

Act-Belong-Commit: A feasibility study on the adaptation of a community-based mental health promotion initiative in Irish community settings



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Funded by: Health Service Executive, Ireland

Background

This study aims to determine the feasibility of adapting and implementing a universal mental health promotion initiative in Irish community settings. Act Belong Commit (ABC) is a community-based mental wellbeing initiative that was originally developed and delivered in Australia, and has since been adapted and implemented in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, and Finland. This initiative encourages people to engage in activities to promote their mental wellbeing that align with three evidence-based behavioural domains - Act (do something, keep active); Belong (do something with someone, keep connected) and Commit (do something meaningful and valuable to you). ABC combines community development and social marketing approaches to promote mental health at an individual, community, and broader societal level. Mentally health activities are provided and promoted by community partner organisations (CPOs) under the ABC banner. The initiative is supported by a media campaign.

Evaluations to date from Australia and Denmark report positive effects for individuals' beliefs and behaviours concerning mental health and increased public awareness of community organisations that provide mentally healthy activities. This collaborative research with the HSE and community partners explores the feasibility of implementing ABC with priority population groups in two purposively recruited community settings in Ireland. Pilot implementation and an extensive evaluation of ABC in two Irish communities will begin in 2026.

Aims and Objectives

The study aims to explore the feasibility of implementing Act-Belong-Commit in two community settings in Ireland.

Specific objectives included:

1. To undertake consultations with community and voluntary partners to determine the implementation readiness of two purposively selected communities
2. To adapt the international mental health promotion campaign Act-Belong- Commit to the Irish context and develop a scalable model for delivery in Irish communities
3. To develop a training manual and educational material for mental health promotion for staff in the community and voluntary sectors in Ireland.

Design and Methods

Objective 1: Two community areas were purposively recruited by the HSE. Across both communities, key community stakeholders were identified through existing contacts in the HSE and engaged. Identified stakeholders were invited to attend a series of focus groups to determine the implementation readiness of the two communities. The Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (www.cfirguide.org) was used to guide the discussions. Data were thematically analysed.

Objective 2: Potential partner organisations who work with priority groups in both communities were identified. Staff and key volunteers of potential CPOs were invited to participate in an in-person, cocreation workshops to adapt ABC to the local context. Group discussions and practical cocreation exercises were facilitated by members of the HSE Health and Wellbeing and University of Galway teams and aimed to tailor ABC to the specific priority groups to ensure its appropriateness and relevance.

Objective 3: To inform the development of training to support the implementation of ABC, a scoping review of mental health promotion training frameworks for staff in community and non-healthcare settings was undertaken in line with the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) five-stage framework. Consultations were also held with key community stakeholders and international ABC partners. Draft courses were reviewed by an Expert Reference Group. Based on their feedback, courses were edited and piloted with staff of potential CPOs across the two communities.

Findings/Results

Stakeholder Consultations: A total of 52 key stakeholders in the area of health and wellbeing across both communities participated in a series of five focus groups, which were held online (Zoom platform) and in-person. Both community groups considered the ABC framework to be a simple, tangible framework that would allow for a coordinated approach to mental health promotion in Irish communities. The need for targeted approaches to implementation to engage specific priority groups, for example people who are disadvantaged, marginalised and vulnerable, was highlighted, alongside the importance of co-designing ABC with potential participants to ensure it is culturally appropriate. Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of adequately training and supporting CPOs in the delivery of the initiative. The findings from the community readiness assessment informed the overall approach to the next steps in the research, which was one of co-production.

Co-adaptation Workshops: Some 34 participants attended a series of three in-person workshops to co-adapt ABC to the local context. Participants were staff, key volunteers and potential participants of six community and voluntary organisations across both communities with a remit for promoting the mental wellbeing of priority groups. Participants identified the specific groups that ABC would most appeal to in their community and using editable templates tailored the ABC domains to suit. Target groups included: Irish Travellers, people living in deprived and disadvantaged communities, new communities, and people experiencing loneliness and isolation. The descriptions of the co-adapted ABC domains were used to draft supporting resources for the local implementation of ABC (see Figure 1 below), in collaboration with the HSE.



Figure 1 An ‘Act Belong Commit’ poster co-designed with participants of a co-adaptation workshop.

Mental Health Promotion Training: Findings from the scoping review and consultation with the key community stakeholder and international ABC partners led to the development of two courses to support the implementation of ABC in Irish community settings. Course 1 entitled “Introduction to Mental Health Promotion” is aimed at macro-level stakeholders, for example, managers of CPOs or Health Promotion and Improvement Officers. Course 2, “Implementing Mental Health Promotion through Act Belong Commit”, is for staff and volunteers of CPOs who will be directly responsible for the delivery of ABC at the local level. Both courses use a hybrid form of delivery, incorporating both online self-paced learning modules and in-person workshops.

Dissemination: Conference presentation, reports for the HSE, and journal publications

Conference presentations to date:

Harte, P., Keppler, T., Barry, M., Walsh, O., & Clarke, A. (2024, June). A collaborative study to determine the feasibility of adapting and implementing a universal mental health promotion programme, “Act-Belong-Commit”, in Irish communities (HSE Health and Wellbeing & Health Promotion Research Centre, University of Galway). Oral presentation at the Annual Health Promotion Conference 2024, University of Galway.

Harte P., Keppler, T., Barry, M., Walsh, O., & Clarke, A. (2025, May). Act Belong Commit – For sustainable and resilient communities in Ireland (HSE Health and Wellbeing & Health Promotion Research Centre, University of Galway). Oral presentation at the 14th Nordic Public Health Conference, 14 May, 2025, Gothenburg, Sweden.

Reports:

Harte, P., Keppler, T., Barry, M., Walsh, O., & Clarke, A. (2024). *The Act-Belong-Commit Programme Implementation Readiness Assessment: A report on stakeholder consultations in two Irish Communities*. A report prepared for the Health Service Executive, Ireland. Health Promotion Research Centre, University of Galway.

Harte, P., Keppler, T., Barry, M., Walsh, O., & Clarke, A. (2024). *A review of international mental health promotion training frameworks for staff in community and non-healthcare settings*. A report prepared for the Health Service Executive, Ireland. Health Promotion Research Centre, University of Galway.

Harte, P., Keppler, T., Barry, M., Walsh, O., & Clarke, A. (2025). *A report on a cocreation workshop with staff, volunteers, and community members in two Family Resources Centres in Community One*. A report prepared for the Health Service Executive, Ireland. Health Promotion Research Centre, University of Galway.

Harte, P., Keppler, T., Barry, M., Walsh, O., & Clarke, A. (2025). *A report on a cocreation workshop with staff of two Traveller organisations in Community One*. A report prepared for the Health Service Executive, Ireland. Health Promotion Research Centre, University of Galway.

Harte, P., Mulgrew, C., Barry, M., Walsh, O., & Clarke, A. (2025). *A report on the co-development of training to support the implementation of Act Belong Commit in community and voluntary organisations in Ireland*. A report prepared for the Health Service Executive, Ireland. Health Promotion Research Centre, University of Galway.

Patient Public Involvement:

The involvement of CPOs and potential end-users has been integral to the co-adaptation of ABC and the co-creation of culturally appropriate resources to support implementation. Through participating in the pilot, accompanying training workshops and giving their valuable feedback, staff of CPOs played a key role in the development and refinement of the mental health promotion courses, in particular Course 2.

Knowledge Translation:

Research findings to date have been shared via oral presentations and national and international conferences and be-spoke presentations and reports with key stakeholders from national bodies and both communities.