West Yorkshire Combined Authority | Tracy Brabin Mayor of West Yorkshire

West Yorkshire Combined Authority Pilot Areas of Research Interest: Health and wellbeing

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Introduction

These Areas of Research Interest (ARI) form a pilot test case focused on health and wellbeing. The pilot will test how the Combined Authority can identify and communicate priority evidence gaps, engage the research community and use resulting insights to strengthen decision-making. The ARIs are therefore intended as a starting point for collaboration rather than a comprehensive or final statement of West Yorkshire's research needs. Learning from this pilot will inform the future development and use of ARIs across the Combined Authority.

The UK Government's Rewiring the State – Cabinet Statement sets out plans to shift greater power, funding and accountability from Whitehall to local leaders, enabling places to drive growth and improve public services. Through this pilot, West Yorkshire aims to demonstrate how stronger links can be built between local policy priorities and research expertise, using robust, locally relevant evidence to make better decisions and improve outcomes for its communities.

The West Yorkshire Plan sets out the Combined Authority's vision for 2040 to transform lives and communities across the region. Its five missions are to make West Yorkshire a more prosperous, happy, well-connected, sustainable and safe place to live. Improving the health and wellbeing of people in West Yorkshire cuts across all five missions and is also a key principle for growth in the Local Growth Plan. In addition, the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 has introduced a new statutory duty for the Combined Authority to improve health and reduce health inequalities.

The size of the challenge is substantial. Yorkshire and the Humber has the third lowest life expectancy in the UK, men experience poorer outcomes than women, and there are pronounced inequalities across the region.

Improving the health and wellbeing of the population not only means addressing existing ill health but also working to prevent ill health before it happens, in line with the NHS ten year plan. In addition, West Yorkshire wants to go further and work with partners to intentionally design systems, places and jobs that create good health and allow people to thrive. The pilot ARI below identify a focused set of priority evidence gaps where research could make the greatest difference to the Combined Authority's work to make West Yorkshire a healthier and happier place to live.

Through this pilot, the ARI aim to support meaningful engagement with the research community and other partners. ARI act as an invite to share existing knowledge, bring forward new perspectives and help share future research and collaboration. They do not represent every evidence need or imply that relevant evidence does not already exist, but signal where additional data, evidence and insights could most strengthen decision making. The Combined Authority will use feedback and learning from this process to refine both the ARI and its wider approach to engaging with research and evidence.

How we developed the pilot ARI

Health and wellbeing was selected as a cross-cutting focus relevant to all five West Yorkshire Plan missions. Three distinct but connected themes were chosen to involve a range of policy teams and test the approach in different contexts:

- Healthy working life
- Active travel and sustainable transport
- Creative health

The ARIs were developed through an iterative and collaborative process. Combined Authority policy, Strategy and Research and Intelligence teams identified priority evidence gaps and developed an initial longlist of questions. Academic colleagues from universities across the West Yorkshire Higher Education Compact helped refine the questions, which were then validated and prioritised by policy teams to ensure they combined academic expertise with practical policy needs. The development process also involved engagement with local authority partners across West Yorkshire and drew on learning from ARIs developed by local and regional authorities to build on emerging good practice.

The strategic context and desired outcomes are set out for each theme and topic to enable researchers to interpret the research and evidence needs and how their research could contribute to addressing the policy challenges outlined.

Healthy Working Life

West Yorkshire has high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity, with rates of employment below the national average. The scale of the challenge varies across the region, with some areas facing greater inequality, fewer employment opportunities and more difficulty reaching those opportunities due to poor connectivity and limited transport options.

A growing number (over 100,000) of working-age people have mental and physical health conditions or disabilities that cause barriers to accessing, sustaining or progressing in employment. In addition, menopause is increasingly contributing to women leaving or reducing work so they can cope with symptoms. Workplace practices, environments and support can contribute to people with disabilities and health challenges leaving employment if they are not sufficiently inclusive or adaptable to their needs.

