

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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Funded by: The Health Research Board-Applied Partnership Awards and the Health Service Executive, Ireland

Background: Mental wellbeing is an essential component of population health. Certain populations (or priority groups) experience poorer mental health, particularly those exposed to adversity. Community-based mental health promotion initiatives (CBMHPI) can empower community members, build social connectedness, reduce inequities and improve mental wellbeing, including for priority groups. In the Irish context, a policy-to-practice gap has been identified in the provision of CBMHPI for priority groups. Act Belong Commit (ABC) is an evidence-based CBMHPI developed in Australia and has been adapted and delivered in other countries, including among priority groups. This project aims to evaluate the implementation of ABC across two purposively selected community areas in Ireland, working in collaboration with the HSE and local community partners over a two year period, starting in December 2025.

Aim: To assess the feasibility and impact of the ABC community mental health promotion initiative on the mental health and wellbeing of priority groups in Irish community settings.

Objectives: To co-adapt the ABC initiative with priority groups; ascertain how the ABC initiative works in the Irish context through co-developing a programme theory; evaluate the implementation process; assess the impact of implementing ABC for participating priority groups and community organisations; inform the scaling-up of ABC nationally.

Methods: A community participatory research approach, employing 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 communities. Peer-researchers will be involved in data collection and analysis at baseline and six months follow-up, plus 12 months follow-up with community organisations, with evaluation measures aligned to the RE-AIM framework.

What the work is expected to establish: Through the involvement of priority groups in mental health promoting activities, it is anticipated that ABC will improve their mental

health literacy, beliefs and behaviour, mental wellbeing and social connectedness. ABC will also increase mental health promotion capacity in community organisations and address the identified gap in community provision for priority groups. The findings will inform scale-up nationally and strengthen the international evidence.