



Research summary

Systematic review of community business related approaches to health and social care

There is a growing interest in community-led approaches to health and social care and the potential they have to impact on users' health and wellbeing outcomes. In light of public health challenges, the decline in state-led services and awareness of social determinants of health, community businesses' initiatives may provide alternative ways of improving physical and mental health and quality of life and reducing social isolation.

This systematic review looks to identify what evidence exists in relation to the impact of community business-related approaches to health and social care on its users. In particular, the report asks how effective community businesses are in delivering outcomes for their users.

Key findings

The review found that there is limited evidence of varying quality around community business related approaches to health and social care. The evidence that does exist uses mostly qualitative methods, but a few studies have also used quantitative survey and mixed methods and demonstrate the challenges of conducting methodologically rigorous real-world research within local community settings. The report suggests that more quality research is needed to provide robust and evidence-based comparisons between community-led and traditional models of health and social care.

Nonetheless the studies included in this review suggest that community business related approaches such as 'men's sheds' initiatives, village models for older people and community farms impact on a range of health and wellbeing outcomes, these include:

- **Social connectedness** – community businesses have developed and bolstered connections among their users. Those who engage with community businesses are more socially connected with others, this in turn lessened their social isolation and feeling of loneliness.
- **Self-esteem** – half of the included studies suggested that community businesses increased feelings of self-esteem. This was expressed in various ways, e.g. users felt a sense of



accomplishment and pride upon the completion of tasks within community business activities, such as gardening or woodwork. Additionally, community business activities develop skills and increase the capabilities of their users.

- **Physical health** – positive effects on physical wellbeing often refers to the users' involvement in community business activities such as production of goods and services, gardening and farming or sports and leisure. All of these types of activity involve some form of physical activity and this has led to improved physical health.
- **Mental wellbeing** – in half of the studies community businesses have been found to make users feel happy and supported, offering a sense of hope in improving their local community. In some cases, community businesses also act as safe havens from negative influences such as drug and alcohol abuse, or offer activities that provide stress relief, such as gardening.
- **Quality of life** – as well as studies reporting a generally improved quality of life, users felt a sense of purpose by being able to help others they were working with.

About the research

The research was undertaken by a multi-disciplinary team based at the University of the West of England's Centre for Public Health. A systematic review approach was taken to address the research questions, this included identifying, screening and critically assessing the quality of evidence in a consistent and procedural way and reporting on key findings of relevant studies. Both grey and academic literature were reviewed. The search was restricted to English language studies and restricted to the period from January 2008 to June 2018 in order to review only the most recent literature. The majority (41%) of the studies were conducted in the United Kingdom, 36% in Australia, 18% in the United States of America and one in Peru and Mexico