The Combined Authority's ambition, set out through the Healthy Working Life Plan and Work, Health and Skills Plan, is to create a region where good health and good work reinforce one another, enabling residents to access, remain in and progress through healthy, inclusive and productive employment. This ambition goes beyond reducing economic inactivity to creating the conditions for people to flourish through good health and good work. Improving healthy working lives can deliver benefits for individuals, employers and communities through improved wellbeing, workforce participation and productivity.

Achieving this ambition requires action across systems, services and workplaces. Understanding how health, skills, employment, transport, employer practices and wider determinants interact is critical to developing more preventative approaches that improve health outcomes, reduce inequalities, support economic participation and increase productivity. This includes understanding how systems, services and workplaces can intervene earlier to prevent health conditions from developing, worsening or leading to people leaving work altogether. Workplaces, job design and employment practices can either support healthy working lives or contribute to people leaving employment if they are not sufficiently flexible, inclusive or supportive.

Achieving this ambition also requires a better understanding of how people experience and navigate education, employment, health and support systems throughout their lives, and how services can respond to individual circumstances and needs. Particular attention is needed for groups facing disproportionate challenges, including young people (16-24), among whom rates of poor mental health and being not in education, employment or training (NEET) have increased since the Covid-19 pandemic.

The topics below explore three interconnected areas where additional evidence can help shape policy and investment decisions: system leadership, person-centred support and employers.

Topic: System leadership

The Combined Authority is working with national, regional and local partners to develop a more integrated and person-centred and preventative work and health system. Despite increasing collaboration, challenges remain around system fragmentation, data sharing and aligning resources to improve outcomes. Evidence is needed to identify and understand which interventions and investments are most effective in improving health and employment

outcomes, how resources can be aligned across policy areas, and how the changing nature of work may create future challenges and opportunities.

As devolution continues to evolve, there is an opportunity to work with partners and co-design a new system. This system must enable partners to work through a person-centred lens, while ensuring sufficiency and capacity across services.

Desired outcomes

- Reduce economic inactivity, increase the employment rate from 73% to 80%.
- Improved population health through access to healthy, inclusive and sustainable work.
- The work and health system is joined up, people centred and preventative in approach.
- Combined Authority provides systems leadership for work and health in the region, with greater devolved powers, responsibilities and funding over work and health.
- Evidence underpinning initiatives is grounded in West Yorkshire–specific data and insight, rather than relying on national-level evidence.

Questions

- **What is the cumulative impact of government policy on health and work outcomes in West Yorkshire?**
    - Considering national, regional and local policy and provision in West Yorkshire for employers, employees and the self-employed, how does it incentivise or disincentivise job creation, retention and job seeking?
    - How do employers view and respond to work and health policy in West Yorkshire and how does this vary across sector, business size, and locality?
    - How can devolved powers, funding and partnerships be used to improve population health and work outcomes in West Yorkshire?
    - What additional powers, responsibilities or funding might the Combined Authority seek to better support healthy working lives and population health objectives?

- **How can West Yorkshire finance and transition to a more preventative work and health system that improves both population health and economic participation?**
    - What are the key barriers to a more integrated and preventative work and health system?
    - What system changes would have the greatest impact on health and work outcomes?
    - How are public resources currently distributed across prevention, early intervention and crisis response and what changes would support a shift towards prevention?
    - What funding and investment approach would support a more preventative work and health system?
    - What is the economic and social value, including cumulative over time, of making a transition to prevention for work and health?

- **Where are the principal gaps, fragmentation and duplication in West Yorkshire's system of work and health support, and how do these affect people's journeys and outcomes?**
    - What can linked administrative and other data tell us about patterns of use, unmet demand and opportunities to create a more joined-up, people-centred system?

- **What balance of interventions would be most effective in preventing economic inactivity due to health-related challenges, disabilities and compounding factors in West Yorkshire?**
    - What are the impacts of current prevention interventions and where would future investment be best placed to improve health and employment outcomes?
    - How do disadvantages accumulate across education, health, employment and support systems and where can earlier intervention alter trajectories before people become economically inactive?

