



# Closing the gap Network

Improving physical health  
and reducing health inequalities  
for people with severe  
mental illness.



UNIVERSITY  
*of York*



# What is the 'mortality gap' for people who use mental health services?

People who use mental health services experience the poorest physical health and most profound health inequalities of any section of the population. Diabetes, heart disease and chronic respiratory illness are two to three times more common than for people without mental ill health. Life expectancy is reduced by 20 to 25 years. This has come to be known as 'the mortality gap'. The underlying causes are complex and innovative solutions are a priority.

## What are mental health research Networks?

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has recognised the importance of research councils working together to stimulate 'interdisciplinarity and innovation' by encouraging the formation of networks to address challenges in mental health. The Closing the Gap Network is one of eight Networks in the UK and is the only one which directly addresses health inequalities for people who use mental health services. The funds allocated to the Networks will enable us to build capacity, stimulate collaboration and conduct new research.

## Who are the founding organisations and what are the priorities for the Closing the Gap Network?

We chose to address the physical health inequality for people with the most severe forms of mental ill health and have formed the 'Closing the Gap' Network. Our Network is led by researchers at the University of York and Keele University. The Closing the Gap Network will draw on our track record in population health, primary care, health services research, evidence synthesis, health economics, digital health, environmental science, and the creative arts. Our Network includes the Mental Health Foundation to innovate and co-produce research with people with lived experience.

Our Network is committed to reducing health inequalities and we have formed a partnership with The Equality Trust to help us understand the causes and consequences of health inequality through the lens of social, economic and political science. We will also work with the Mental Elf to raise the profile of our work, via innovative means of communication and knowledge mobilisation. Mental Elf will be 'in the room' at our events, so you can follow our progress and get involved across the life of the Network.

# What are the core priorities for the Closing the Gap Network?

We have prioritised areas which are under-researched but have great potential to bring new thinking to this area. For example we will look at the potential of 'big data' and digital interventions to engage people in managing their own health. Another area we will look at is the potential for the natural environment ('greenspace') to improve both mental and physical health. We will also explore the potential of arts, creativity and cultural resources to improve health.

The Closing the Gap Network will be underpinned by core principles of (1) scientific rigour, (2) collaboration between disciplines, (3) innovation, and (4) co-production with people who have experienced severe mental ill health. We will undertake research and will also be able to offer small project grants over the next four years to stimulate new working. We also seek to link up with other researchers and policy makers working in this area in the UK and overseas, in order to grow our Network over time.

# Who will participate in the Closing the Gap Network research programme?

At the heart of the Closing the Gap Network is a research-ready cohort of people with lived experience of SMI. The Closing the Gap Cohort is an ongoing project which includes over 7000 (and counting) people who have provided data on their health and lifestyle. This Cohort has already helped researchers to deliver large-scale trials of smoking cessation and diabetes management in SMI. Researchers who join the Closing the Gap Network will be able to work with and support this innovative cohort to deliver internationally-excellent and impactful research.





## How can I find out more and get involved?

The Closing the Gap Network will act as a springboard for a much larger and long-lasting programme of work to address health inequalities among people with severe mental ill health. Further updates on future meetings and work which emerges from the Closing the Gap Network will be posted on our Twitter page. We will also partner with @Mental\_Elf who will help us to communicate our work. Please follow and retweet if you would like to join us in Closing the Gap. We also have a website – [www.york.ac.uk/closing-the-gap](http://www.york.ac.uk/closing-the-gap)

- Please follow and retweet if you would like to join us in Closing the Gap. [@CTGNetworkUK](https://twitter.com/CTGNetworkUK)
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