NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research

Growing primary care research delivery : the NIHR experience

27.11.25

Phil Evans
Academic GP and National Associate Director of Health and Care Research , NIHR RDN CC

&

Prof of Primary Care Research, University of Exeter

NIHR RDN Primary Care Research

- Why do primary care research ?
- The benefits of primary care research
- The English (NIHR) experience
- How we can grow primary care research ?
- Current challenges and opportunities

Changing research landscape

HOSPITAL *to* **HOME**	**ANALOGUE** *to* **DIGITAL** *and building the workforce of the future*	**SICKNESS** *to* **PREVENTION**

Fit for the future: 10 Year Health Plan for England

Driving growth, innovation and better health outcomes

Life Sciences Sector Plan

NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research

Why do research in primary care ?

Why is primary care research important ?

- Primary care is important and unique (Barbara Starfield, 2005)
- Primary care needs its own clinical research base (Furler et al, 2008)

Research is therefore needed to underpin all aspects of generalist primary care :

a. Early intervention and prevention
b. Common diseases and multimorbidity
c. Whole person care
d. Delivery of care e.g. continuity of care (Pereira Gray et al, 2018)
e. Interventional trials and new treatments

Further develop the knowledge base of our specialty and benefit our patients

Benefits of doing primary care research delivery ?

The current research evidence and our pandemic COVID-19 experience (e.g. PANORAMIC) indicate that doing research is :

- Good for **P**atients e.g. access to new treatments / better care
- Good for **P**ractitioners e.g. portfolio careers / recruitment/ retention
- Good for **P**ractices e.g. income stream / job satisfaction
- Good for **P**opulations e.g. accessing underserved populations

Research activity and outcomes in general practice

ARAPAHO study

- Relationship between research activity and general practice performance: cross sectional and longitudinal analyses | British Journal of General Practice (bjgp.org)
- Impact of research activity on performance of general practices: a qualitative study | BJGP Open

Jonker and Fisher, 2024

- Appraisal of National Institute for Health and Care Research activity in primary care in England: cross-sectional study | Family Practice | Oxford Academic (oup.com

Systematic review

- Boaz A *et al* 2024 If health organisations and staff engage in research, does healthcare improve? Strengthening the evidence base through systematic reviews | Health Research Policy and Systems | Full Text (biomedcentral.com).

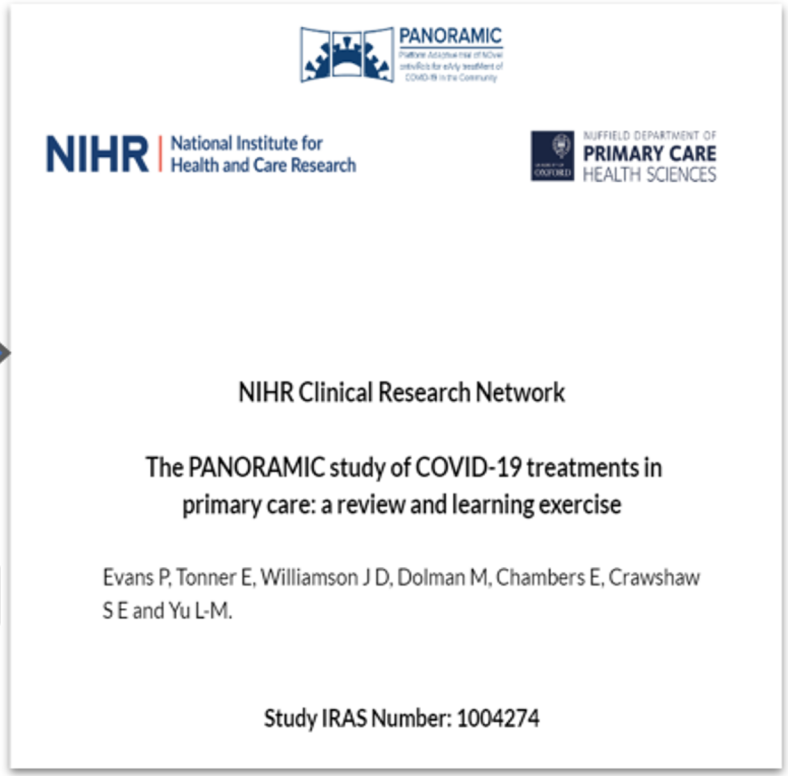
NIHR CRN PANORAMIC Learning document

Writing group :