Topic: Person-centred support

People with health-related barriers to employment are not a single group, and their experiences, needs and outcomes vary significantly. Evidence is needed to better understand how different groups experience and navigate employment, health and support services, and which approaches are most effective in improving outcomes for individuals.

Desired outcomes

- Healthiest residents and workforce in England by 2040.
- Reduction in the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) due to health reasons.
- Reduction in older adults leaving the workforce prior to retirement age due to health reasons.
- Improved access to healthy, inclusive and sustainable work for people with health conditions and disabilities.

Questions

- **What are the characteristics of a healthy inclusive workforce, where people with health-related challenges and disabilities are enabled to contribute to their full potential?**
    - How do we effectively measure and monitor the health of a workforce and what available indicators best capture it?
    - How does West Yorkshire benchmark against other regions in the UK?

- **What distinct groups exist with health barriers to employment and what are their different needs, pathways through services, challenges, and outcomes?**
    - Which groups are most likely to enter health-related economic inactivity and how does this differ by locality, demographics, and level of qualification?
    - How do these groups experience, and what are their pathways through, the benefits, health, employment support, care, justice and other support systems?

    - What barriers and challenges do different groups experience and how are these mitigated or reinforced by the support system?
- **What health-related challenges and compounding factors influence people's ability to access, sustain and progress in work and what interventions are most effective in improving health and employment outcomes?**
    - What health related, personal, structural and place-based factors influence whether people access, sustain or leave work, and over what timescales do these act?
    - What preventative measures, workplace practices and support interventions are most effective in improving health and employment outcomes?
- **What hidden or underserved groups with health barriers or disabilities are not currently engaging with employment and health support and what approaches are most effective in supporting their engagement?**
    - How can we identify and better understand 'hidden' or underserved populations with health-related barriers who are not engaging with mainstream employment and support services?
    - What specific factors contribute to their non-engagement and how can they be engaged effectively?

Topic: Employers

The Combined Authority recognises that employers must be at the heart of a strengthened work, health, and skills system in West Yorkshire. Employers play a critical role in creating healthy working lives through their recruitment, retention and progress practices, workplace culture and job design. However, businesses face a range of workforce, skills and economic pressures that can affect their ability to recruit and support people with health-related challenges and disabilities. Evidence is needed to understand what enables employers of different sizes and sectors to adopt healthy and inclusive practices, and how these contribute to improved health, inclusion and productivity outcomes.

Desired outcome

- Increased employer capacity to design and sustain healthy, inclusive workplaces that support talent attraction, retention, and progression of people with health needs.
- Reduced number of people leaving work for health-related reasons and increased access to healthy, sustainable and productive work for people with health-related challenges and disabilities.
- Improved understanding of how employer practices contribute to workforce health, inclusion and business performance.

Questions

- **What are the benefits of healthy and inclusive workforce practices for employers, employees and the wider economy and how does this vary across sectors, business size or groups?**
    - To what extent do inclusive workforce practices improve retention, reduce recruitment costs, and increase productivity?

- What wider benefits do healthy and inclusive workforce practices provide for employees, employers and local economies?
- How do healthy and inclusive workplace practices influence workforce wellbeing, retention and productivity?

- **What works to incentivise and support employers across different business sizes and sectors to recruit, retain and support people with health-related challenges and disabilities, and what barriers remain?**
  - How effective are different employer incentives and risk-reduction measures in supporting the long-term recruitment of people with health-related challenges or people whose employment history has been affected by health issues?

- **How can more employers across different business sizes and sectors be engaged to adopt healthy and inclusive employment practices?**
  - What approaches are most effective in encouraging employers with differing levels of engagement to embed health, inclusion and wellbeing within workforce practices and organisational culture?
  - What are the costs to employers of implementing inclusive employment interventions and how do these vary for business size and sector?

