# NIHR | Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex

# Identifying Priorities for Adult Social Care Research

## A focus group study in Kent, Surrey & Sussex

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# Acknowledgements

# Content

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## Applied Research Collaboration Kent Surrey Sussex
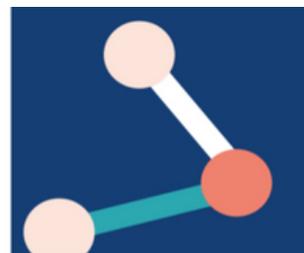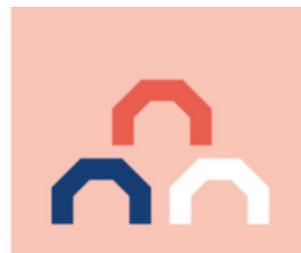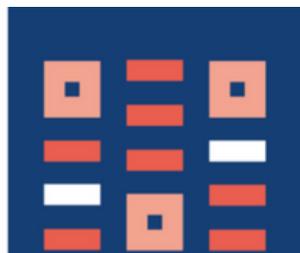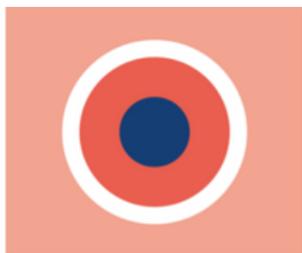
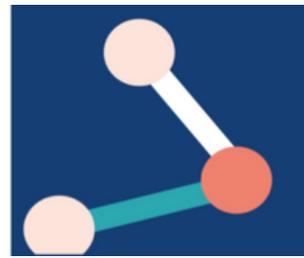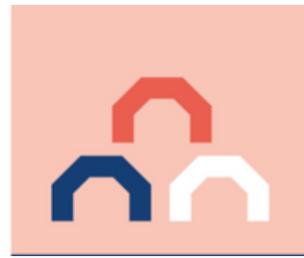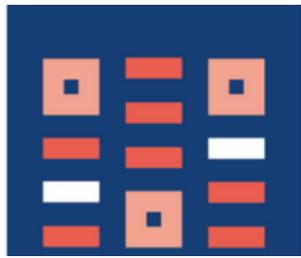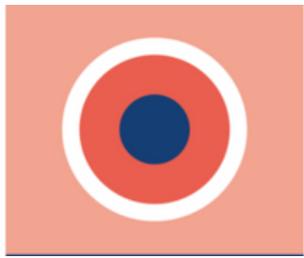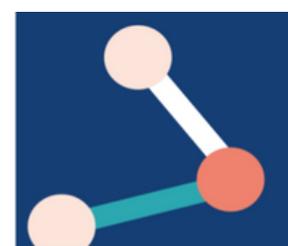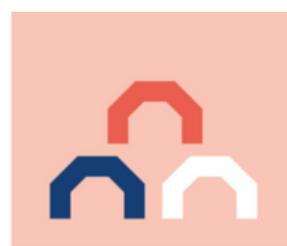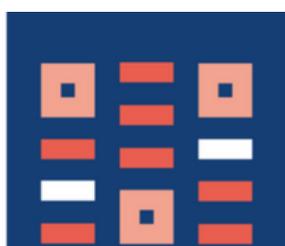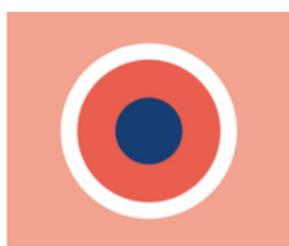The Applied Research Collaboration Kent Surrey Sussex (ARC KSS) is funded by The National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) to support applied health and care research. ARC KSS is one of 15 ARCs across England. ARC KSS carries out research relevant to practice and aims to improve outcomes for those receiving and those providing care. Each ARC includes local NHS providers, local care services, commissioners, local authorities, universities and charities as member organisations. Together, these organisations aim to support and implement high-quality research that addresses the health and care needs of local systems and the local population. ARC KSS consists of 8 different research themes: Social Care, Child & Young Person Mental Health, Dementia, Primary & Community Care, Co-Production, Public Health, Digital Innovation, and Health & Social Care Economics.

## ARC KSS Social Care Theme

ARC KSS consists of 8 different research themes of which Social Care is one. Adult Social Care in England covers a wide range of activities and services that support people who are older, living with a disability, or with a physical or mental illness. This might be to support independence, keep people safe, and improve quality of life. These services can be provided by Local Authorities, the NHS, independent organisations and the voluntary sector.

