

Working with partners and maintaining Healthwatch independence

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About this guide

This guidance explains why working with partners is important while maintaining Healthwatch's independence.

Working with partners

Why work with other organisations on research projects?

Working with other organisations to undertake research projects and influence stakeholders can be very beneficial. We look at why you should work with partners, with examples of local Healthwatch work.

It can provide a different perspective on research topics, methods and influencing policies and practices.

[Healthwatch Derbyshire](#) undertook targeted engagement with children and young people. Within the planning stages for the engagement, they spoke to the Children's Sustainable Transformation Partnership Board, which runs, chooses and buys health services for children and young people in Derbyshire. From this, Healthwatch Derbyshire could identify their research areas.

Your partners can quality assure and test your work.

[Healthwatch Islington](#) carried out community research. Once they analysed their data, they produced a draft report shared across their partnership, adding further observations and agreed on conclusions.

By working in partnership you can help fill skills gaps.

[Healthwatch South Gloucestershire](#) and The Hive Avon partnered to deliver a project called Hivewatch, funded by South Gloucestershire's Learning Difficulties Partnership Board. Together, they trained five volunteers, all of whom had learning disabilities, to carry out visits to health and social care settings to recognise examples of good practice.

You can spread the cost of undertaking the research and/or increase reach.

[Healthwatch Bristol](#) worked in collaboration with Bristol Bangladeshi Women's Group, speaking to its service users to find out how they keep emotionally well. As the group is self-funded, it helped share the

cost of undertaking this project and reach out to women of Bangladeshi origin.

By working with partners, you can enhance your engagement by giving you access to people who are seldom heard.

[Healthwatch Southwark](#) partnered with the Southwark LGBT Network to learn about the LGBTQ+ community's healthcare experience and access.

You can work together to create achievable suggestions or recommendations.

Local Healthwatch working on [the Better Births project](#) developed a survey with input from the Maternity Voices Partnerships (MVPs) and the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Local Maternity System (BOB LMS). Some recommendations were made whereby the BOB LMS used the results to inform the format and content of the personalised care plan in the Sustainability and Transformation Partnership area.

Your partners can add additional weight to any suggestions or recommendations made.

[Healthwatch Bolton](#) worked in partnership with Bolton Public Health and Bolton University to collate research on COVID-19 communications. From this partnership, they made recommendations on how the local Council and Clinical Commissioning Group can tailor their public messages.

You can enhance your profile or reputation.

[All ten Healthwatch in Greater Manchester](#) worked in partnership and carried out engagement to gather patients' views of Cancer Services for the NHS Long Term Plan. The results were shared with Healthwatch England to produce a national evidence base and with the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership to create a regional plan for the next five years.

You can share skills.

[Healthwatch Bristol](#) researched The Natural Health Service, which had been created in partnership with Off The Record (OTR), a youth mental health charity. Healthwatch found that delivering this service in collaboration with existing organisations led to sharing expertise and gave access to specialist mental health workers.

You can identify broader information-sharing opportunities.

Forming partnerships can create long-term opportunities. In 2019/20, [Healthwatch Sefton](#) worked in partnership with both of Sefton's Clinical Commissioning Groups to ensure information was shared widely with network members, along with the opportunity to share the views of the community they represent.

Understand organisational objectives and pave the way for future collaborative opportunities.

Many local Healthwatch recognise that partnerships are crucial to their organisational objectives. The eight North East London Healthwatch and the East London Health and Care Partnership agreed to focus on three priorities in their [2019 Long Term Plan research project](#).

Maximising impact

Working in partnership is an excellent way to maximise impact, but it needs good planning. You'll need to think through several things. You can learn more about the critical things to consider when planning your research, including partnership working in our guidance – What does the research process look like from start to finish.

Involve partners at the beginning of your research planning

Each organisation's objectives and outcomes will be different. Have a frank conversation about both organisations' expectations and establish a clear joint vision. It is vital to reach an agreement at the very beginning about what can be done and achieved within the project's parameters.

Clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations

Ensure there are no misunderstandings about what each person will provide and receive when conducting the research. Clarify expectations and time scales of the project. This is a great time to discuss intellectual property rights which is about ownership of the data, authorship and research publication.

Be flexible

Try to stick to your aims and objectives but remember to be flexible – sometimes things may not go as planned, so be prepared to adapt.

