

Voices to value with King's Improvement Science: Celebrating patient and public involvement in quality improvement



Since 2013, the King's Improvement Science (KIS) programme has built valuable partnerships with patients, public contributors and collaborators, generating important learning along the way.

As the programme concludes, we capture some highlights and reflections from people involved with KIS to inspire future involvement in quality improvement work.

Foundation and capacity building

- 2013: Founded with support from King's Health Partners (KHP) to build strength in applied health research, implementation research and quality improvement
- Since our foundation, we have worked closely with NIHR Applied Research Collaboration South London and the Health Innovation Network (HIN), which specialise in applied health research and supporting research into practice
- Supported capacity building across the three KHP NHS Trusts
- 14 improvement science research fellowships and 5 PhD students supported



A 'PPI member' is someone who uses personal, professional or community experience - such as being a patient, carer or member of the public - to help shape research and health and care priorities. They provide unique insights, act as lay advisors and offer valuable connections to wider communities and networks.

Our research

- 14 improvement research projects co-developed with NHS Trusts, patient and public involvement (PPI) members and other partners
- 86 peer-reviewed research papers published, many of which have been co-written with PPI members

Community engagement and impact

- Engaged over 80 PPI contributors
- Amplified unheard voices in service design
- Influenced local NHS Trust initiatives
- Contributed to wider system projects and improvement programmes



Collaboration

- We delivered this high impact work alongside the South East London and South West London Integrated Care Systems, The Health Foundation, Lambeth Living Well Network Hub, Black Thrive, Healthwatch Lambeth, Guy's and St Thomas' Charity and Maudsley Charity
- Supported 16 projects through our pilot South London Evaluation Advice Clinic alongside the HIN and KHP. The clinics were also supported by the South East London and South West London Integrated Care Boards



“The KIS team has worked to bring people and teams together to collaborate where this would add value. We have been instrumental in establishing and supporting the South East London Improvement Collaborative and bringing partners together to work on the South London Evaluation Advice Clinics. Both initiatives focus on system-wide capacity building.”
Zoë Lelliott, Director, KIS

“Working with KIS has been transformative for King's College Hospital. Their expertise and dedication helped us establish a systematic process, significantly elevating patient and carer involvement in quality improvement, resulting in clear, impactful deliverables.”

Andrea Cortés, Improvement Deputy Director, King's College Hospital

Resources and knowledge sharing

- 53,200+ visits to website since 2022
- 40 readily accessible resources developed - including guides, videos, posters and websites - on improvement and implementation within health services, which have been accessed and shared nationally.



**Manuela Russo,
Research Fellow, KIS**

What makes KIS truly unique is its multidisciplinary team. Each project brings together individuals with diverse backgrounds and expertise, along with at least two closely involved PPI members. This collaborative model - integrating professional knowledge, partnerships, and meaningful PPI involvement - is key to how we work and the impact we make.

What we're most proud of...



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Mel Getty, PPI Member, KIS

My first project, in partnership with the Aurora Project (a peer-led charity I co-founded), aimed to improve lung health in south London's drug and alcohol services.

Real change came through the KIS Service User Group, where we created visual prompts to encourage patients to visit their doctor, and developed a simple screening tool now routinely used in centres like Lorraine Hewitt House. The focus was on lasting change, not quick fixes.

"I was part of the Alcohol Assertive Outreach project at KIS, which aimed to support frequent A&E attenders with alcohol issues by encouraging engagement with day centres. The key deliverable I was able to bring was an understanding of the sorts of issues that people face, for example, advising that asking about money spent on alcohol may be more effective than asking about units, which many don't track."

John O'Toole, PPI Member, KIS



A highlight was being part of the recruitment panels for staff members of our own PPI group. This was a great insight into the mechanics of recruiting. It was also a golden opportunity for me to bring in my lived experience and to have a say about who the PPI coordinator that we were going to be working closely with would be.



Chris Pavlakis, PPI Member, KIS

"When we talk about improving care, words like 'quality', 'improvement', 'evaluation', and 'co-production' come up a lot. But these words can mean different things to different people even when they work in the same team. Without a shared understanding, it can be harder to collaborate, make decisions, or communicate clearly. We created a shared glossary of terms to help everyone from clinical staff and managers to patient partners to speak the same language when working together on improvement."

