

## **LiLaC (Liverpool and Lancaster Universities Collaboration)**

LiLaC is the Liverpool and Lancaster Universities Collaboration for Public Health Research. It was established in 2011 building on more than a decade of collaboration between health researchers at two research intensive universities in the North West of England. We are a member of the NIHR School for Public Health Research and contribute to the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration for the North West Coast and the NIHR Research Design Service North West (RDS NW).

Our goal is to work with public, community, policy and professional partners to better understand 'what works' to improve health and wellbeing and reduce the health inequalities experienced by disadvantaged children and adults. Our research findings are influencing policies and other actions to reduce inequalities in health locally, nationally and globally. We are also involved in a range of activities aimed at building capacity for the conduct and uptake of research to inform policy and other action on the structural determinants of health inequalities.

### **Our Approach**

Firstly, the right of the public to be involved in research and decisions that affect their lives, is central. Extending our existing public involvement activities, we create opportunities for the public, including children, to work as partners with researchers and organisations to identify priorities, design and deliver research and co-produce evidence-based policies and other action. Research has shown that if organisations such as councils commit to promoting these rights, solutions are more appropriate, accessible and effective.

Secondly, LiLaC is uniquely multi-disciplinary, drawing members from across both universities, encompassing: clinical, social, spatial and environmental epidemiologists; economists in public health, health care, labour, education and finance; and experts in statistics, health informatics, computational science and implementation science. We also include geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, social psychologists, policy analysts, political scientists, linguists, lawyers, historians and planners and designers.

Thirdly, we have developed unique resources that provide an in-depth understanding of the changing conditions in places that influence health. These include a long-term programme of supporting and training residents in specific communities as partners in our research, digital online resources that enable members of the public to record their experiences and linked datasets that enable the health impact of social, environmental and economic initiatives to be evaluated.

Fourthly, our research has shown that addressing the complex problem of health inequalities, requires multiple perspectives. LiLaC brings together researchers who have developed ways of jointly applying their wide-ranging expertise, alongside the expertise of the public and professionals. We work with these diverse partners to identify practical solutions to challenging problems in order to improve the health of populations and reduce health inequalities.

## Information on the project and PhD

### *Title:*

Reducing health inequalities through embedding community participation and co-production in public health systems

### *Supervisory team:*

Professor Jennie Popay - LiLaC (Lancaster University)

Professor Leon Cruikshank - LiLaC (Lancaster University)

Dr Louise LaFortune - University of Cambridge

Dr Dalya Marks - LSHTM

Andy Knox - GP, Director of Population Health & Engagement  
Morecambe Bay integrated care partnership (ICP)

This project has links with Cumbria Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) and Lancaster CVS, both of which are undertaking work on action to reduce health inequalities.

Project code: LiLaC\_2\_Popay

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## **Project outline**

There is an urgent need to embed participation and promote real empowerment with communities as a central component of developing equitable public health systems. Research is rapidly accumulating on the benefits in terms of the acceptability and uptake of services and positive social and health impacts of community participation in decision making. There is a large body of research on specific co-production initiatives but relatively little on co-production at a systems level.

SPHR has undertaken innovative research on community-centred approaches to local action on health equity and pioneered using complex systems perspectives in evaluation. The proposed studentship would forge theoretical and empirical links across these areas, conducting in-depth qualitative research on co-production of action on health inequalities between the wider public health workforce and lay communities from a complex systems perspective.

This is one of two PhD studentships to provide the necessary lens on system relationships, one will be embedded within the Lancashire & South Cumbria ICS and the other in a 3rd sector organisation. As participant observers the students will conduct participative action research with a group of key stakeholders including professional staff and members of relevant communities of interest/place in each organisational context. The interactive PAR process would involve:

1. Developing a shared understanding of barriers and enablers to achieving inclusive community involvement in designing action to reduce health inequalities;
2. Using creative design approaches to develop 'interventions' to address some of the issues identified (e.g. service co-design; policy equity audit)
3. Implementing interventions and evaluating the process and impact
4. Reflecting on the learning and deciding on next steps

Data collection and analysis will involve observational notes, documentary analysis, transcripts of group discussion and mechanisms to monitor intervention impacts. The students would be based at Lancaster University and part of a diverse disciplinary group of public health researchers across LiLaC.