

Scientific Summary

Background: UK policy supports greater engagement in health improvement, however, more needs to be known about effective mechanisms to deliver this aspiration. One strategy for engagement is supporting lay people in public health roles.

Aims of research: To improve understanding of valid approaches to identifying, developing and supporting lay people who take on public health roles, to research public perspectives of lay people in public health roles, and to identify elements of good practice. Specific research objectives include:

- critical analysis of models of involving lay people in public health roles, including defining different dimensions of 'lay' and providing clarity over the core elements of different models;
- investigating how public health services currently recruit, develop, manage and support lay people in public health roles;
- identifying factors affecting the development, effectiveness and sustainability of services/ programmes which seek to involve lay people in public health roles;
- examining the perspectives of community members with experience of public health services/ programmes delivered or led by lay people.

Type and location: The research will comprise a scoping study on approaches to involving lay people in public health roles, through a literature review and a review of current practice. A series of case studies will be carried out at selected sites throughout England. Between six and eight cases will be selected to illustrate models of practice and to cover different types of target populations.

Methods of working: The study will be in two distinct phases.

Phase 1 – The scoping study will identify the range and types of approaches to lay public health 'activists' and the role of public health services in supporting this type of engagement. The scoping study will have three elements:

- (1) A literature review of lay engagement in public health roles
- (2) Expert hearings with key informants with relevant expertise
- (3) A number of site visits to gain first hand information about current practice

The literature review will first highlight emerging models and key issues for service delivery and organisation. The draft findings will be presented at the expert hearings and form the basis of discussion. Results from the expert hearings will allow us to identify further sources of evidence. Site visits will then be undertaken to engage in further dialogue with lay people and front line practitioners.

Phase 2 – Case studies of projects and services selected to reflect the different models of lay engagement in public health roles. The case studies will gather in depth qualitative information from different stakeholder groups. This will include investigating public perspectives of the value, drawbacks and acceptability of lay people in public health roles.

Outcomes: We will produce a planning matrix bringing together key evidence and guidance to assist public health services commission, develop and support programmes involving lay people in public health roles. We will provide a searchable online database of research, practice and key contacts in this area. Clear

recommendations will be available to guide the funding of innovations, identify approaches for mainstreaming and future research priorities.