The Social Care theme of the ARC conducts research that evaluates the effectiveness of social care activities to improve outcomes for service users, informal carers and the social care workforce in Kent, Surrey and Sussex. The research discussed in this report was conducted by the Social Care theme. The ARC KSS Social Care theme is also the national ARC lead for Adult Social Care and Social Work.

## The Social Care Team

Professor **Julien Forder** is the Theme Lead for the ARC KSS Social Care theme. He is a Professor of the Economics of Social Policy at The University of Kent .

**Rebecca Sharp** is the Implementation Manager for the ARC KSS Social Care theme. She works as a senior programme manager at the Kent Surrey Sussex Academic Health Science Network (KSS AHSN).

Dr **Jolie Keemink** is the Postdoctoral Research Fellow for the ARC KSS Social Care theme. She works at The University of Kent.

# WHAT DID WE DO?

## Background to this Project

ARC KSS aims to carry out research projects which are informed by the needs of local service users, informal carers and the social care workforce. This is to make sure that the research findings are relevant and useful for local care systems in Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

This project has been the starting point, aimed at identifying our future research projects. We engaged with local stakeholders to ask them about their priorities for adult social care research. Specifically, we wanted to know about innovative practice already underway, as well as the challenges experienced by those receiving and those involved in the provision of care. This initial study would then identify priority areas for research and support the development of specific research projects to support evidence-based practice and support oucomes for people receiving services, informal carers and the social care workforce.

## Online Focus Groups

To engage with stakeholders, we organised online focus groups. In a focus group, researchers ask people to discuss a certain topic to gather ideas and opinions.

We conducted seven online focus groups across Kent, Surrey and Sussex. Six included social care professionals (care provision, voluntary sector, local authority) and one with members of the public. We discussed priority areas for adult social care research using a discussion framework, which is presented on the next page. The figure below provides more detail about the seven focus groups. After the focus groups, the participants completed an online survey in which they ranked research areas in order of priority.



| 7 online focus groups N=44 |
| --- |

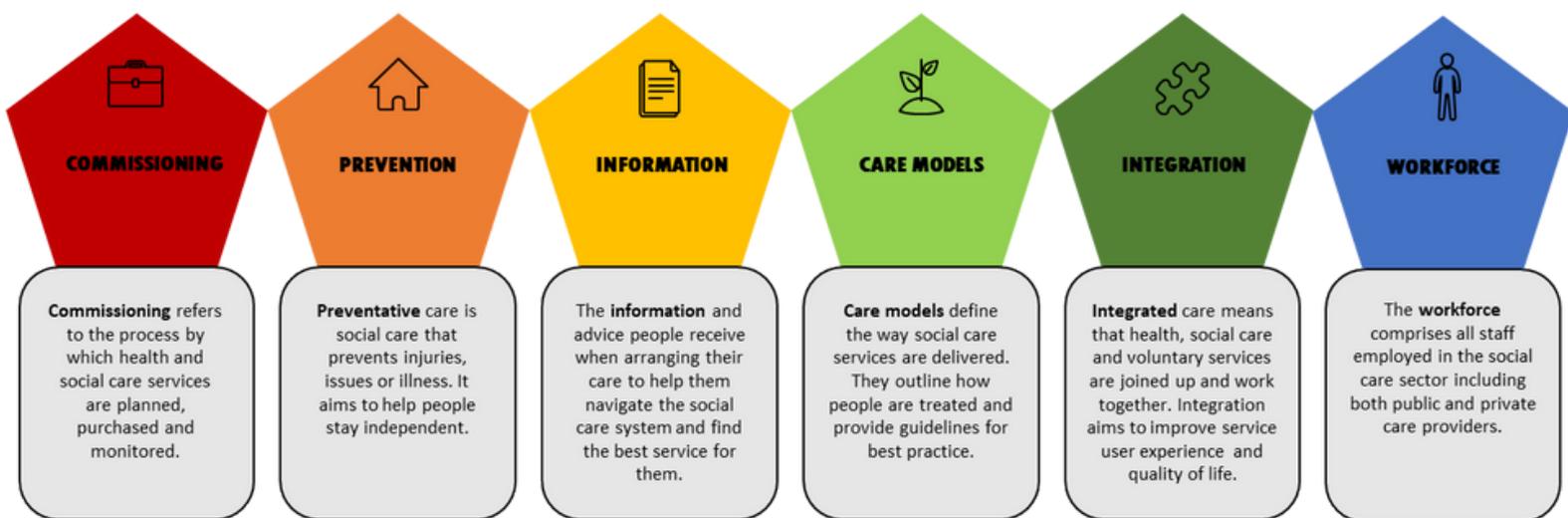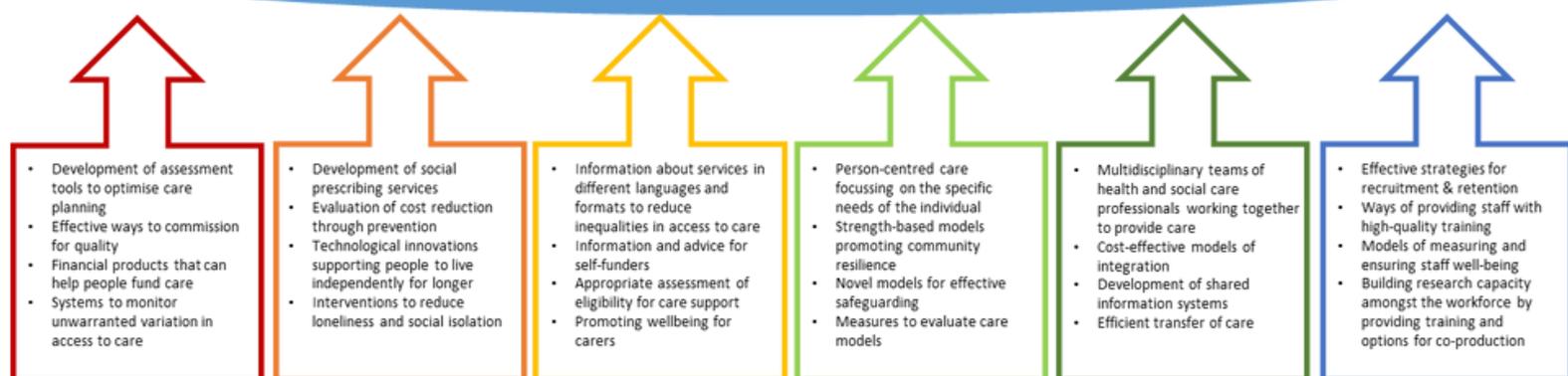| 2 with social care professionals from East Sussex | 1 with social care professionals from Kent | 2 with social care professionals from Brighton & Hove | 1 with social care professionals from Surrey | 1 with members of the public living in Kent, Surrey or Sussex |

