What are our next steps for children and young people's mental health research?

Recommendations from delegates at the Big Emerging Minds Summit 2022

Emerging Minds

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Action for child mental health

The Big Emerging Minds Summit

Children & young people's mental health: From research to action

ABOUT EMERGING MINDS

The Emerging Minds Network was a research network running from 2018 – 2022 that aimed to reduce the prevalence of mental health problems experienced by children and young people. Funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), Emerging Minds was led by Professor Cathy Creswell at the University of Oxford.

In 2019, Emerging Minds and charity partners YoungMinds and the Centre for Mental Health worked with children, young people, family members, practitioners, and policy makers to identify four research challenges for the network to address in children and young people's mental health research.

Guided by these research challenges, Emerging Minds has launched grants programmes, cross-sector placements, the GROW Researcher Development Programme, and supported Special Interest Research Groups.

ABOUT THE SUMMIT

The community of people passionate about children and young people's mental health research grew to over 5000. To share the collective knowledge and research findings of the Emerging Minds Network, The Big Emerging Minds Summit was held on October 17 2022 at St Catherine's College, University of Oxford.

The one-day conference was attended by over 300 delegates, both virtually and in person, representing universities, charities, the NHS, research networks, schools, funding bodies, lived experience, and community interests.

Summit delegates came together to share ideas and learn from each other through two plenaries, 24 workshops, and 18 exhibitions.

As funding for the Emerging Minds Network came to an end in November 2022, a central aim of the Summit was to discuss the next steps for children and young people's mental health research.

During the day's closing plenary, delegates to the Summit were asked to write their reflections, hopes, and ideas for the next steps that should be taken in children and young people's mental health research on two "footprints".

The first footprint, "My Next Steps", was a space for personal thoughts and plans, which delegates were encouraged to take home.
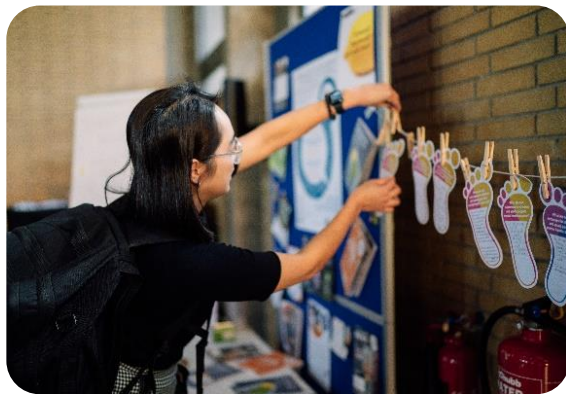
The second footprint, "Our Next Steps", was an opportunity for delegates to share their thoughts about priorities for the wider community of people in children and young people's mental health research.

In November 2022, Emerging Minds intern Rowan Streckfuss Davis reviewed the "Our Next Steps" responses and identified recurrent themes in delegate contributions. In this report, we detail these themes and provide some relevant summary recommendations for key stakeholders in children and young people's mental health research.

With Emerging Minds delegates representing a diverse range of researchers, young people, parents and carers, health and care professionals, funders and commissioners, and community members, Our Next Steps are a rich source of recommendations for mental health research priorities.

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PART I
Key messages

- **90 Next Steps were shared** by delegates on the day of the Summit. Delegates' backgrounds included academics, researchers, teachers, counsellors, social workers, pharmacists, psychologists, psychiatrists, parents, carers, artists, charity workers, high school and university students, and those working in community and voluntary organisations.

- Delegates overwhelmingly expressed that **the voices, opinions, and experiences of young people and their families** should be at the heart of all research and policy on children and young people's mental health.

- Delegate responses indicated a belief that for research in children and young people's mental health to be productive, it is **essential that researchers work in partnership** with policymakers (including politics, healthcare, and education), and that these **policymakers commit to research implementation**.

- Delegates emphasised that **treatment and support** for children and young people, including psychological, psychiatric, and social care, **should be holistic, adaptive, and responsive to individuals' needs**.

