

What is a Research Engagement Network (REN)?

A partnership of organisations and individuals working together to increase diversity, inclusion and participation in health and care research in their local area. RENs aim to build long-lasting trusting relationships with communities in order to help make this happen.

Why is it needed?

It has been shown through research that UK geographies with the highest incidence of disease also have the lowest number of people taking part in research. The areas where research recruitment is low also aligns closely to areas where earnings are lowest, and indices of deprivation are highest. This means that research is often carried out with healthier individuals who may have different experiences or responses to clinical care than others. Covid-19 also exposed this ongoing lack of the inclusion of marginalized groups in health and care research.

In 2022, NHS England published [Increasing diversity in research participation: A good practice guide for engaging with underrepresented groups](#). In the co production of this guide, it was identified that a number of factors may impact on how, or whether, people are involved in research, including language barriers, accessibility and mistrust.

The national Research Engagement Network (REN) Development programme aims to increase diversity in research participation and is jointly funded by NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care.

REN work focuses on the development of local partnerships between voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations, Integrated Care Systems (ICS) and the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and draws on wider existing place-based research initiatives.

Following a successful trial phase over 2022/23, all 42 Integrated Care Systems nationally have REN activity taking place.

Research in Sussex

Research can be transformative for the health and care sector; it can help [Integrated Care Systems](#) to address local health priorities and support the population to live healthy lives for as long as possible. [The Sussex Improving Lives Together Through Research Strategy](#) outlines how research will help to support:

- Improvements in population health and reductions in health inequalities
- Services which are efficient, agile and sustainable
- Improvements in quality of care, clinical outcomes and experience of care
- A supported and satisfied workforce. “Together, we can grow a reputation for distinctive, excellent health and care research across Sussex”