Phil Evans (lead author)
Emma Tonner
James Williamson
Mark Dolman
Emma Chambers
Sarah Crawshaw
and
Ly-Mee Yu (study team)

Stakeholder engagement and feedback

In NIHR Open Research
https://openresearch.nihr.ac.uk/documents/4-46


PANORAMIC

NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research

NUFFIELD DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY CARE HEALTH SCIENCES

NIHR Clinical Research Network

The PANORAMIC study of COVID-19 treatments in primary care: a review and learning exercise

Evans P, Tonner E, Williamson J D, Dolman M, Chambers E, Crawshaw S E and Yu L-M.

Study IRAS Number: 1004274

Research for all in primary care?

Ability to use the results of research (universal)

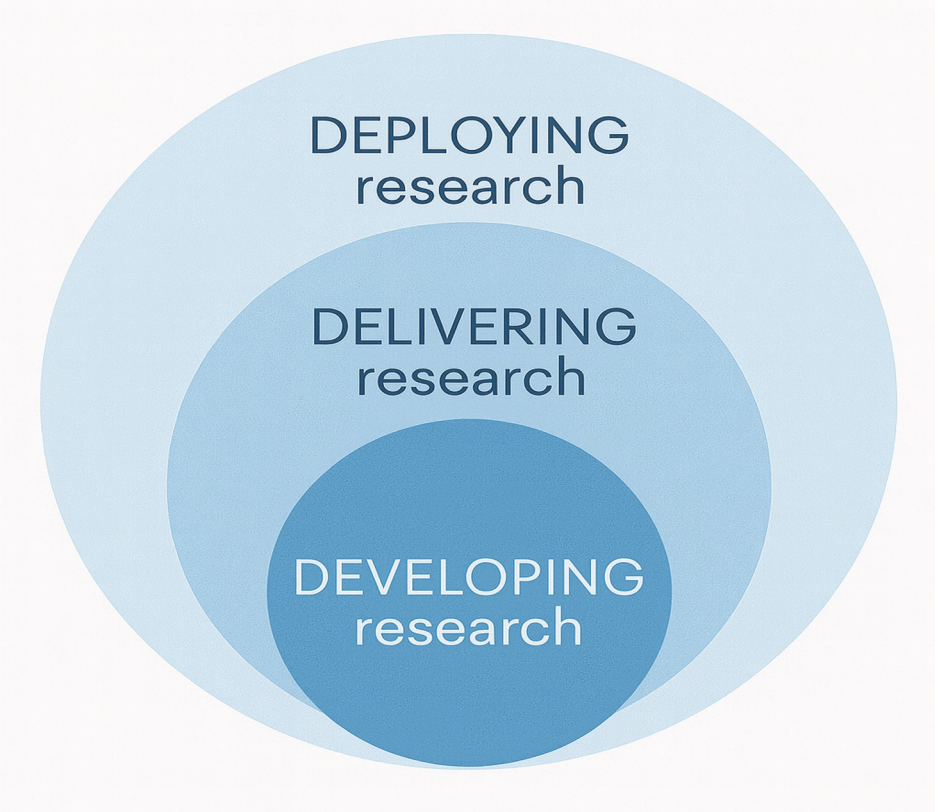
DEPLOYING research

Ability to facilitate research (majority)

DELIVERING research

Ability to do your own research (specialised)

DEVELOPING research



NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research

NIHR, the RDN and its offer to Primary Care



We fund or part-fund over 10,000 front-line research delivery staff throughout the NHS