- **How can employers and regional partners shape the changing nature of work to improve inclusion, health and economic outcomes across West Yorkshire?**
  - How can jobs and workplaces practices and policies be designed or adapted to better support people with health-related challenges and disabilities across different business sizes and sectors?
  - What recruitment, retention and progression practices are most effective in improving workforce inclusion across different business sizes and sectors?
  - What can regional partners do to help employers adopt, test and scale effective approaches to healthy and inclusive work?

Active travel and sustainable transport

Active travel and sustainable transport are central to achieving the ambitions of the Mayor's West Yorkshire Local Transport Plan, which seeks to improve access to opportunity, support inclusive growth, enhance health and wellbeing, create a safer transport system and reduce environmental impacts. They also play an important role in supporting regional productivity and delivering on West Yorkshire's commitment to a net zero carbon economy by 2038.

Opportunities to walk, wheel and cycle as part of everyday journeys can improve physical and mental wellbeing, help prevent ill health, and support people to remain active, engaged and economically productive for longer.

Transport plays a fundamental role in connecting people to employment, skills, education, healthcare, shops, leisure opportunities, green space and wider social networks. Where transport is inaccessible, unaffordable or unavailable, existing economic and health inequalities can be reinforced.

The region also experiences unequal environmental harms from transport, including air pollution, noise and the wider impacts of traffic on neighbourhoods and public spaces. These impacts are often concentrated in communities already experiencing disadvantage, creating cumulative environmental and health burdens.

Safety and perceived safety influence whether people feel able to walk, wheel, cycle or use public transport. Concerns about road danger, such as collisions, deaths and serious injuries, as well as personal security and harassment can restrict travel choices, reduce access to opportunities and disproportionately affect certain groups and communities, particularly for children, women and girls, and groups who experience exclusion or discrimination in public spaces. In addition, the West Yorkshire Vision Zero seeks an increase in road safety, eliminating traffic fatalities and serious injuries, to support safe, healthy and equitable mobility.

At the same time, technological change and new transport services present opportunities and challenges for creating a more accessible, sustainable and equitable transport system.

The Combined Authority is working to make active travel and sustainable transport the easy, attractive and practical choice for everyday journeys. Encouraging people to choose active and sustainable modes is not an end in itself, but a means of improving access to opportunity, supporting healthier lifestyles, reducing environmental impacts and creating more inclusive and productive communities.

Topic: Inclusive access and productivity

Understanding how transport shapes access to opportunity remains a key challenge for West Yorkshire. While improvements to the transport network are being delivered through initiatives such as the Weaver Network and bus franchising, evidence is needed to understand where barriers remain and how future investment and network design can best support fairer and more inclusive access to employment, skills, education, healthcare and other opportunities. This will inform both shorter-term planning to 2028 and longer-term planning to 2032.

Desired Outcome

- Reduce transport-related social exclusion by improving affordable, reliable, accessible and inclusive transport options.
- Improve access to employment, education, healthcare, leisure, shops, green space and other essential services.
- Support regional productivity by widening access to opportunity and reducing transport barriers to employment and skills.

Questions

- **Where and how do transport barriers limit access to employment, skills, education, healthcare and other essential services across urban and rural West Yorkshire?**
    - How do barriers differ for people without cars, different demographic groups, and communities in poorly connected neighbourhoods?
    - How do perceptions of transport accessibility shape the opportunities that different communities in West Yorkshire feel able to access?
    - How do people perceive active and sustainable transport limits or facilitates their access to employment opportunities in different sectors or employment types?
    - How may the changing labour market and economy influence active and sustainable travel needs in West Yorkshire and what role do employers play in shaping this?

- **What active and sustainable transport interventions would most effectively reduce transport-related social exclusion and widen access to opportunity?**
    - How should fair and inclusive access be built into the Weaver Network, including as part of bus franchising and future network design?
    - How could more flexible, demand-responsive public transport models, including routes and services that vary by demand, location and time of day, help reduce transport-related social exclusion and improve access to employment, skills, healthcare and other essential services?

