Commissioning community champions

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Overview

- Community champions are volunteers or paid individuals who undertake health promotion activities within local communities.

- Community champions programmes have been around for more than a decade

- During COVID-19, DLUHC allocated funding to local authorities to develop community champions programmes in 2 waves to support people most at risk of infection and improve vaccination rates.

- Opportunity to capture learning at a national scale

Our research

Research aims:

- How were community champions programmes commissioned and used during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- What happened to the programmes after national restrictions reduced?

- What data was collected to understand their impact?

- What factors might influence the sustainability of programmes?

Methods:

- Online survey of local authority commissioners of community champions

- Semi-structured interviews with 15 commissioners or deliver partners

How are programmes commissioned?

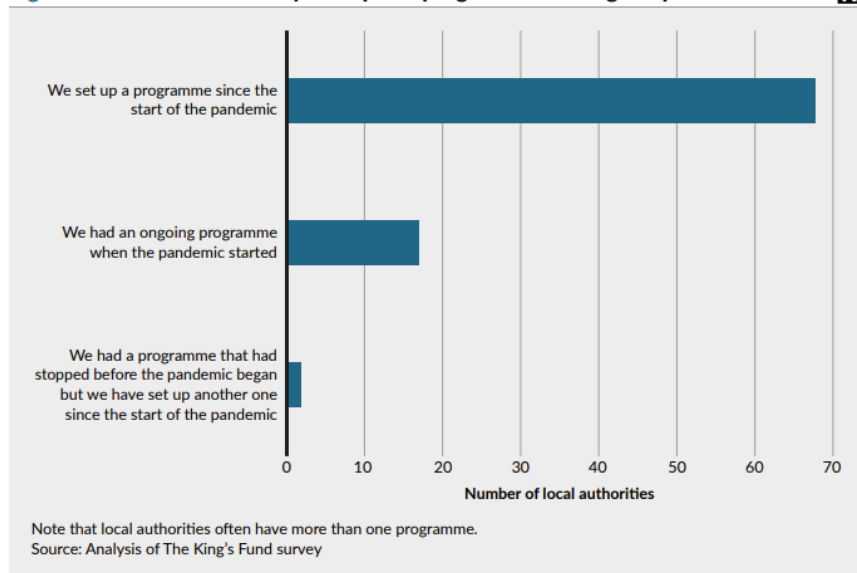Figure 1 Status of community champions programmes during the pandemic

Table 1 Approaches to commissioning and delivering community champions programmes, and the perceived strengths of each one

Community champions and reach

Table 2 Target characteristics of community champions and delivery partners

Target characteristics of community champions and delivery partners
Individuals
• Members of a defined population that community champions approaches seek to target for support
• Members of the wider community in general – eg, people who can talk to their families and friends or who have connections within their street
• Community and faith leaders – sometimes they were representative of a target population, sometimes they had access to a target population
• Local clinicians or hospital staff
• Business owners in general or within target neighbourhoods
• Local authority staff
• Staff of voluntary, commmunity and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations who may already work with members of target groups
Delivery partners or groups
• Education organisations, eg, staff and students at schools, and school governors
• Community organisations, eg, staff at libraries, children's centres or gyms
• District-wide voluntary and community services or community interest companies

- Reach vs. representation?

- Recruiting and managing community champions

- Routes for engagement

- Paid roles vs. volunteers

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Activities and value of community champions

- Sharing information with communities

- Providing capacity and wider support

- Collecting insight

- Providing a route for the co-design or co-production of approaches to service delivery and public health

Three key areas where a community champions approach can add value

1. Supporting engagement with communities to share information, collect insights and support collaboration with statutory partners.

2. Building trust with communities and between local authorities and organisations involved in delivering community champions programmes.

