

 <p> <b>GIG</b>        CYMRU  <b>NHS</b>        WALES     </p> <p>       Iechyd Cyhoeddus        Cymru        Public Health        Wales     </p>	<b>Name of Meeting</b> Knowledge, Research and Information Committee
	<b>Date of Meeting</b> 17 March 2026
	<b>Agenda item:</b> 2.1

## Shaping the future of Academic Public Health Research in Wales: Strategic Vision and Aims

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<b>Approval/Scrutiny route:</b>	Research and Evaluation Oversight Group Iain Bell, Director of Research, Data and Digital

### Purpose

To share the completed report from development of the Academic Public Health Vision for Wales programme, and for assurance and support from KRIC for Public Health Wales's continued engagement with stakeholders to realise the vision.

### Recommendation:

APPROVE <input type="checkbox"/>	CONSIDER <input type="checkbox"/>	RECOMMEND <input type="checkbox"/>	ADOPT <input type="checkbox"/>	ASSURANCE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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The Committee is asked to:

- Receive **assurance** on the publication of "A Strategic Vision and Aims for Academic Public Health Research in Wales"
- Endorse the need for Public Health Wales to continue to work with Welsh Government and wider system partners to translate ambition into coordinated action and measurable impact.

### Link to PHW [Strategic Plan](#)

PHW has an agreed strategic plan, which has identified six strategic priorities and well-being objectives.



This report contributes to the following:	
<b>Strategic Priority/Well-being Objective</b>	All Strategic Priorities/Well-being Objectives
<b>Summary impact analysis</b>	
<b>Equality and Health Impact Assessment</b>	No Equality and Health Impact Assessment has been undertaken as a decision is not required by the Committee.
<b>Risk and Assurance</b>	Not identified as a risk on the Corporate Risk Register or Board Assurance Framework.
<b>Health and Care Standards</b>	This report supports and/or takes into account the <a href="#">Health and Care Standards for NHS Wales</a> Quality Themes
	All themes
<b>Financial implications</b>	None
<b>People implications</b>	No direct impact to PHW People.

## 1. Purpose / situation

The purpose of this paper is to receive assurance from KRIC for the publication of “A Strategic Vision and Aims for Academic Public Health Research in Wales” and to endorse the need for Public Health Wales to continue to work with Welsh Government and wider system partners to translate ambition into coordinated action and measurable impact.

Academic Public Health Research (APHR) in Wales faces structural challenges including constrained funding, fragmented infrastructure and limited system-wide coordination. Following a comprehensive national review and extensive stakeholder engagement, a shared vision and set of strategic aims have been co-developed to strengthen coherence, capability and impact.

## 2. Description/Assessment

In 2023, the then Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Health and Care Research Wales and Public Health Wales identified Academic Public Health Research as an area under pressure but with significant untapped potential.

To help inform a future approach, Public Health Wales conducted a comprehensive review of the APHR landscape in Wales, supported by an UK wide steering group. Published in May 2025, the "[Optimising Academic Public Health Research in Wales](#)" report set out four key recommendations:

1. Develop a national vision for APHR
2. Focus on Wales’s strategic and innovative research strengths
3. Enhance funding and partnerships through cooperation and collaboration
4. Support the next generation of public health researchers

In response to the report and to develop the work further, PHW convened five system-wide workshops between July–December 2025 involving 149 participants across Welsh Higher Education Institutions (WHEIs), NHS Health Boards, Public Health Wales, local government, third sector partners and the Wales Innovation Network (WIN). This process resulted in a shared Strategic Vision, Aims and outlined potential next steps (subject to agreement). Please see [Appendix 1](#) for the full report.

### Next steps

To continue our role in stakeholder collaboration and engagement through this work, Public Health Wales will:

- Publish the shared vision and aims and disseminate amongst stakeholders, including WHEIs, WIN, Welsh Government and others.
- Maintain a central point of contact through its Research & Development Office.
- Work collectively across government, academia, the NHS, local authorities and communities, to embed sustainable coordination.



- Identify areas of technical strength and public health thematic priorities for APHR.
- Identify, maintain and publish public health research priorities aligned to PHW strategic objectives and national policy frameworks.
- Strengthen Wales's positioning with UK-wide funders and strategic research initiatives.

### 3. Recommendation

This paper sets out a shared national Vision and Strategic Aims for Academic Public Health Research in Wales, co-developed through system-wide engagement and informed by comprehensive review.

The Vision provides a coherent framework to strengthen research excellence, workforce capability, collaboration and policy impact, positioning Wales as a competitive and outward-facing research system.

This work will now be taken forward in partnership with the Welsh Government in their development of a refreshed Health and Care Research Strategy.