Topic: Travel behaviour

Travel choices play a significant role in achieving the ambitions of the Mayor's West Yorkshire Local Transport Plan and shaping wider outcomes for health, access to opportunity and the environment. Around 80% of miles travelled in West Yorkshire are by private car, although reliance on the car varies across different groups, places and journey types. Evidence is needed to understand what influences travel behaviour, where there is greatest potential for mode shift, and how behavioural and structural interventions can be combined and sequenced to support greater use of active travel and sustainable transport. Areas of interest include the role of school cycling schemes such as Bikeability, barriers such as cycle storage and perceived safety, short and medium-distance multimodal journeys, trip chaining, household travel habits, and the groups and journeys with greatest potential to shift away from private car use.

Desired Outcome

- Public transport, particularly buses, becomes the default choice for everyday journeys, with walking, wheeling and cycling the preferred choice for shorter trips.

- Behaviour change interventions are targeted at the groups, places and journey types with the greatest potential to shift.

Questions

- **Which active travel and sustainable transport interventions have delivered in West Yorkshire show the greatest potential for cost-effective scale across communities and the region?**
    - What can be learned from the collective impact of active travel and sustainable transport schemes delivered in West Yorkshire, including their effectiveness, value for money and transferability?
    - How can successful behaviour change and active travel interventions be scaled to achieve region-wide impact?
    - In what order should interventions be implemented to mostly quickly reach the desire outcomes above?
    - Does people's behaviour change over time in response to the introduction of different interventions?

- **What barriers and enabling factors affect demand for active travel and sustainable transport?**
    - How do practical and knowledge barriers affect walking, wheeling, cycling, public transport and shared transport use?
    - How do barriers and people's perception of barriers vary by place, population group and type of journey, including work, caring, school and social trips?
    - How might the transition to electric vehicles support or undermine mode shift from private car use to active travel, public transport and shared transport across different places, population groups and journey types?

- **Where is there greatest potential to support a shift from private car use to sustainable modes, considering different groups, life transition points, places and journey types?**
    - What makes it difficult for drivers to change from private car journeys to more sustainable modes?
    - What markets are currently not being reached, given that around 80% of miles travelled are by private car?
    - Which behavioural or structural interventions are most effective in mode shift from private cars, and how can they be targeted effectively to different groups, places and life transition points?
    - How do responses to mode shift interventions vary across different social groups and are there any groups whose behaviour change could cause ripple effects that increase uptake in other groups?
- **How do land-use patterns, planning decisions and the built environment influence travel behaviour and mode choice across West Yorkshire?**
    - How can active and sustainable travel be best integrated into new housing developments and high-street regeneration to improve access to services and opportunities and make areas more attractive for residents and businesses?

- **How do people use multiple modes of travel in short (up to 2 miles) and medium (2-5 miles) journeys and how can active and sustainable travel modes be better, integrated and supported to increase their use?**
    - How and why do people combine multiple modes within a single short to medium distance trip?
    - Drawing on international and other examples, how can ticketing and service design better support trip chaining and multimodal journeys?

- **How are travel habits formed, and what interventions could influence longer-term behaviour?**
    - How do early-life and household travel habits form, including the effect of car-based school runs where parental choices or other influences may establish children's long-term behaviours?
    - Do active and sustainable travel interventions aimed at children and young people, such as Bikeability, influence longer-term travel behaviour beyond the active period?

- **Which active and sustainable transport interventions deliver the greatest social, mental and physical wellbeing benefits in West Yorkshire and how can these benefits be maximised for different groups and places?**

Topic: Air quality, noise and green-blue infrastructure

Understanding the health implications of the environmental impacts of transport remains a significant challenge for West Yorkshire. Evidence is needed to better understand the current and future distribution of air and noise pollution across West Yorkshire, their impacts on health and different population groups, and the role that interventions, including green-blue infrastructure, can play in reducing exposure, improving wellbeing, supporting climate resilience and mitigating flood risk. This will help inform future transport investment and policy decisions.