Maintaining Healthwatch independence

When working with partners, it is important to maintain Healthwatch's independence. Ensure any conflicts of interest have been made transparent. Don't feel pressured to agree to changes that you don't feel comfortable with or that will compromise Healthwatch's integrity. Consider solutions to potential disagreements when you write your evidence up. It's best to have an agreed-upon process for disputes about findings and recommendations.

You can find more information in our guidance, [Helping you to create a robust conflict of interest policy](#) and [How to run a Healthwatch](#).

Write down all agreements, roles and responsibilities

This ensures everyone has a physical copy of what you've all decided. This can be an email. However, if it is contracted work, you may want to consider something more formal like a memorandum of understanding (MOU).

Agree to check-in points

This ensures communication throughout your research, so everyone can keep up to date with how your project is going. Maintaining regular contact with your partners is a great way to keep them involved and for potential problems to be identified at an earlier stage. Aside from regular check-ins, it's also a good idea to have project updates around research milestones, such as the planning stage, the analysis and findings, and the recommendations.

Intellectual property rights

Intellectual property (IP) is something you create using your mind – including an invention, an artistic work or a piece of writing. Copyrights, patents and trademarks are all forms of IP. For Healthwatch, IP can be the findings and outcomes of any research we carry out.

Why do we need to think about intellectual property rights?

Like other kinds of property, intellectual property can be owned and protected. Intellectual property rights guard the ownership and use of IP. For Healthwatch, considering intellectual property rights is usually only relevant when another organisation has commissioned the project, or you are working in partnership with one or more other organisations. In basic terms, IP rights define who owns the data generated through a project and who owns any final reports or other project outputs.

In this regard, you need to consider how the independence of Healthwatch is protected. The independence of purpose, voice and action sets local Healthwatch apart from the statutory organisations and bodies you work with, enabling you to effectively deliver our statutory duties as the consumer champion for health and social care by speaking up for everyone.

Independence does not mean avoiding partnership with others. Strong and trusted relationships are vital to having local insight and influence. In undertaking contracted work, there is a risk that commissioners might not understand your independence and statutory powers, so it is important to make these clear upfront to manage expectations.

What do we need to do and when?

The key to successfully managing intellectual property rights in Healthwatch research is to ensure the following points have been agreed upon at the project planning stage before any work begins:

Which organisations are commissioning and/or collaborating on the project?

These stakeholders need to agree to the plan for managing intellectual property related to the project.

How will you comply with data protection legislation?

Working in partnership with other organisations means you need to consider how you'll comply with data protection legislation.

Decide who will take on the roles of Data Controller or the Data Protection Officer.

Decide who will be responsible for data subject access requests and take action on any safeguarding issues.

For further guidance, see our guidance on [data processing and protection](#).

Assess your risks by undertaking [a data protection impact assessment](#) and how to mitigate them.

Update your [privacy notice](#) to explain who you'll be sharing data with and how.

Ensure that you have methods to share data securely with the other organisations in the project.

Ensure that people who take part in joint surveys, focus groups or interviews understand how you'll use the data by including brief information in [survey introductions](#) or [information sheets](#).

What will happen to the findings of the project?

Think about how the findings will be used and by whom. You'll need to decide who'll write and/or publish any reports or other outputs.

If the other partner is taking responsibility for publishing the results, check whether you can also use the data for other purposes.

How will each organisation be acknowledged in any project reports or other outputs?

Agree this at the outset.

What do you need to do to maintain Healthwatch's independence?

Work out an appropriate decision-making process between the partners to agree on the findings and recommendations. This needs to consider what you'll do if other partners disagree or want to suppress findings that they consider unhelpful.

You need to think about each of these points and, where relevant, agree during the planning stage and follow through the life of the project. Healthwatch should also consider the most effective way to manage this agreement formally. You can do this through a collaboration agreement, terms of reference or memorandum of understanding or these points could be agreed upon and recorded by email.

Further reading

[Working with partners to create a stronger voice for residents](#)– this guidance explains how Healthwatch Islington worked with local partners to tackle health inequalities.

[Helping you facilitate collaboration at place and system-level](#) – this comprehensive toolkit sets out everything you need to know about working with other Healthwatch across an ICS area.



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