#### **The Committee is asked to:**

- Receive **assurance** and endorse the Strategic Vision and Aims for Academic Public Health Research in Wales.
- Endorse the need for Public Health Wales to continue to work with Welsh Government and wider system partners to translate ambition into coordinated action and measurable impact.

## Appendix 1

# Shaping the future of Academic Public Health Research in Wales

## Executive Summary

A strong Academic Public Health Research (APHR) environment is essential to improve population health, inform policy, drive innovation, and support economic growth in Wales. While Wales has a strong research history and supportive policy context for public health, the APHR environment and capacity is currently constrained by limited funding, fragmented activity, and the absence of a coherent, system-wide vision, strategy, and influence across Wales and UK funders. This threatens growth and sustainability and highlights significant untapped potential to address current and emerging public health challenges through high-quality, impactful research and development.

The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for Wales (2023), Health and Care Research Wales (HCRW) and Public Health Wales (PHW) identified APHR as an area facing challenging times in Wales, but with the potential to be strengthened for the benefit of the population.

To help inform a future approach, Public Health Wales conducted a comprehensive review of the APHR landscape in Wales, supported by an UK wide steering group. Published in May 2025, the "[Optimising Academic Public Health Research in Wales](#)" report set out four key recommendations:

1. Develop a national vision for APHR
2. Focus on Wales's strategic and innovative research strengths
3. Enhance funding and partnerships through cooperation and collaboration
4. Support the next generation of public health researchers

The report concluded that a *unified vision for Wales* was needed to improve coherence, strengthen collaboration, and maximise research impact on policy, health outcomes, and inequalities. The report recommended by thinking differently, working collectively, and investing in strategic coordination, capacity building, and career development, Wales can create a thriving APHR environment that delivers measurable benefits for population health, policy, and the economy. While Public Health Wales was considered well placed to support coordination, leadership must be shared and facilitated with partners - across Welsh Government, Health and Care Research Wales, the Chief Medical Officer, higher education institutions, the NHS, social care, local authorities and the third sector.

### ***What happened next***

In 2025, Public Health Wales convened a series of five system-wide workshops to co-develop a shared vision for APHR. This included engagement with all Welsh higher education institutions, the Wales Innovation Network, NHS Health Boards, local government, Public Health Wales and third sector partners. These insights

shaped a collective vision, strategic aims, principles and actions focused on moving from aspiration to delivery.

### ***Developing a collective vision for Academic Public Health Research in Wales***

The following vision and strategic aims describe a coordinated, outward-facing national public health research system that strengthens areas of methodological excellence and future research capability (essential components to underpin high-quality APHR), delivers robust evidence for policy and practice, and responds to emerging challenges. Together, they aim to enhance Wales's ability to grow and sustain APH, and Wales's contribution to UK and global public health research improving health and equity.

#### ***Strategic Vision***

*“A dynamic, innovative and strengths-based academic public health research system that builds future research excellence and capability, and delivers visible, measurable impact on health and equity in Wales and globally.”*

#### ***Strategic Aims***

1. Strengthen APHR infrastructure as an enabler of research excellence and impact
2. Build methodological and technical capability, APHR careers and workforce resilience,
3. Co-produce a coherent national identity and collective voice for APHR in Wales
4. Embed open, collaborative and co-produced research across the system
5. Deliver challenge-led, responsive and forward-looking research.

Together, these aims provide the foundations for a future-ready capable and collaborative APHR system that delivers impact and positions Wales as a high-performing, competitive research environment.

#### ***Next steps***

The strategic vision and aims provide a clear statement of ambition that has been jointly shaped by stakeholders. These will be shared with partners across Wales and the UK, recognising that achieving this vision is not the responsibility of any single organisations. Progress will require alignment with Welsh Government and wider UK Life science strategies and funders, research infrastructure initiatives and academic career pathways.

The intent of the vision is to provide a common reference point to support dialogue, partnership working and future system development of a more connected, impactful and equitable academic public health research system in Wales. As part of this work, Public Health Wales will continue to provide national leadership and advocacy

and act as a central point of contact and facilitation for AHPR in Wales through its Research and Development Office.

## A Shared Vision for Academic Public Health Research in Wales

### Introduction

A strong Academic Public Health Research (APHR) environment is essential to improving population health, driving innovation and supporting economic growth. Wales has a rich public health research heritage and a supportive policy context, but structural challenges currently limit the system's full potential. These include constrained funding, fragmented activity, and the absence of a coherent, system-wide vision and strategy with influence across Wales and UK funders. Without action, this risks undermining future growth and sustainability, despite significant untapped potential to address current and emerging public health challenges through high-quality, impactful research and development.