Desired Outcome

- Reduce environmental and health harms caused by transport, including air pollution, noise and carbon emissions, flood risk, water pollution and soil contamination.
- Reduce transport-related emissions, particularly in the most affected areas and where there are vulnerable groups.
- Help West Yorkshire meet UK air quality targets and move towards WHO Air Quality Guidelines.
- Reduce the number of deaths where air pollution is a contributing factor.
- Strengthen regional evidence, monitoring and coordination on air quality.
- Make walking, wheeling and cycling more appealing by improving place quality and access to green- blue infrastructure.
- Strengthen investment decisions and business cases.

Questions

- **How do current and emerging sources of air pollution vary by place and population group in West Yorkshire and what are the main factors influencing exposure?**
    - How are groups vulnerable to air pollution distributed spatially across West Yorkshire, and how does this affect their life course exposure to poor air quality?
    - What are the current and emerging sources of particulate pollution, including PM2.5, PM10 and ultrafine particles, how severe is exposure across the region and how is it distributed spatially?
    - How might EV uptake, heavier vehicles and tyre, brake and road wear affect future PM2.5 and PM10 exposure?

- **Which targeted interventions would most effectively improve air quality outcomes and reduce impacts on those most affected?**

- **How can air quality be effectively monitored and modelled, or data shared, to strength regional evidence on air quality within constrained local capacity?**
    - What monitoring technologies, datasets and modelling approaches are available or emerging, and how could they improve local understanding?
    - What monitoring models, data-sharing approaches or partnerships have worked elsewhere where local capacity is constrained?

- **What is the scale and distribution of transport-related noise across West Yorkshire, and what are its impacts on physical and mental wellbeing?**
    - How are noise impacts distributed across different places and communities?
    - What are the impacts on physical and mental wellbeing?

- **How might future transport changes affect noise exposure, health outcomes and the experience of travel for different areas across West Yorkshire?**
    - How might increasing adoption and technological development of electric vehicles change noise exposure for different groups in West Yorkshire?
    - Which localised interventions, such as greening urban streets, would be most effective in reducing noise pollution and improving health outcomes?
    - How does transport-related noise influence active travel, public transport use and perceptions of place quality?

- **How do noise, air pollution and green infrastructure interact spatially, and which interventions offer the greatest potential for improving outcomes in areas experiencing multiple environmental burdens?**
- **What are the place-specific benefits of green and blue infrastructure in transport settings?**
    - How can the benefits of green-blue infrastructure projects be measured for mental and physical health, air quality, noise reduction, climate mitigation and adaptation, flood mitigation and economic productivity, and how do they influence each other?

- How can the transport network be made more resilient to the effects of climate change, including flooding and extreme weather?
- How can green-blue infrastructure make walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport more attractive?

Topic: Safety

Safety is a cross-cutting issue that affects how people access opportunities, use public spaces and travel throughout West Yorkshire. Evidence is needed to understand how real and perceived safety risks vary across people, places and journey types, and which interventions are most effective in increasing safety, confidence and reducing barriers to active and sustainable travel. This will support the Combined Authority's ambition to deliver Vision Zero and create a transport system where people can travel safely and confidently, regardless of mode.

Desired Outcome

- Deliver Vision Zero by ending all traffic deaths and serious injuries by 2040.
- Improve actual and perceived safety for walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport.

Questions

- **What real or perceived safety risks of injury or crime prevent people from walking, wheeling, cycling or using public transport in West Yorkshire?**
  - How do safety risks that prevent people using active or sustainable travel differ by population group, place, journey type, mode, time of day and access to a car?
- **Where are the most significant safety gaps within the transport network, and which interventions are likely to have the greatest impact on reducing risk and increasing confidence to travel?**

Topic: Innovation

Innovative transport technologies and service models have the potential to support healthier, more sustainable and accessible travel across West Yorkshire. Advances could include ticketing and payment systems, micromobility and vehicle share options, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, autonomous vehicles, drones, storage and charging solutions for personal transport modes such as cycles, scooters and mobility aids. As these innovations develop, it will be important to ensure their benefits are shared equitably and that adoption does not widen existing inequalities or create new barriers for disadvantaged groups.