Sapna Kurade, Project Officer, KIS

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I work for the Research Delivery Network, and KIS helped us look into how inclusive our research recruitment and retention processes are. KIS PPI members played a key role by challenging our initial approach, pointing out they hadn't been involved in the design and suggesting it be reshaped with their input. That's exactly the kind of involvement we were hoping for - and they delivered!

**Anbhu Balasubramanian, Project Manager,
Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust**

We hosted an event on the value of patient and public involvement in October 2024 that was attended by over 90 people. For me, the key takeaway was that it wasn't just 'how to do PPI', the sort of formulaic stuff. We covered quite a bit around ethical issues, discrimination in PPI, which reflects issues in broader society, health and academia.

Josie Tapper, PPI Member, KIS



Through our work, we have been able to open the conversation to the wider community of people with an interest in PPI. The response from them is emphatic - there is a real hunger to know more, to be involved more, and to work together to really make best use of the knowledge and solutions generated by communities and the people in them.

"I asked KIS for support on a project I was working on related to experiences of public involvement, as I don't have research expertise. My preconceptions were that this would be rather complicated and I wouldn't understand it (I imagined researchers to be all huddled in darkened rooms!), but this was not the case. The team made me feel so welcome and helped me to really understand the processes that go into research."

**Richie Morton,
Involvement Lead,
South London and Maudsley
NHS Foundation Trust**



**Erin Letbe-Holder,
PPI Coordinator, KIS**

Our recent projects

Evaluation of remote monitoring for patients with rheumatoid arthritis

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KIS evaluated a new multi-trust remote monitoring service for patients with rheumatoid arthritis designed to help better manage symptoms. We worked with the Health Innovation Network, patients and the National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society. Findings have informed ongoing service developments and implementation.

Understanding patient experiences of waiting for heart surgery

KIS carried out a project to better understand patient preferences and experiences of waiting for heart surgery across four south London hospitals. The findings were shared with healthcare managers and clinicians and will directly impact the way that cardiac surgery waiting lists are managed across these hospitals in the future, and elements will be generalisable to other hospital specialties.



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We contributed to this research as PPI members. We have a unique insight into what patients and families go through from their very first communication with hospital teams to being on the waiting list itself and eventual surgery. Through our sharing, we helped the research team to understand the patient perspective and therefore develop questions that would be relevant to the survey.

Rashmi Kumar and Jo Burridge,
PPI Members, KIS

Developed a Theory of Change for NHS quality improvement training

KIS worked closely with the quality improvement team at King's College Hospital to develop a Theory of Change, which outlines everything that needs to be in place, including resources, training and outcomes, for the team to deliver its improvement goals. This work informed the Trust's quality improvement strategy and has led to more systematic involvement of patients and public in this work.

"Working with KIS and using the Theory of Change to look at our quality improvement training programme has provided us with critical insights for strengthening our quality improvement training, building capability and fostering a culture of improvement."

Lorraine Catt, Senior Improvement Manager, King's College Hospital



Developed a 4Pi framework-based questionnaire to evaluate service user and care involvement in research

KIS developed and tested a new questionnaire that organisations can use to evaluate service users and carers' experiences of involvement. Based on the 4Pi National Involvement Standards, the questionnaire enables the involvement process to be better understood, so that good practice can be more widely shared and challenges can be better identified and overcome.

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By acting on the feedback and letting involvement members know how their input led to change, staff help close the loop - making involvement feel authentic and impactful.

Araya Gautam, PPI Member, KIS

Evaluated NHS staff support and wellbeing programmes during Covid-19

KIS evaluated the implementation of NHS staff support and wellbeing programmes across all three King's Health Partners Trusts during Covid-19. Our findings were shared with the lead implementors at each NHS site to inform future staff support and wellbeing programmes, addressing any barriers and ensuring their sustainability.

Evaluated remote consultations in mental health

The pandemic led to a rapid shift from face-to-face consultations to telephone and video appointments in mental healthcare. KIS was part of a unique collaboration in south London to evaluate the impact of these changes on service users and mental healthcare staff, resulting in recommendations to inform clinical practice.

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"Alongside the Health Innovation Network, we co-designed research summaries and infographics, highlighted overlooked groups such as older adults and people in the criminal justice system and championed inclusive, person-centred care. A key message that we took from that project was that choice matters. Remote consultations can work well, but must never replace thoughtful, equitable care. Technology should widen access, not deepen exclusion."