The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for Wales (2023), Health and Care Research Wales (HCRW) and Public Health Wales (PHW) identified AHPR as an area facing challenging times in Wales, but with the potential to be strengthened for the benefit of the population. To help inform a future approach, Public Health Wales undertook a comprehensive review of the AHPR landscape in Wales, including desk-based analysis, stakeholder interviews, and input from a Wales Steering Group and UK-wide expert panel. Published in May 2025 the '[Optimising Academic Public Health Research in Wales report](#)' highlighted both significant strengths and system-wide challenges for AHPR.

Wales benefits from rich linked data assets, strong links between academia, policy and practice, and a committed research community. However, the system remains fragmented, with uneven infrastructure, limited visibility, variable capacity, erosion of public health posts, and unclear career pathways. Stakeholders identified a lack of coordinated priority-setting as a key barrier to maximising impact. The review concluded that a unified national vision was required to strengthen coordination, collaboration and impact, aligning with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and Public Health Wales's long-term strategy to support prevention, equity and evidence-informed policy.

### Approach to developing a shared vision and aims

In response to the report, Public Health Wales led the co-development of a shared vision for Academic Public Health in Wales. Five workshops were held between July and December 2025, involving 149 participants from Welsh higher education institutions (including early career researchers), NHS Health Boards, Public Health Wales, local government, the third sector and the Wales Innovation Network.

The workshops built on evidence from the review to explore system needs, enablers and barriers, research purpose, incentives and priorities. Participants strongly supported the need for a coherent national voice and identity for AHPR in Wales -

visible at national and international levels; a challenge-led, responsive research system; stronger methodological capability; meaningful co-production; the right technical expertise and better connectivity across institutions, communities and funders. The focus was on establishing a practical and collaborative pathway to build a stronger, more connected and impactful academic public health research environment for Wales.

This process resulted in a shared vision and a set of strategic aims focused on moving from aspiration to delivery.

## Vision and Aims

### Strategic Vision

*“A dynamic, innovative and strengths-based academic public health research system that builds future research excellence and capability, and delivers visible, measurable impact on health and equity in Wales and globally.”*

### Strategic Aims

#### **1. Strengthen APHR infrastructure as an enabler of research excellence and impact**

Wales is recognised as a place where high-quality, policy-relevant public health research can be delivered efficiently and at scale and research infrastructure actively supports translation into policy and practice. Data, digital, governance and organisational infrastructure reduce fragmentation, enables rapid collaboration, and supports engagement with UK and international partners.

**Success:** Faster consortium-building, efficient access to data and funding, and stronger translation of research into policy and practice.

#### **2. Build methodological and technical capability, APHR careers and workforce resilience**

Wales has a resilient, interdisciplinary public health research workforce with broad and deep expertise. There is a clear opportunity to better connect methodological and technical skills with public health domain expertise to build sustainable, interdisciplinary APHR careers. A more integrated research ecosystem - linking strengths in social and behavioural sciences, health economics, data science and AI, advanced analytics, geospatial methods, evidence synthesis, and participatory and systems approaches with expertise across microbiology, genomics, epidemiology, prevention, mental health, social determinants, health services, and climate and planetary health - would enable a robust, responsive APHR capable of addressing complex and emerging public health challenges.

**Success:** A future focused APHR career pathway, and ecosystem that supports resilient, skilled workforce, with the ability to respond rapidly to complex and

emerging public health challenges. There are clear academic pathways (MSc, PhD, Postdocs, Fellows etc), joint positions supporting interdisciplinary research that informs policy and practice.

### ***3. Co-produce a coherent national identity and collective voice for APHR in Wales***

Establish a visible, recognisable APHR identity for Wales to strengthen collaboration - locally, nationally and internationally connect with and collaborate with the right expertise quickly and confidently. This will amplify impact, strengthens advocacy, attract talent, and position Wales as a credible partner and leader in UK and international public health research.

**Success:** Stronger cross-disciplinary collaboration and expanded access to research council funding, sustainable APHR career pathways, and greater national and global recognition of Wales's research strengths.

### ***4. Embed open, collaborative and co-produced research across the system***

Embed meaningful partnerships and co-production with communities, services and third-sector organisations a core way of working across the research lifecycle ensuring that public voice, lived experience and service insight shape research priorities, design, delivery and translation into practice.

**Success:** Research priorities reflect lived experience and system need, with evidence more readily adopted into policy and practice.

### ***5. Deliver challenge-led, responsive and forward-looking research***

To maximise impact in strengthening APHR in Wales, a collective and prioritised approach is needed, focusing on a small number of challenge-led thematic areas where Wales has existing or emerging strengths, system need is greatest, sustainable funding routes are feasible, and coordinated action can deliver measurable gains over the next 2–5 years. Through the collaborative workshops, a set of challenge-led themes were proposed as areas of focus\*.