# DISCUSSION FRAMEWORK



**COMMISSIONING**

Commissioning refers to the process by which health and social care services are planned, purchased and monitored.

**PREVENTION**

Preventative care is social care that prevents injuries, issues or illness. It aims to help people stay independent.

**INFORMATION**

The information and advice people receive when arranging their care to help them navigate the social care system and find the best service for them.

**CARE MODELS**

Care models define the way social care services are delivered. They outline how people are treated and provide guidelines for best practice.

**INTEGRATION**

Integrated care means that health, social care and voluntary services are joined up and work together. Integration aims to improve service user experience and quality of life.

**WORKFORCE**

The workforce comprises all staff employed in the social care sector including both public and private care providers.

## EXAMPLES OF AREAS FOR INNOVATION

- Development of assessment tools to optimise care planning
- Effective ways to commission for quality
- Financial products that can help people fund care
- Systems to monitor unwarranted variation in access to care

- Development of social prescribing services
- Evaluation of cost reduction through prevention
- Technological innovations supporting people to live independently for longer
- Interventions to reduce loneliness and social isolation

- Information about services in different languages and formats to reduce inequalities in access to care
- Information and advice for self-funders
- Appropriate assessment of eligibility for care support
- Promoting wellbeing for carers

- Person-centred care focussing on the specific needs of the individual
- Strength-based models promoting community resilience
- Novel models for effective safeguarding
- Measures to evaluate care models

- Multidisciplinary teams of health and social care professionals working together to provide care
- Cost-effective models of integration
- Development of shared information systems
- Efficient transfer of care

- Effective strategies for recruitment & retention
- Ways of providing staff with high-quality training
- Models of measuring and ensuring staff well-being
- Building research capacity amongst the workforce by providing training and options for co-production

Social care is a broad sector including many different services, making it challenging to pinpoint priority areas for research. To support the focus group discussion we developed a framework with potential priority themes. The framework was based on the Care Act 2014, setting out local authorities' duties in relation to social care.

The six potential themes for discussion were: Commissioning, Prevention, Information, Care Models, Integration and Workforce. The figure above provides a definition for each theme, and gives examples of specific areas of innovation that could be relevant to research. Participants were sent this figure in advance to prompt their thinking about local activities that could benefit from research evaluation.

# WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

## Focus group discussions

We analysed the content of the focus group discussions using a method called thematic analysis. Discussed social care activities were categorised in terms of which theme they fitted best. Susbequently, we could identify which of the six themes from the discussion framework were discussed the most. Table 1 on the right shows the discussion topics in order of frequency. Research questions related to 'Care Models' were discussed the most, followed by 'Information' and 'Integration'. The following page shows examples of research questions for each of the themes that the participants of the focus group suggested would be relevant to explore in research.

Table 1. Discussion topics from 'most discussed' to 'least discussed'

**FOCUS GROUPS**
1. Care Models
2. Information
3. Integration
4. Prevention
5. Workforce
6. Commissioning

## Online survey

In the online survey, people were asked to rank the six themes from the discussion framework in order of priority for adult social care research. Table 2 on the left shows that 'Prevention' was ranked top priority for adult social care research. Interestingly, there is a difference between the two tables. Participants talked most about research related to 'Care Models', but ranked 'Prevention' highest. It is likely that this occured because of an overlap in what type of social care acitivities the themes cover (e.g. care models that focus on prevention). The themes 'Information' and 'Integration' are ranked similarly in both tables.

Table 2. Ranking of research themes in order of priority.

**SURVEY**
1. Prevention
2. Information
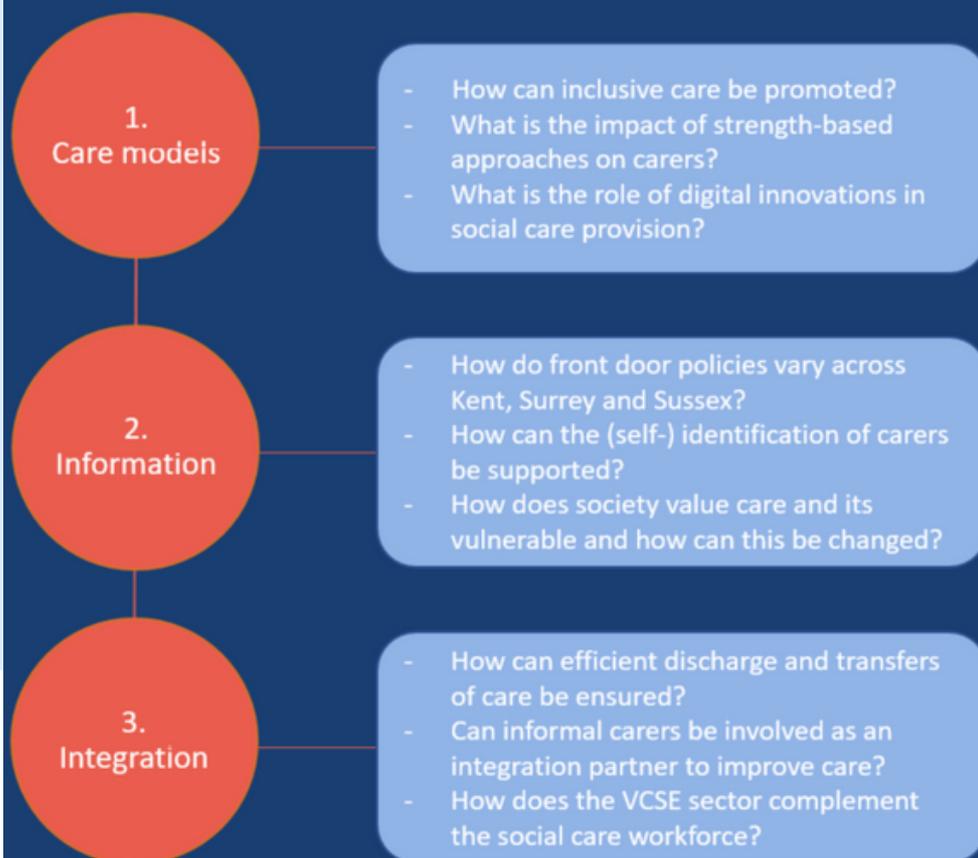3. Integration
4. Commissioning
5. Care Models
6. Workforce

# WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

The figures on this page provide examples of the research questions that came up most during the discussions in the focus groups. The research questions were categorised according to the themes from the discussion framework. The themes are ordered from 'most discussed' to 'least discussed'. Within the capacity of the team, the ARC KSS Social Care theme will develop some of these research questions into projects. For more details, please see next page.

**1. Care models**
- How can inclusive care be promoted?
- What is the impact of strength-based approaches on carers?
- What is the role of digital innovations in social care provision?

**2. Information**
- How do front door policies vary across Kent, Surrey and Sussex?
- How can the (self-) identification of carers be supported?
- How does society value care and its vulnerable and how can this be changed?

**3. Integration**
- How can efficient discharge and transfers of care be ensured?
- Can informal carers be involved as an integration partner to improve care?
- How does the VCSE sector complement the social care workforce?

