

CLAHRC BITE

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A bite-sized summary of CLAHRC research: Changing risk behaviours and promoting cognitive health in older adults.



Researchers developed key findings from systematic reviews into an evidence-based resource for local authorities and commissioners



What?

Researchers in the Dementia Frailty End of Life Care Theme worked with Public Health England to develop an evidence-based resource to change risk behaviours and promote cognitive health in older adults.

Who?

An alarming proportion of older adults are physically inactive, smoke cigarettes, misuse alcohol, eat poorly and are socially isolated. In light of the growing evidence that these risk behaviours can damage older adults' health, commissioners and local authorities need to provide tailored interventions to support change in these often entrenched behaviours.

Why?

Researchers undertook three systematic reviews of the scientific literature to promote healthy behaviours and cognitive health in older adults. The findings were organised in an accessible report intended to support the development and commissioning of evidence-informed prevention packages for older adults.

Background

There is evidence that changes in health behaviour in older age can have beneficial effects on cognitive function in the short term. While this segment of the population is highly heterogeneous, many are likely to share similar core issues and challenges when it comes to changing behaviours. To effectively 'reach' that population health promotion initiatives need to be specifically tailored.

Researchers reviewed the evidence for older adults' health, looking at interventions targeting risk behaviours including alcohol consumption, smoking, diet and nutrition, physical and cognitive activities alongside social engagement to help prevent isolation. They discovered that improvements in smoking and drinking are favourable for a range of health outcomes. Physical activity was also effective for maintaining brain health and increasing participation.

With the demands of local authorities and clinical commissioners in mind, the researchers summarised the evidence for each health behaviours impact on cognitive health, outlined interventions to improve behaviour and assessed the barriers and facilitators that may affect the effectiveness of such interventions.

There are major engagement considerations when seeking to change often entrenched behaviours in older adults. These were flagged up in the final Public Health England resource: Changing Risk Behaviours and Promoting Cognitive Health. Published in November 2016, the results were subsequently presented at numerous scientific and practice-focused conferences, including 2017's Faculty of Public Health Conference and PHE's Annual Conference.

References

Lafortune L, Kelly S, Olanrewaju O, Cowan A, Brayne C. (2016). Changing risk behaviours and promoting cognitive health in older adults: An evidence-based resource for local authorities and commissioners. Public Health England. PHE gateway number: 2016427. <https://goo.gl/SSBTYP>

Kelly S, Lafortune L, Olanrewaju O, Cowan A, Brayne C. (2017). Interventions to prevent and reduce excessive alcohol consumption in older people: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Age Ageing – in press.

What is NIHR CLAHRC East of England?

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHRC) East of England is a five year programme of applied health and social care research which focuses on the needs of people with complex problems, often vulnerable, when multiple agencies are involved in their care: young people, frail older people, those with dementia, learning disabilities, acquired brain injuries or mental ill health.

The CLAHRC East of England collaboration encompasses some thirty-six organisations, with research hubs in the Universities of Cambridge, Hertfordshire and East Anglia working closely with individuals and organisations involved in the whole care pathway.

Service users and carers are at the heart of what we do, in parallel with an ambitious public health research programme.

Co-production and collaboration at all stages of the research process are fundamental to making a positive impact through applied health research.

[Useful links and contact](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changing-risk-behaviours-and-promoting-cognitive-health-in-older-adults>

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