We're funding more than 1,000 active health and social care research projects

NIHR funds, enables and delivers world-leading health and social care research



More than 2,000 researchers hold our career development awards



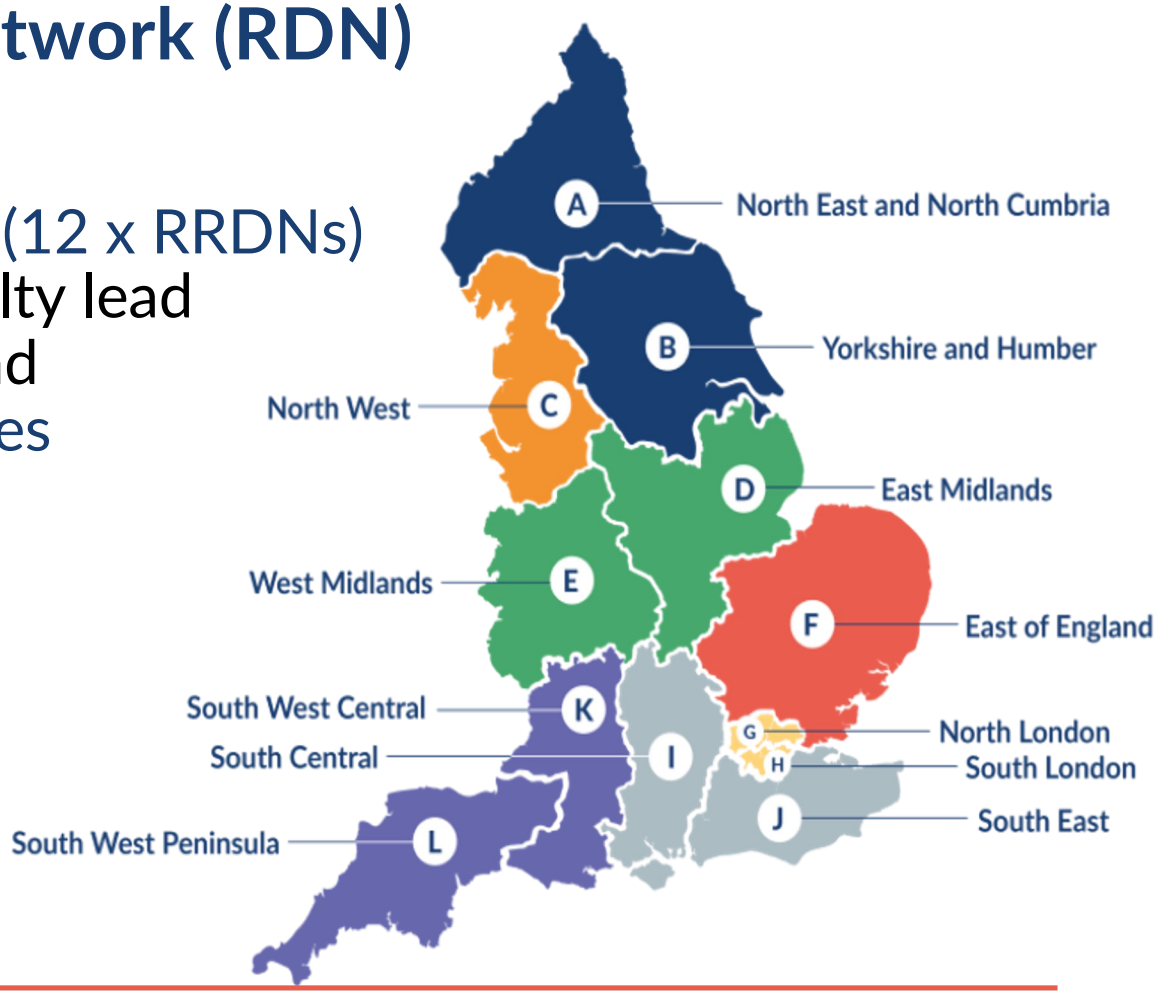
More than a million participants take part in research supported by the NIHR each year

