

Improving the mental health and wellbeing of priority population groups: An evaluation of the Act Belong Commit mental health promotion initiative in Irish community settings



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Background

This collaborative research study aims to assess the impact of the Act Belong Commit (ABC) community-based mental health promotion initiative on the mental health and wellbeing of priority groups in Irish community settings. The study builds directly on research undertaken by the University of Galway and HSE to determine the feasibility of implementing ABC with priority groups in Irish community settings.

ABC is a community-based, mental health promotion initiative that was first developed in Australia and has since been adapted and implemented in a number of European countries. The ABC initiative encourages community members to take part in activities that are known to improve mental health (Act, Belong, Commit). These activities are provided and promoted by community and voluntary sector organisations who partner with the ABC initiative. Evaluations from Australia and Denmark report that ABC has led to improvements in a range of mental health outcomes for participating community members, as well as improving the mental health promotion capacity of partner organisations.

Building on the findings of the Feasibility Study, the baseline data collection and implementation will begin in January 2026. The project aims to improve participants' mental health and wellbeing as well as contribute to the evidence base on effective mental health promotion initiatives for priority groups.

Aims and Objectives

The study aims to assess the implementation and impact of the ABC community mental health promotion initiative on the mental health and wellbeing of priority groups in Irish community settings. A secondary aim is to explore the experience of staff of partner organisations of implementing ABC.

Specific objectives include:

1. To co-adapt the ABC initiative with priority groups through participatory approaches.
2. To ascertain how the ABC initiative works in the Irish context through co-developing a programme theory with community steering groups.
3. To evaluate the implementation process.
4. To assess the impact of implementing ABC for participating priority groups and community organisations.
5. To inform the scaling-up of ABC nationally by refining the programme theory with community steering groups.

Design and Methods

A mixed methods study design will be used to test the implementation and impact of ABC with 120 purposively recruited priority group participants and community organisations from across six sites in two purposively selected community settings. The RE-AIM framework will be used as the overall conceptual framework for the evaluation. In line with findings from the ABC Feasibility Study, a community participatory research approach will be adopted.

Findings/Results

The findings will contribute to the national and international evidence-base on effective mental health promotion interventions for priority groups, as well as informing if and how ABC should be rolled out at a national level, including for priority groups.

Dissemination: Conference presentations, reports for the HRB and HSE, policy and practice briefs and journal publications.

Patient Public Involvement:

The involvement of CPOs and potential end-users was integral to the ABC Feasibility Study, informing the overall approach (co-production) for this phase of the research and ensuring that ABC was co-designed with communities. There will continue to be a strong PPI focus throughout each stage of this study, including PPI contributors on the project's Advisory Group, the involvement of priority group members in local Community Steering Groups, and the engagement of Community Peer Researchers for data collection and analysis.

Knowledge Translation:

Research findings will be shared via oral presentations at national and international conferences, be-spoke presentations and reports with key stakeholders from the HSE, HRB, and both communities, and through knowledge exchange events with the ABC International Partner Network.