support Theme-specific PPIEP advisory groups (e.g., Terms of Reference, Payment Policy, Confidentiality, Complaints procedures, Glossary, Barrier map, Research readiness check, etc.)
- Number of training developed, delivered and reviewed though feedbacked
- Attendance and feedback on training documented and evaluated
- Suite of document PPIEP reviewed and implemented

5 Programme of activities

We plan to offer an ongoing programme of activities to ensure that PP are involved, engaged and participate throughout the entire lifecycle of the project—from beginning to end. This approach guarantees that co-researchers are involved at every stage. The table below shows what the programme may include:

Activity	Description
Co-authorship	Contribute to scientific publications, aiding the development of frameworks and guiding innovation in research.
Collaborating	Collaborate with both place-based and place-independent PPIEP groups, fostering diverse perspectives and broader community engagement.
Community consultation	Set up workshops and focus groups with community members to co-design the interventions.
Creative Activities	This can involve a range of creative approaches such as co-designing therapeutic gardens.
Cultural Sensitivity	Offer training to ensure that the activities and interventions are culturally sensitive and appropriate for diverse communities.
Digital Engagement	Open access live digital platform where participants can log their experiences, challenges, and milestones. This would be especially useful for those who may be less mobile or homebound.
Educational Seminars	Host informational sessions about the benefits of nature on mental and physical health, targeting schools and retirement communities.
Intergenerational work	Encourage intergenerational interaction through structured activities, promoting knowledge exchange and collaborative learning.
Lab-In-Your-Pocket activities	E-Co-Flourishing Blitz (maps both biodiversity and “wellbeing diversity”) using digital methods; e.g., Secret Life of Walls.
Living Lab concept development	Review the concept of Living Labs and adapt it to E-Co-Flourishing research approach.
Methodology development	Develop and test new methods and tools to improve operational efficiency and effectiveness in PPIEP, e.g. ECOFLORET toolkit.
Nature Walks and Outdoor Activities	Organised (semi-guided/-structured) events that focus on adolescents and older adults interacting with nature, facilitated by healthcare providers and nature experts.
Ongoing Assessment	Frequent check-in; Implement a system for collecting regular feedback from participants and adjusting activities and research approaches accordingly.
Organise regular PPIEP meetings.	We know that research and community/PPIEP processes may progress at different paces. To maintain consistent contact, we set a regular meeting schedule. Our approach also includes dynamic consent mechanisms to meet the changing needs and expectations of all participants.
Reflexive practice	Review current Theme projects, making sure PPIEP is present or highlighting the need for PPIEP when appropriate. Contribute to self-reflective research practices by documenting and analysing your co-production processes, enabling continuous improvement and adaptation.
Skill-building Workshops	Offer workshops aimed at building practical skills around nature-based activities that contribute to mental and physical health (increasing emotional, environmental, digital, social literacies)

Outcomes to monitor:

- Meeting Schedule.
- Number of PPIEP members actively involved in various stages of the project, ensuring diverse and meaningful engagement.
- Impact assessment of PPIEP input on project direction, decision-making, and overall research quality.
- Monitor the representation of underrepresented groups within PPIEP.
- Frequency and quality of interactions between PPIEP and other stakeholders.
- Evaluate how PPIEP contributions have influenced research outputs, such as publications, methodologies, and project outcomes.
- Track intergenerational engagement, observing how different age groups contribute to and benefit from the project.
- Monitor the effectiveness of self-reflective practices, including documenting and analysing co-production processes, to facilitate continuous learning and improvement.

6 Dissemination

To improve accessibility to research and foster involvement and participation among people from diverse backgrounds and with varying needs, we co-design dissemination materials that are inclusive and engaging. This aligns with our E-Co-Flourishing approach, as seen in Paper 2, which explored the E-Co-Flourishing concept, and the draft for Paper 4, a Living Lab narrative review. These papers are gaining valuable insights from public contributors and offer co-authorship opportunities.

Our research project hosts a variety of workshops and focus groups, both indoors and outdoors, where PPIEP members take on co-leadership roles. We aim to make our outputs widely accessible by producing blog posts, short films, one-page summaries in large print, visuals, verbal communication, audio recordings, digital apps, and handheld devices for nature engagement (Lab-In-Your-Pocket)—all designed to investigate human-nature interaction and relationships.

To further broaden our reach, we consider including additional dissemination methods like public forums, interactive digital platforms, or art installations. These approaches not only engage a wider audience but also ensure that our research is accessible and resonates with diverse communities, extending involvement beyond traditional research stages.

Outcomes to monitor:

- Numbers of outputs and diversity of formats in accessible language (papers, workshop reports, co-developed research protocols, digital formats such as blog posts, short clips/movies, one-pagers, audio, and visuals (photo voice).
- Barrier mapping and co-produced solutions, implemented changes.
- Secure (interactive) online platform for research process tracking, preference updates, resource access, communication with other co-researchers
- include additional elements like public forums
- (disruptive) art installations to disseminate research, thereby expanding the involvement to stages beyond what is usually considered

Overall, the E-Co-Flourishing strategy takes a comprehensive, integrative, and holistic approach to public and patient involvement in research. It sinclusivity, collaboration, and continuous improvement, while also promoting the link between nature and well-being. By aligning with the broader goals of the BRC, this strategy seeks to advance our understanding of flourishing through participatory research practices that consider the interconnectedness of humans and nature.