- Delegates who mentioned the **funding and commissioning of research** suggested that future priorities should include **accessible** outputs that are **co-produced with young people** and their families, **early career researchers, including from minoritised backgrounds**, and long-term **multidisciplinary research collaborations** and **networks**.

PART II

Implementation and engagement

A prominent thread among delegates was questions and suggestions on assuring the longevity of research findings in the mental health research landscape and their implementation in mental health practice. Two sub-themes were apparent in these responses. The first centred on **implementing and disseminating research**: ensuring that research findings are implemented into practice, shared outside of academia, taught to new practitioners, and incorporated into policy on a long-term basis. The second sub-theme was **engaging the public** in research implementation. Delegates expressed concern that key decision-makers like politicians and community leaders should be actively engaged with research outputs.

i. Implementing and disseminating research

Research findings need to be easily available to research participants and the wider public. Concrete plans for research implementation and action should be made at all levels of involvement with mental health care.

OUR DELEGATES SAID…

*"Turning **words and findings into action!!** Getting schools, CAMHS, government to implement important changes and reforms."*

*"How do we make **training** for new practitioners **responsive to the emerging evidence base** and research insights?"*

*"Action all the coproduction and lived experience insights from the project beyond the researcher driven action. This needs to be fed back to the funders – **let's not have the same conversations in 20 years!**"*

OUR DELEGATES SAID…

*"Press for decision-makers and commissioners to **listen to what young people are saying and what the research is uncovering** – then committing to lead change in practical, meaningful ways."*

*"Help us **amplify these messages to people in positions of power**: what changes are needed in schools, CAMHS & other organisations."*

ii. Engaging the public

Working to bring policy-makers and leaders, educators, clinicians and practitioners, and the wider community into the conversation means that diverse voices can be heard. Delegate responses included the education system and the government as key examples, as well as the local and national communities as sites for priority-setting.

OUR NEXT STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Researchers **could**

- Work closely with practitioners to implement research findings
- Ground new research projects within existing mental health systems
- Increase partnership work with schools and youth services
- Develop outputs for specific implementation in education and health

Funders & commissioners **could**

- Foster opportunities for interdisciplinary and collaborative research with direct avenues towards implementation
- Commission more groups and forums for public involvement in research and promote such opportunities to a broad population

Policymakers **could**

- Engage regularly with researchers and institutions to update practices and policies with new evidence

PART III

Co-production and amplifying lived experience

Including young people at every possible stage of research respects and values their lived experience. Delegates highlighted the importance of co-produced research and listening to young people's voices, calling for researchers, practitioners, and those with the capacity to impact change to listen and engage meaningfully with young people and their families.

Responses identified collaborative research methodologies such as co-production as key for relevant and effective mental health research. Delegates emphasised that research and mental health interventions should be designed and implemented together with the people they will affect, and that collaboration and co-production should be an ongoing, reflexive practice for researchers.

OUR DELEGATES SAID…

*"Embed **children and young people's voices** into mental health support from conception and throughout the implementation and evaluation processes to facilitate **transformative change that is not tokenistic.**"*

*"Engage with **charities and youth orgs**, especially small ones supporting under-represented groups to lend capacity to **peer research** and lobby for **systemic change** for children and young people's mental health."*

OUR NEXT STEPS FOR CO-PRODUCTION

Researchers **could**

- Work with institutions and youth-focused organisations to develop research methodologies that centre the lived experience of young people

Young people and families **could**

- Seek out co-production opportunities that are equitable and helpful, and encourage others to do so as well

Funders & commissioners **could**

- Prioritise funding and support specifically for co-produced research

PART IV
Diversity and accessibility

Issues of diversity and accessibility were significant themes in delegates' Next Steps. Among these issues, we identified two sub-themes: **modelling inclusive research and practice** and **making the effort to reach out.**

i. Modelling inclusive research and practice

Researchers and practitioners are responsible for ensuring their work accurately reflects the complexities of mental health experiences. Intersectionality, flexibility, and reflexivity are needed for research and practice to be meaningful.