The Combined Authority's ability to influence innovation is shaped by available powers, funding, incentives, data access and wider market conditions. Evidence is needed to understand which technologies, service models and policy approaches have the greatest potential to support West Yorkshire's transport ambitions, and the conditions required for their successful, safe and equitable adoption.

Desired Outcome

- Future-proof the transport system so West Yorkshire can access and utilise relevant transport technologies.
- Develop incentives and disincentives that support equitable and sustainable travel while maintaining financially sustainable delivery models.
- Use evidence to support innovation and better delivery of policies and transport schemes within available powers and funding.

Questions

- **How can ticketing structures be redesigned for the Weaver Network to incentivise sustainable travel while maintaining a financially sustainable business model?**
    - How do price, flexibility, simplicity and targeted concessions influence travel choices?
    - What pricing structure would encourage more young people (19–25-year-old) to use the Weaver Network, particularly those on low or no incomes or who are learning to drive?

- **How can West Yorkshire access and utilise future transport technologies, including digital and vehicle innovations, to support active and sustainable travel in a fair and equitable way?**
    - How can West Yorkshire future proof its transport system so it is resilient to and adaptable for changing transport technologies?
    - What opportunities or risks do future transport technologies, such as Mobility as a Service and payment systems or autonomous vehicles and drones, pose for supporting active and sustainable travel in West Yorkshire?

- **What package of interventions within regional control would best encourage innovation that supports active and travel in West Yorkshire?**
    - What mix of incentives and disincentives would work best to support innovation for active and sustainable travel and who should these target?

Creative health

Creative health, including arts, culture and creative activities can support better health and wellbeing. It can act as an intervention through social prescribing, or contribute to prevention, helping reduce the risk of health issues arising or escalating. This aligns with ambitions set out in the Region of Learning and Creativity Strategy, which recognises the contribution of creativity and culture to thriving communities, and the Healthy Working Life Plan, which highlights the importance of prevention, wellbeing and participation in supporting healthier lives and improved outcomes.

Creative health activity in West Yorkshire is broad and often delivered at a hyperlocal level and may not be labelled as “creative health” by providers, participants or referrers. This localised nature can make provision highly responsive to community needs, trusted by participants, innovative and embedded within places. However, it can also make provision difficult to map, connect and scale. Creative health also sits across several policy areas and has traditionally lacked a single policy owner.

Creative health can generate forms of value that are relational, community-based and cultural, and these outcomes are not always easily captured through traditional measurement and evaluation approaches. While evidence of individual interventions continues to grow, challenges remain in comparing outcomes consistently, understanding system-wide impact and identifying approaches that can be scaled and sustained. Securing sustainable investment and commissioning pathways also remains a significant challenge. Connections between creative health provision, health systems and referral pathways are often inconsistent, limiting visibility, coordination and long-term sustainability across the system.

By developing a stronger creative health system across West Yorkshire, we are seeking to improve life expectancy and mental health outcomes, while reducing health inequalities. The work of the West Yorkshire Creative Health System Consortium is already playing a key role in the ambition by bringing together partners across health, culture, local government and the voluntary sector to strengthen collaboration and maximise impact.

West Yorkshire aspires to be recognised as a national leader in creative health demonstrating how place-based collaboration can improve health and wellbeing outcomes at scale.

Topic: Systems development

While creative health activity is often trusted, responsive and closely connected to local communities, it is not always well connected to commissioning, funding and wider health and care systems. A key challenge is strengthening coordination, visibility and sustainability while retaining the local relationships and community focus that are central to the sector's effectiveness. Evidence is needed to understand how provision, evidence, commissioning and investment can be better connected to create a more joined-up, accessible and sustainable creative health system. This includes understanding how successful models can be supported, sustained and scaled while remaining responsive to local communities.

