

Women's Health in Dorset – how engagement with the women of Dorset informed the programme – a reflective case study

Introduction

In Dorset, a collaborative group came together to review, improve and enhance the services and information available to support Women's Health ensuring the voice of the women and girls of Dorset underpinned this. This group included NHS Dorset, Health Innovation Wessex, Dorset Women's Community Interest Company (Dorset CIC) and Bournemouth University (BU).

The issue the group were trying to address related to women in the UK living longer on average than men, however the evidence shows they spend a greater proportion of their lives in ill health or disability compared with men. The government's 'Women's Health Strategy: Call for Evidence' received nearly 100,000 responses from women in England and this, together with feedback from local systems, highlighted several issues with women's health services. These include a lack of data about women's health, failure to take women's concerns seriously, fragmented commissioning (for example, some by Local Authorities (LA) and some by the NHS) and a lack of service integration, where women are required to attend a range of different services which do not provide holistic care for the issues they face.

The Women's Health Strategy for England (Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), July 2022) [Women's Health Strategy for England - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/111111/Women's_Health_Strategy_for_England.pdf) sets out 10-year ambitions for boosting the health and wellbeing of women and girls, and for improving how the health and care system listens to women.

What we did

Our collaborative group undertook a series of events and activities to engage with the population of Dorset (across all ages) to shape and influence the programme of work and priorities. This involvement and engagement continued as the programme progressed.

Key events and activities included:

- Dorset Women's Community Interest Company (CIC) symposium – this was attended in person by women in Dorset to listen to their views, issues and priorities.
- Dorset CIC engagement events to influence the programme and priorities of work – this was attended in person by women in Dorset to help influence the programme and ensure their voice is heard.
- Public representation on the virtual steering group and within project teams including the development of the Dorset Women's Health Online Resource.
- BU engagement events through the Centre for Midwifery and Women's Health which were attended by researchers, health care professionals and members of public (mix of online and in person).
- A digital survey asking women for their experiences of accessing information and self-help to which we received nearly 1000 responses from women.
- In person focus groups were used to proactively engage with community groups, including underserved groups to understand barriers in accessing information and care, from their perspectives. On average, there were 8-10 people in attendance at each focus group.
- We connected with over 20 organisations and existing groups within Dorset.
- The engagement events, focus groups and survey findings enabled the programme to be underpinned by the views of the women of Dorset.
- The feedback received through various methods highlighted six focus areas which became the projects – these were Menopause, Young Women's Physical and Mental health, Pelvic Health, Long-Acting Reversible Contraception, Minoritised groups and mobile support and online resources.
- The programme ensured the public voice was heard throughout and will continue to be heard.

What impact did it have?

The feedback received **directly influenced** the content for the online resource website called Women's health – Our Dorset, ensuring that we included **Gynaecology, Pelvic Health and Menstruation** in the first content to 'go live.' We also used this feedback to ensure we developed more education and information for menopause which was another key theme in the feedback received.

The Dorset Women's CIC moving forwards will be maintaining the online resource and continued engagement, so it is a resource created by the women of Dorset for the women of Dorset.

We plan to collate the impact from this work through repeating the digital survey, further engagement activities and focus groups and usage of the website over 2025-26 and will publish a further case study displaying the impact in 2026.

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