

Women's Health in Dorset – how Health Innovation Wessex provided innovation project management capabilities to the programme – a reflective case study

Dorset Women's Health Programme 2024/25

We worked with:

- NHS Dorset
- Dorset Women's Community Interest Company (CIC)
- Bournemouth University
- Dorset County Hospital
- University Hospitals Dorset
- Dorset HealthCare NHS Trust
- Wessex Health Partners
- Health Sciences University

Creating the conditions to innovate and bring about change

Finding and connecting innovators to health and care systems

Adopting and spreading innovations



I remain hugely grateful for everything HIW have overseen, led on and supported with, under the Dorset Women's Health Programme. They are an incredible organisation and working in partnership with them has greatly increased the success of this programme and benefited thousands of clinicians and women across the Dorset system.

Helen Crook, Programme Manager for Dorset Women's Health Hubs – NHS Dorset

Background and the issue

NHS Dorset commissioned Health Innovation Wessex from July 2024 until the end of March 2025 to support innovation adoption and oversee the running of five out of six projects. Each project was underpinned by multiple engagement activities to ensure the views of Dorset women informed the work. These projects were:

- Long-Acting Reversible Contraception
- Menopause
- Minoritised Groups & Mobile Support
- Pelvic Floor Disorders
- Young Women's Physical & Mental Health

The aim was to address project priorities and challenges across the health and social care sector for Dorset women and support the organisations across Dorset who were part of each project. Two innovation project managers from Health Innovation Wessex provided a total of three days per week support for the entirety of the project.

Although women in the UK live longer on average than men, evidence shows they spend a greater proportion of their lives in ill health or disability compared with men ([The King's Fund, 2024](#)). The government's [Women's Health Strategy: Call for Evidence](#), which nearly 100,000 women in England responded to, and feedback from local systems, highlighted several issues with women's health services.

The Women's Health Strategy for England (Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), July 2022) 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. In March 2023, the government announced £25 million for Women's Health Hub expansion.

What we did

Our innovation project management capabilities included the following support and delivery:

- Drive successful project delivery on time and meeting key agreed objectives.
- Build trust and grow relationships across the project groups and across Dorset through active engagement.
- Foster an inclusive environment, utilising a compassionate approach and relational leadership style with regular check ins.
- Address barriers and navigate system and resource challenges.
- Encourage teams to think laterally and innovate with new approaches and share ideas.
- Provide regular communication, clear objectives, and active and direct involvement to troubleshoot complex issues, enabling faster and more efficient problem solving.
- Facilitate design, co-ordination, planning, promotion, communication campaigns, implementation, and evaluation.

Empowerment

This activity and capability provided the following value:

- Motivation and support enabled project team members and other NHS Dorset colleagues to contribute and deliver within tight deadlines.
- People felt empowered, valued and respected which enabled and attracted support across the system and beyond.
- Women and health care professionals (HCPs) across Dorset have access to evidence based information and support through a central virtual online resource, apps, staff training packages and clinical care pathways system wide.

What impact did it have?

- Produced a report which **analysed just under 1000 responses** from a **digital survey** for NHS Dorset to take forwards.
- Enabled **21 groups** to be connected to the Women's health hub work **from 20 organisations**, to enable the public voice.
- Completed an **innovation scan** looking for innovations **ready for adoption** in the areas of menopause, young women's physical and mental health, long-acting reversible contraceptive and pelvic floor health.

- Implemented **five new applications** to support the women of Dorset, **Squeezy App** and **four apps for menopause** have been added to the Dorset App Library.
- Supported the **creation of an online resource website** Women's health – Our Dorset, which went live in April 2025. It will support the women of Dorset with **education, treatment and signposting** for more support.
- Supported the delivery of **two new pathways** of care enabling better access to services, more timely access and access closer to home.
- **System support** beyond the project timelines continues due to the drive, energy, and passion fostered.
- Long standing relationships have been forged between colleagues; shared learning and **increased connections** have been made across the system and with wider partners.
- **Increased educational awareness**, knowledge and support for women in Dorset and HCPs.

What is next?

The work undertaken was just the start of the journey for improving women's health in Dorset. A key aspect which has been built into this work has been **sustainability** and ensuring onward plans.

For example, the newly developed online resource will be maintained going forwards by the Dorset Women's Community interest Company and Health Innovation Wessex have been commissioned to design and produce an impact report during 2025-26.

If you would like to speak to Health Innovation Wessex about innovation project management support for your project or programme, or you are interested about how innovation could help your team, service or system contact us for further information:

Health Innovation Wessex: enquiries@hiwessex.net



What our Dorset partners are saying...

“The support, leadership, advice, and insights HIW have provided have been absolutely paramount in driving forward the Dorset Women's Health Hub Programme. We're extremely lucky to be working with them and hugely benefit from their skills and expertise. The programme should be a huge success due to our joint working and the skills they bring.”

Helen Crook, Programme Manager for Dorset Women's Health Hubs, NHS Dorset

“It was an absolute pleasure working with colleagues across HIW and, through the women's pelvic health project, identifying each of the organisation's strengths and recognising the potential for the future.”

Professor Carol Clark, Professor in Physiotherapy, Bournemouth University

“I've found working with HIW really helpful and productive. The whole HIW set up with the connections and staff it has available has facilitated multi-agency working very effectively and helped us achieve a lot in a short space of time which I'm sure will ultimately benefit patients and women's health in particular.”

Tim Hillard, Consultant and specialist in Menopause, University Hospitals Dorset

“The work on the Women's Health Hubs has helped bring some clarity and focus, creating a set of priorities that have harnessed the ideas and enthusiasm of our clinicians and user groups. Your willingness to be present, involved, and help lead has been great.”

Paul Johnson, Chief Medical Officer, NHS Dorset

“HIW involvement has offered a more robust and valid representation of the work undertaken facilitating opportunities for onward sharing for adoption and adaptation. I would always encourage a collaboration such as this.”

Sally Sheppard, Service Lead Pelvic Health Physiotherapy, University Hospitals Dorset

“The School Aged Immunisation Service have been working closely with HIW as part of their improving women's health programme in Dorset. To achieve a greater uptake, we targeted particular schools where we wanted to improve awareness of vaccination. HIW's leadership and drive was instrumental in the success of this.”

Paul Bolton, Clinical Services Manager, Integrated Vaccination Service, Dorset