The Research Delivery Network (RDN)

- National (RDN CC) & Local (12 x RRDNs)
  - General practice specialty lead
  - Primary care setting lead
- Local funding to GP practices
- Local Clinical leadership
- Agile teams

Support for the delivery of

NIHR PORTFOLIO studies



Deliver NIHR Research Delivery Network

- Mixed **portfolio of studies** within the NIHR
- All across **England and analogous research networks** in Devolved Administrations
- Practices are **incentivised and funding** is activity-based
- Participant Identification Centre (**PIC**) work …through to interventional trials
- Delivers **Non-Commercial and Commercial** Studies
- Regional and National **Specialty (GP) and Setting (Primary care)** leads
- Local **Agile Research Delivery Teams (ARDTs)** available to help recruitment and delivery of studies
- Potential significant **income stream** for practices - especially commercial income

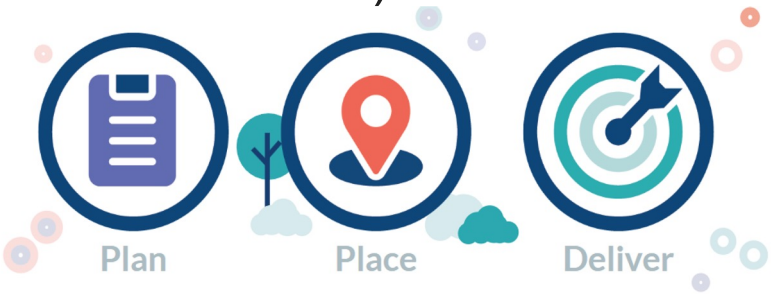
Deliver NIHR Research Delivery Network

Significant DSHC investment into primary care from NIHR in 2025/26

1. **21 NIHR Commercial Research Delivery Centres (CRDCs) involving primary care (one in NI)**
2. **14 NIHR Dedicated Primary Care Commercial Research Delivery Centres (PC CRDCs)**
3. **NIHR Infrastructure support - capital funding (pending announcement)**
4. **NIHR SPCR Commercial Clinical Fellows (x11)**
5. **Primary Care National Contract Value Review (PC NCVR) voluntary sign up - currently 573 practices**

Other continued RDN Services

- Key Account Management (Life Science Industries)
- Study Support Service
- Engagement and Inclusion
- Communications
- Data and Analytics
- Agile teams
- R and D support
- PRIDES (health informatics) support RDN PRIDES - Primary care digital landscape



NIHR Research Delivery Network

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Research Delivery Network (RDN) enables the health and care system to attract, optimise and deliver research across England.



Transforming lives through research

We operate as a single Network across England to support the delivery of clinical, public health and social care research in a wide range of health and care settings.
We are increasing capacity and capability of research by transforming our services.

Agile Research Delivery Team

Our Agile Research Delivery Team is a group of dedicated staff based in our Regional Research Delivery Networks (RRDNs) across England. They are skilled, multi-disciplinary staff who can work flexibly across a variety of different locations to support research delivery in health and social care.

Our regional teams can support studies at various stages as needed. Examples include:

- supporting the set-up of research
- helping with screening
- taking consent from participants
- recruitment to studies
- data management and follow-up

Research support for wider care settings

The ***research support for wider care settings*** **will continue to be delivered by the RRDN Agile workforce, funded, and/or subcontracted by the RRDN within other regional organisations until a wholescale alternative option is identified**. It is anticipated that this transition to other regional organisations is phased over the duration of the contract, as and when system partners are able to move into this space.

