

Multi-disciplinary research

– thoughts on how to do it (better)

Tips from a #MentalHealthResearchMatters webinar

Multi-disciplinary research – what does this mean?

Working with people from a range of different academic disciplines.



Using new (and different) research methods. Being prepared to work out of your comfort zone.

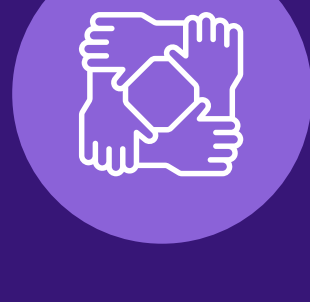
Taking time to build your team, establishing common goals in order to work together well.



“It is a solution in mental health to how we provide better care, support and treatment because knowledge is socially distributed. The insights and rich data produced are a strong endorsement of the approach”.

Skills and approach needed for multi-disciplinary research

There are quite a few key ingredients for effective cross-disciplinary research including good communication, working flexibility and allowing sufficient time to build teams that can work well together.



Respectful and inclusive communication – this is key!



Explore everyone's understanding of key concepts and approaches to create a common language for the project



Noticing and voicing power structures



Being open minded, generous with time, showing humility and compassion



Questioning assumptions – individually and collectively as a group



Getting used to feeling discomfort and vulnerability

“Treat multi-disciplinary working as a methodology in itself – with the main principle being communication”



The role of funders

Funders have a significant role to play, influencing how we do research and the kind of knowledge we can co-produce. Several are asking for more use of multi-disciplinary approaches in mental health research.

Tips from funders:

1 Ask – is multidisciplinary working the right approach for this particular project?



2 Mobilise yourselves to do more cross-discipline work – skill up and make new partnerships as need grassroots drive as well as funder commitment.



3 Be creative, involve lived experience expertise in multidisciplinary teams, and share your learning on multidisciplinary working.



A few more top tips for researchers for multidisciplinary working



Honesty about expectations

Work on expectations for what collaborations will actually look like in practice. Ensure that the team have a common vision and goal. This means communicating clearly not working by assumption.

Challenge existing structures

Multidisciplinary work requires small continuous efforts including challenging the academic structures and funding environment we work within to achieve change and deliver better outcomes.

Be ready for hard work

It requires intellectual effort to do multidisciplinary work. Anticipate this level of effort and embrace this way of working which will require energy and effort.

Keep trying

Mental health is not going to be advanced by disciplines working in silos so we must overcome the challenges to produce better science, better solutions and choices for individuals living with poor mental health.

Relinquish power

Need to address power of our thoughts, privileges, and practices which means be willing to compromise. Be open to learning from other disciplines.

Take a few risks

Send that email to a new contact, engage in conversation with new people, be ready to feel a little uncomfortable and less expert than usual!

Give yourself time

Doing multidisciplinary work well takes time. Allow time to carve out new niches and spaces to coproduce new knowledge. Build your networks with other scientific colleagues and the third sector.

Enjoy the journey

Done well multidisciplinary working is enjoyable, enriching and creates friendships as well as academic work partnerships.