Mel Getty, PPI Member, KIS



Top tips from KIS for other organisations wishing to embed PPI in their work

- **Embed PPI from the start**

Plan for PPI from the start, not as an afterthought. Involve PPI members alongside your core team early, and fund dedicated support roles, integrating PPI in a structured yet flexible way.



- **Create clear roles and provide support**

Define specific roles, responsibilities and skills, and how PPI input will be used. Help your PPI members to feel confident in contributing, with training, support and mentorship.



- **Ensure leadership and team buy-in**

Secure senior leadership commitment and embed PPI at all levels of governance. Consider training to help teams understand PPI's value in service design and improvement.



- **Be ambitious**

Be ambitious with PPI integration, even under financial pressure. Think creatively about accessing resources to support PPI, and aim for meaningful engagement that adds real value to your activities.



- **Provide fair compensation and support**

Pay appropriate stipends, cover expenses and offer professional development opportunities to PPI members. Meet accessibility needs, recognising other responsibilities and demands on their time.



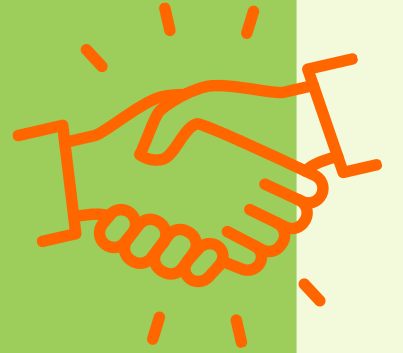


- **Foster equal partnership and respect**

Empower PPI members as valued partners, not consultees. Enable PPI members to chair meetings and lead discussions, recognising power imbalances at play.

- **Build trust through relationships**

Invest time in developing long-term, reciprocal and trusting relationships with local community groups and charities that represent diverse communities.



- **Make PPI accessible and inclusive**

Avoid jargon, provide materials in different formats and create supportive, open environments where people feel comfortable to ask questions and challenge ideas.

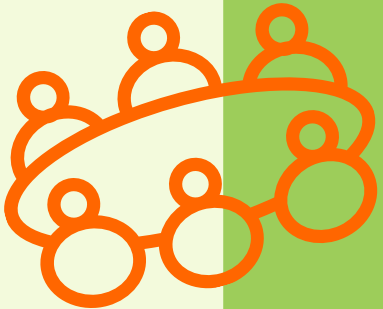
- **Close the feedback loop**

Clearly show how PPI input influenced decisions and had impact, especially when reporting back to PPI members themselves.



- **Welcome challenge**

Doing PPI well is hard, and you may get it wrong at times. Be open about this, learning from mistakes when they happen.



- **Meet people where they are**

People are not 'hard to reach' - go to them rather than expecting engagement on your terms. Recognise the emotional labour and bravery required that is required to share personal experiences.



Strengthening health and care research by becoming a PPI member: Advice from our PPI members

- **Your voice matters.** You don't need to be an expert, your lived experience is valuable and brings new insight.
- **Take your time.** It's fine to listen, ask questions and learn the process - you're not expected to know everything at once.
- **Share in whatever way works for you:** email, meetings or one-to-one chats. There's no single 'right way' to contribute.
- **Ask for what you need.** Accessibility matters - whether extra time, clearer explanations, tech help or a slower pace, good teams will adapt.
- **Be a 'critical friend'.** Your role isn't just to agree - it's to support while also constructively questioning. Speaking up helps maintain trust and ensures research reflects real public needs.
- **Help make connections.** PPI is often about being the 'missing link', bringing together ideas, people and communities. Sharing knowledge and joining dots can spark real progress.
- **Speak for the wider public.** You don't have to share your personal health story. Your role can be to represent what others might experience and need - especially those whose voices aren't often heard.
- **Open the doors!** Your presence encourages openness, transparency and inclusion. You're helping research become something more people can trust and take part in.
- **Stay curious.** Your questions matter. They help challenge assumptions, widen understanding and make health research better for everyone.
- **Be kind to yourself.** Life and health can be unpredictable, and it's okay to step back, pause, and return when you're ready.



KING'S IMPROVEMENT SCIENCE

The knowledge and insights gathered by KIS serve as a blueprint for developing new, responsive research services - creating a legacy for change.

PPI doesn't end when a programme closes - it evolves. We invite you to take what we've learned, expand it and keep the momentum alive.



kingsimprovementscience.org