3. Supporting the development of community-based approaches by increasing capacity and capability within the community.

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Approaches to supporting engagement

Messaging	Two-way communication	Co-design
Local authorities use feedback to refine their responsibilities and consider the feedback in the context of their wider work	Local authorities respond to feedback and questions that communities are raising, providing real-time responses that can be shared	Local authorities work with community champions to co-produce, and sense-check their responses in relation to design and content of communications

Community champions were valued for:

- delivering information in a timely way to provide real-time intelligence
- gathering insights in a less structured way to inform programmes
- bridging communities and statutory bodies, particularly in relation to communities poorly represented in existing engagement mechanisms and public health interventions

Making the most of flexibility and adaptability

Role defined by set of structured activities that community champions engage in as identified by LA

- When delivery partners were deemed to be unsure about how to deliver the programme

- Partners are new to working with local authority, or very small

- Response to funder expectations and monitoring requirements

Core set of aims but community champions and delivery partners given agency to identify what activities would be most effective and how to deliver them

- Capitalise on knowledge and expertise of partners and champions
- Champions can tailor activities to specific community needs, make use of resources and employ creative methods to the work

Evolution of programmes

Figure 2 Changes to community champions programmes after most of the government's Covid-19 restrictions were removed in July 2021

Source: Analysis of The King's Fund survey
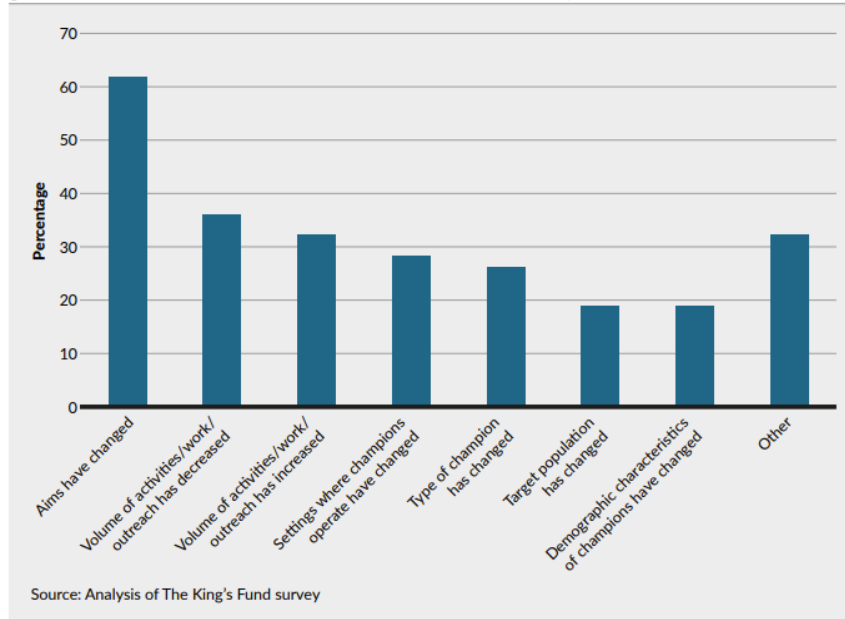
- Adapting delivery in response to local needs
- Refocusing programmes
- Change of target groups

- Broadening aims
- Vaccination programmes

- Change in partners and creating new networks
- Aligning with other programmes e.g. Core20PLUS5
- Scaling community champions
- Involvement in service design