OUR DELEGATES SAID…

*"Look beyond diagnosis and single causes – we need to take the risks of **messier data** to **address the realities of young people's lives.**"*

*"Aim to bring in **more flexibility in mental health treatments** for young people."*

*"Building an evidence base and **evidence-based practise that IS inclusive and meaningful** for ALL groups in society"*

*"Do not be afraid to research unconventional or heavy topics – push boundaries, **amplify the ignored or unheard voices.**"*

OUR DELEGATES SAID…

*"Prioritise reaching out to diverse groups/people with lived experience. **Push funders to require this** in their funding calls."*

*"**Acknowledging** social trauma in clinical settings. Scaling up **funding for early career researchers from racialised groups.**"*

*"Think about & disrupt typically centralised narratives. **Do the work to reach out** rather than assuming groups are 'hard to reach'."*

ii. Making the effort to reach out

Engaging marginalised and under-represented populations is essential for inclusive and relevant research and practice. Outputs such as research findings and clinical interventions need to be accessible, and researchers/ practitioners should consider creative solutions. Systemic improvements can be driven by funders and commissioners.

OUR NEXT STEPS FOR DIVERSITY & ACCESSIBILITY

Researchers **could**

- Allocate resources to recruiting participants from diverse range of backgrounds
- Confront and actively work to dismantle biases
- Share research outcomes freely, creatively, and promptly with participants and the wider community

Funders & commissioners **could**

- Call for further development of creative mental health interventions and "real-world" outputs
- Increase funding awards for early career researchers from racialised, working class, and gender- and neuro-diverse backgrounds

PART V

Maintaining the research community

Delegates expressed enthusiasm for keeping researchers connected and encouraging further collaborations across institutions and disciplines. Responses indicated a desire to maintain communication between researchers and participants involved in research, champion collaboration across disciplines, and continue creating accessible spaces for discussing mental health research and practice.

OUR DELEGATES SAID…

"Keep collaborating, building networks and working together! **Let's not lose momentum***."*

"Emerging Minds has role-modelled opportunities for bringing the system together more creatively. **How can this be sustained?***"*

*"**Keep providing these spaces** for such helpful conversations."*

OUR NEXT STEPS FOR MAINTAINING THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY:

Researchers **could**

- Stay engaged with research communities and networks through online and in-person spaces

Funders and commissioners **could**

- Support the continuation of long-term research networks

PART VI
Reforming the system

There was a strong response from delegates calling for our next steps to include system level change to mental health systems. Responses reflected views that established institutions, processes, and attitudes do not always support wellbeing, and can be actively harmful to children and young people's mental health. Delegates expressed that systemic reform is needed in politics, education, healthcare, and research to create sustainable and equitable outcomes.

OUR DELEGATES SAID…

"Don't be afraid to question whether ways of doing research are supporting us to listen and observe and learn from people with lived experience."

"Informing the vision of what mental health services need to look like – the current model is not sustainable."

OUR NEXT STEPS FOR CHANGING THE SYSTEM

Researchers **could**

- Engage and centre young people and families in research methodologies
- Produce research in response to community needs
- Disseminate research outputs creatively, targeting policy-responsive outlets

Clinicians and practitioners **could**

- Treat mental health holistically with consideration of intersecting issues and identities
- Adapt interventions to the individual, listening and responding to young people's feelings and opinions

Funders & commissioners: **could**

- Prioritise collaborative research into preventative measures, early intervention, and partnership work with youth-focused charities and organisations

PART VII

Further resources for mental health research

Emerging Minds Legacy Website

emergingminds.org.uk

Mental Health Research Incubator

mentalhealthresearch.org.uk

The Mental Elf

nationalelfservice.net/mental-health

Mental Health Research Matters

mentalhealthresearchmatters.org.uk

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