Desired Outcome

- Integrated creative health system, with pathways and partnerships between health and cultural organisations
- Preventative and community-based solutions for NHS and local authority partners
- A clearer investment model for a sustainable creative health system in West Yorkshire
- Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSE) and providers have financial stability and recognition of their contribution

Questions

- **How can Creative Health support people across their whole life and where does this lead to better health and wellbeing outcomes?**
    - How can Creative Health reduce health inequalities experienced by communities facing socio-economic disadvantage?
    - Which groups benefit the most from creative health provision and at what stage are interventions most successful in leading to better outcomes?

- **What contribution does Creative Health make to education and skills development, employability, workforce participation and community resilience?**
    - What role can Creative Health play in supporting and reengaging young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), including those with health conditions or SEND?

- **What funding, commissioning and investment models are currently used to support Creative Health in the UK and internationally, and what lessons can be applied in West Yorkshire?**
    - How are residents, participants and communities involved in shaping creative health priorities and provision?

- **What social, cultural, health, economic, and place-shaping value is created through investment in Creative Health and how can this be evidenced?**
    - What benefits of creative health are currently not captured by existing monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and how could these be effectively measured?
    - How can wellbeing be monitored at local and regional levels and what proxy indicators could be used where direct data is not available?

- **What monitoring and evaluation approaches are effective and appropriate in community settings to support improving quality of provision and communicating outcomes to health service commissioners?**
- **How can social prescribing, community referral pathways and neighbourhood health systems connect more effectively with cultural providers?**
    - How can Creative Health providers, cultural organisations, heritage institutions, libraries, museums and VCSE organisations be more effectively embedded within Social Prescribing and neighbourhood health systems?
    - What barriers prevent referrals into creative health provision, including awareness, confidence, eligibility, data-sharing and provider capacity?

- Does the health sector have the capacity, flexibility and understanding to effectively engage with creative health sector?

- **How can successful Creative Health models be scaled across West Yorkshire, the UK and Europe while retaining their responsiveness to local communities and places?**
  - What models of collaboration between health services, cultural organisations, heritage institutions, VCSE organisations and creative practitioners are most effective?
  - How can cultural, heritage and creative sector organisations become systematic partners in improving health and wellbeing?

- **What contribution can Creative Health make to the sustainability of the creative and community sectors and practitioners within?**
  - How and why do practitioners include Creative Health provision in their work and how does this fit into their wider career?

- **How can creativity, culture and technology be combined to develop innovative, scalable and commercially sustainable Creative Health products, services and experiences that are inclusive and accessible?**
  - How can West Yorkshire's Creative Industries access emerging global wellness markets?
  - Which sectors (games, design, heritage, music, performance, immersive, digital content, fashion and textiles) present the strongest opportunities for Creative Health growth?
  - What are the risks of technology-led approaches, particularly around inclusion, accessibility, data protection, and quality of provision?

Working with us

These Areas of Research Interest are intended as a starting point for collaboration between the Combined Authority, researchers and other partners. They highlight priority evidence gaps where additional research, insight and innovation could help strengthen policy development and decision-making in West Yorkshire.

We welcome engagement from anyone with relevant expertise and encourage you to get in touch if you:

- Have research, evidence or insights relevant to one or more of the questions.
- Are undertaking or planning research aligned to these priorities.
- Would like to explore opportunities for collaboration and knowledge exchange.

As this is a pilot, we are also keen to receive feedback on the engagement process and how the Combined Authority can strengthen links between policy and research in the future.

Subject to available capacity, we may be able to support collaborative research activity through policy engagement, advice on regional priorities or letters of support for funding applications. However, this document is not an invitation to tender or a commitment to commission or fund research.

When you contact us, please tell us:

- who you are and the organisation you represent
- which ARI theme or question your enquiry relates to
- a short summary of the relevant research, evidence or insight
- whether the work is completed, ongoing or planned
- any opportunities for collaboration or knowledge exchange

Contact: ARI@westyorks-ca.gov.uk

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