Tackling sustainability

Purpose, buy-in and support
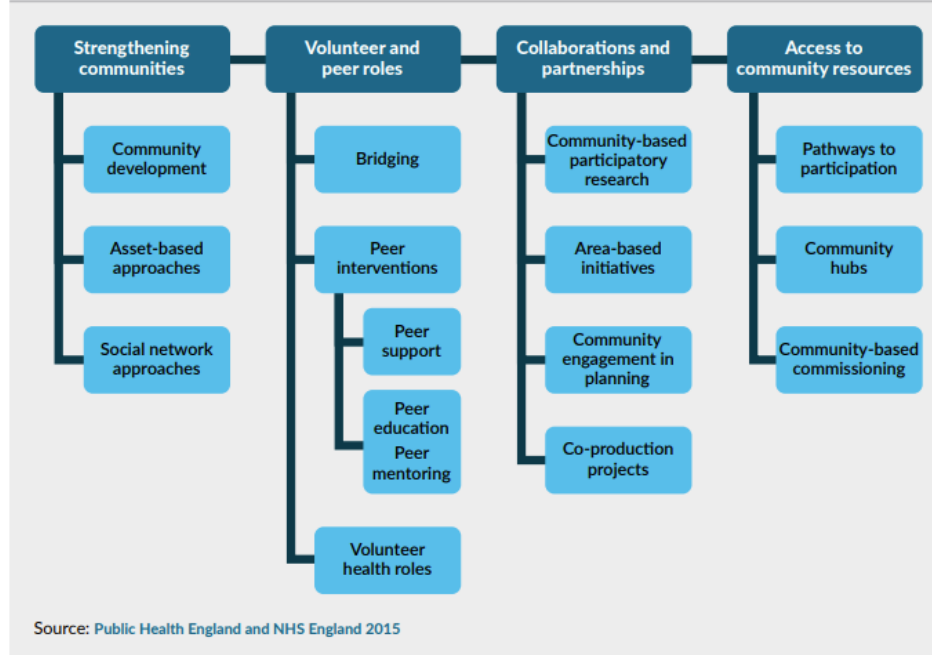
Engagement with community champions

Demonstrating impact

Funding and resourcing

Where community champions fit

Figure 4 The family of community-centred approaches for health and wellbeing

Source: Public Health England and NHS England 2015

What can community champions do for us?

Connecting with the big picture and the jigsaw of approaches

- Does your local authority and ICS have a commitment or strategy for community approaches to health?
- What is the picture of community-centred approaches in your area?

How can a community champions approach contribute?

- Which of the key strengths of community champions are important to you?
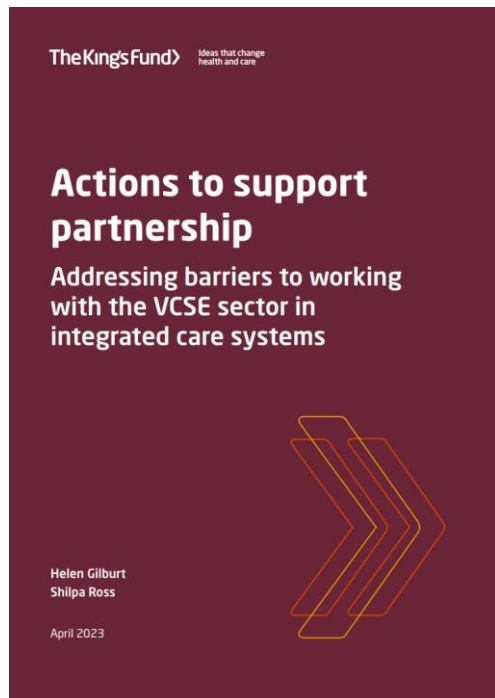- Are there any communities where current approaches are proving less effective?

What commissioning or delivery model is needed

- Which organisations and groups are currently working with the groups you want to focus on?
- What is the strength of those relationships and areas you want to strengthen further?

Considerations for sustainability

- What is the plan for the community champions approach in the long term?

The bigger picture

The King's Fund | Ideas that change health and care

Actions to support partnership

Addressing barriers to working with the VCSE sector in integrated care systems

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Shilpa Ross

April 2023

📖 **Long read**

Determinants of health

Covid-19 recovery and resilience: what can health and care learn from other disasters?

What do communities need to be able to recover from Covid-19 and build resilience? This long read identifies key insights from people involved in disaster recovery around the world.

4 February 2021 › 19-minute read

📖 **Event** | 10 July 2024 - 11 July 2024 | Past event

Health and care services

Community-led and person-centred approaches to health and wellbeing

Join us at this event to learn about the power of community-led and person-centred approaches to improve people's health and wellbeing.

📖 **Long read** | Deborah Fenney et al

Health and care services

Transforming power relationships in partnership working

Exploring the practical challenges of working with power in the Healthy Communities Together partnerships.

15 November 2023 › 25-min read

📖 **Long read** | David Buck et al

Patients and the public

Communities and health

The role of communities in improving population health is receiving increasing, and long overdue, attention in health policy and practice. This piece gives an overview of the different a...

5 May 2021 › 10-minute read

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