**Success:** Coordinated system effort focused on areas of greatest potential impact, enabling rapid mobilisation of expertise in response to emerging threats and pressures, and driving innovation, new methods and cross-sector solutions to improve health and reduce inequalities.

#### **\*Challenge-Led areas of focus**

**Indicative areas of strength and focus** (to be periodically reviewed):

1. Climate change, One Health & environmental public health
2. Genomics and infectious diseases
3. Healthy places / built & natural environments (urban and rural)



4. Mental health & community wellbeing
5. The future of public health: digital, data and AI and surveillance

### **All thematic priorities must:**

- Be developed through an equality lens and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act
- Align with PHW, WG and university priorities
- Incorporate community voice
- Complement and inform existing and future national strategies for health

The vision and strategic aims set out a coordinated, outward-facing national public health research system that strengthens methodological excellence and future capability, delivers robust evidence for policy and practice, and responds to emerging challenges. Together, they enhance Wales's ability to grow and sustain APHR and to contribute meaningfully to UK and global public health research that improves health and equity.

### **Next steps**

This document provides a clear statement of ambition that has been jointly shaped by stakeholders and provides a common reference point to guide future development, collaboration and dialogue across the public health research system.

Achieving this vision is not the responsibility of any single organisation - progress will require alignment with many factors including funders, academia, Welsh Government and wider UK health and life science strategies, research infrastructure initiatives, and academic career pathways.

### **To continue momentum towards this vision, Public Health Wales will:**

- Provide system leadership and advocacy for the APHR Vision for Wales at national, UK and international levels.
- Identify areas of technical strength and public health thematic priorities for APHR: such as linked data for population health, genomics, threat surveillance and response (e.g. climate change, infectious diseases)
- Identify, maintain and publish public health research priorities aligned to PHW strategic objectives and national policy frameworks.
- Host the annual Public Health Wales Research & Evaluation Conference as a national platform for visibility, collaboration and impact.
- Maintain a central point of contact for public health research through the PHW Research & Development Office, supporting engagement, navigation and partnership across the system.

Public Health Wales will also work with Welsh Government to inform and develop national research, innovation and life sciences strategies in relation to health and public health; and to strengthen Wales's positioning with UK-wide funders and strategic research initiatives. This will include consideration of sustainable funding models, academic career pathways, and mechanisms to enhance Wales's competitiveness for major research programmes.

**Building on the strong collaboration that shaped this collective vision, PHW will work with Welsh Government and wider system partners to translate ambition into coordinated action and measurable impact.**

Together, we will explore coordination and shared mechanisms for oversight that can both inspire, support implementation, and sustain progress over time. Areas for further work identified through development of this vision are:

*1. National Leadership and Strategic Advocacy*

Provide visible national and international leadership for APHR in Wales, aligning and publishing research priorities with strategic policy objectives, and acting as the central coordination and access point through the Research & Development Office.

*2. Challenge-Led Focus*

Develop and coordinate priority thematic areas, mobilise Wales-wide collaboration for strategic funding opportunities, and align system strengths with policy need and sustainable funding routes.

*3. Governance and Shared Oversight*

Establish a cross-sector National Academic Public Health Steering Group to provide strategic oversight, priority-setting and clear governance, supported by system-level reporting and prioritised action plans with defined ownership and review cycles.

*4. Coordination Infrastructure (Hub Model)*

Establish a light-touch Coordination Hub to connect expertise, support co-production, mobilise collaborative funding and enhance national visibility, alongside mapping existing infrastructure, identifying gaps and developing a sustainable, non-duplicative resourcing model

*5. Phased and Proportionate Implementation*

Phase delivery by prioritising actions within existing capacity, identifying areas requiring additional investment, focusing on high-impact activity, and ensuring dedicated coordination resource to avoid fragmentation.

**Conclusion**



The intent of this vision is to provide a shared point of reference for the future development of APHR in Wales. It is intended to stimulate dialogue, strengthen relationships and support collective learning across the system, while creating the conditions for greater coherence, collaboration and impact over time.

While not a formal commitment, this vision provides a shared platform to guide future thinking, strategic direction and investment and partnership working, enabling the development of a more connected, interdisciplinary, sustainable and impactful APHR system for Wales.

## Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- Receive **assurance** on the publication of “A Strategic Vision and Aims for Academic Public Health Research in Wales”
- Endorse the need for Public Health Wales to continue to work with Welsh Government and wider system partners to translate ambition into coordinated action and measurable impact.