**4. Prevention**
- How can carer burn-out be prevented?
- Can digital innovations support people to live independently for longer?
- What is the role of preventive social care support to reduce intensive care needs?

**5. Workforce**
- What are effective strategies for staff recruitment & retainment (in home care)?
- How can staff values/attitudes be changed to create better care environments?
- How can young people be attracted to the care profession?

**6. Commissioning**
- What are valid outcome measures to support outcome-based commissioning?
- Can giving people more control over their care lead to cost savings?
- What assessment tools can optimise care planning?

# WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

The outcomes of the focus group discussions form the foundation for research projects set up within the social care theme and the wider ARC KSS. The following projects link to the prioritisation findings and are in varying stages of development. We are also setting up Communities of Experience around some of these research projects, bringing together people with a shared interest.

## Inclusive Practice
### Care Models & Workforce

We are setting up a project exploring strategies to make residential care settings more inclusive for older people who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. This project has a national focus and we are working with various local and national charities to promote inclusive practice.

## Home Care
### Care Models & Workforce

Together with the Public Health theme of ARC KSS, we are running a Community of Experience on Home Care. We are implementing existing evidence around workforce sustainability and supporting the development of new projects, including a focus on prevention and safety.

## Carers
### Care Models & Prevention

The focus groups revealed several research questions related to carers that would be relevant to explore. Examples of projects include (self-) identification of carers (recognising that someone is a carer) and the impact of strength-based approaches to needs assessments and care.

## Digital Social Care
### Care Models & Prevention

The National ARC Programme for Adult Social Care and Social Work is leading a project evaluating the use of digital innovations in adult social care. Specifically in KSS, we are exploring a project around telehealth in social care commissioning, in collaboration with industry partners.

## Outcome measures VCSE
### Care Models & Commissioning

The theme is supporting a project developed by researchers at The University of Kent looking at co-producing a framework and toolkit to support Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations in demonstrating their activity, outcomes and impact.

## Front Door to Adult Social Care
### Information & Prevention

In collaboration with local authority partners, we are developing a project that examines variations in front door services across the Kent, Surrey, Sussex region. Front door refers to the information and advice services that people encounter when they access social services.

## D2A Model
### Care Models & Integration

In line with the content of the focus group discussions, the wider ARC and AHSN team are setting up a research project to evaluate the Discharge to Asses (D2A) pathway with a focus on community settings. The project will examine the impact of the D2A model on social care, community care, primary care and informal carers.

## What are Communities of Experience?

A Community of Experience (CoE) is a group of people with a shared interest and individual experience, who come together to hear and learn from each other, to share knowledge and good practice, and to address challenges. Our CoEs aim to bring together those involved in the provision of services, those supported by services, the public, and academia in order to understand need (needs articulation), develop research and support the implementation of evidence based practice and service provision to improve outcomes for both those receiving and those providing care. In order to support this we are currently setting up Communities of Experience for: Inclusive Practice, Homecare, Carers, Digital Social Care and the VCSE sector. Please contact Rebecca Sharp at rebecca.sharp4@nhs.net to get involved or find out more.
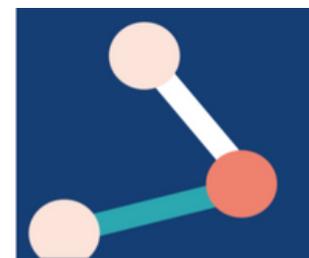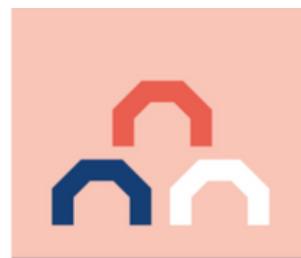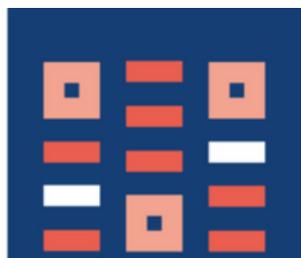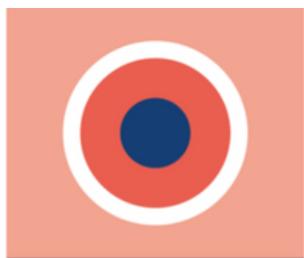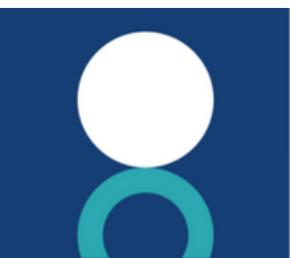
# Want to know more or get involved?

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