

Increasing capacity for public health and prevention research in local government: **Research training needs survey to inform skills development activities in Camden & Islington Public Health**

Cassie Moore, Georgia Watson and Jessica Sheringham, April 2022

Executive Summary

Background: There is currently a gap in understanding research related training needs in public health Local Authority (LA) teams. Identifying these is the first step in understanding how to facilitate and embed research networks and activity in public health and other teams in LAs.

Aim: To identify research related training needs in North Central London (NCL) LA public health teams using an adapted research training needs survey.

Methods: We searched relevant literature to inform adaption of a validated tool designed to assess training needs in healthcare staff, to public health teams in North Central London (NCL). We conducted four interviews with public health staff to pilot the proposed changes. The final survey consisted of 21 items covering perceived importance and skills in four domains: Research skills, Evaluation, Application of research, Skills sharing and Resources. **The survey link was distributed via email to Camden & Islington, Enfield and Haringey public health teams.** Median importance and performance rating scores were calculated for each survey item. We used the difference in importance and skill scores as an indication of training need priority.

Results: Forty percent of the Camden & Islington Public Health team completed the survey and 84% of survey respondents were from Camden & Islington. There was a very low response rate from Haringey and Enfield public health teams.

The highest training needs were *accessing peer-reviewed literature* and *access to research related training and learning opportunities*. Other high priority items included *interpreting evidence* and *writing up research findings; applying research results to own work; providing accessible evidence-based information to residents* and *working collaboratively with colleagues across departments and organisations when carrying out research*. However, the small sample size meant that it was not feasible to disaggregate the data or to draw inferences about training needs in boroughs outside of Camden & Islington.

Discussion: Actions already taken in response to the survey include:

- **In-house training**, how to access peer reviewed literature via Open Athens was demonstrated at a department meeting and a “how to” guide written for Camden & Islington Public Health which is disseminated in induction packs to all new staff.
- **Signposting to existing external training opportunities**: 8 team members completed the NIHR ARC NT course *Introduction to Evaluation in Health Care & Public Health*.
- **Promoting critical appraisal of recently published evidence**: A Public Health journal club was set up and attended by Dr Jessica Sheringham who provides an academic perspective.

Some of the needs identified **may not require formal training, but instead a review of how the councils enable links across departments and organisations**. In addition, we recommend the following activities to understand training needs further:

- Extending the survey to teams outside of public health in Camden and Islington to promote wider support for research across the boroughs
- Surveying (with stronger institutional commitment) other NCL borough public health teams to enable disaggregated analysis by job role and borough
- Conducting interviews to understand responses and seek solutions to challenges to accessing training