Through our **flexible and multi-disciplinary study support and Agile Research Delivery Team,** we can help you deliver research in a wide range of settings.
These include:

- GP surgeries
- hospices
- care homes
- sheltered accommodation
- schools
- community hubs
- places of worship
- prisons
- people's homes

NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research

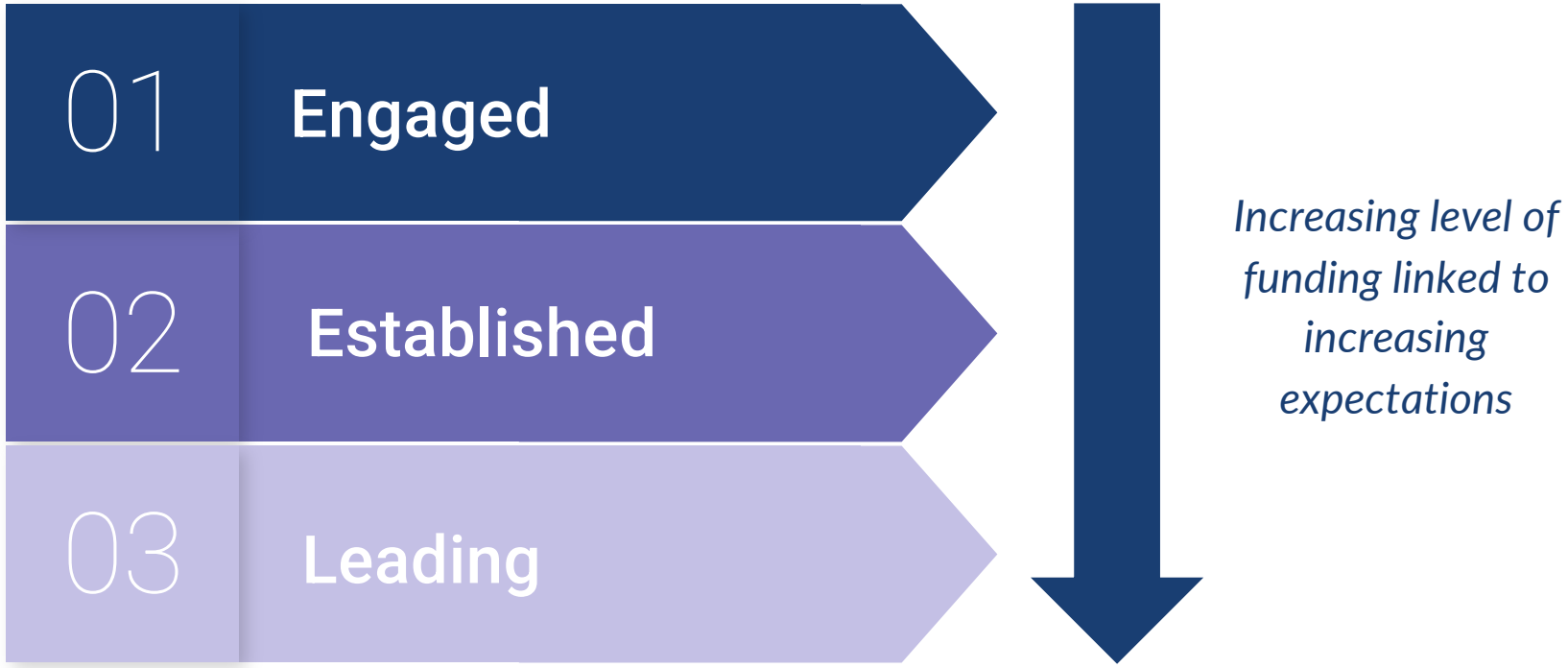
Funding - Strategic Investment & Wider Care Settings

Wider Care Settings Funding From April 2026

A **consistent, nationally agreed funding distribution model** that is adopted across England.

A key aim is to enable a more **transparent, fair, and predictable** system of funding that supports the NIHR's strategic ambitions and the needs of the whole health and care system, including underserved areas and settings.

The Wider Care Settings Funding Model



NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research

Current state of NIHR primary care research delivery

Deliver NIHR Research Delivery Network

A snapshot from 2024-25

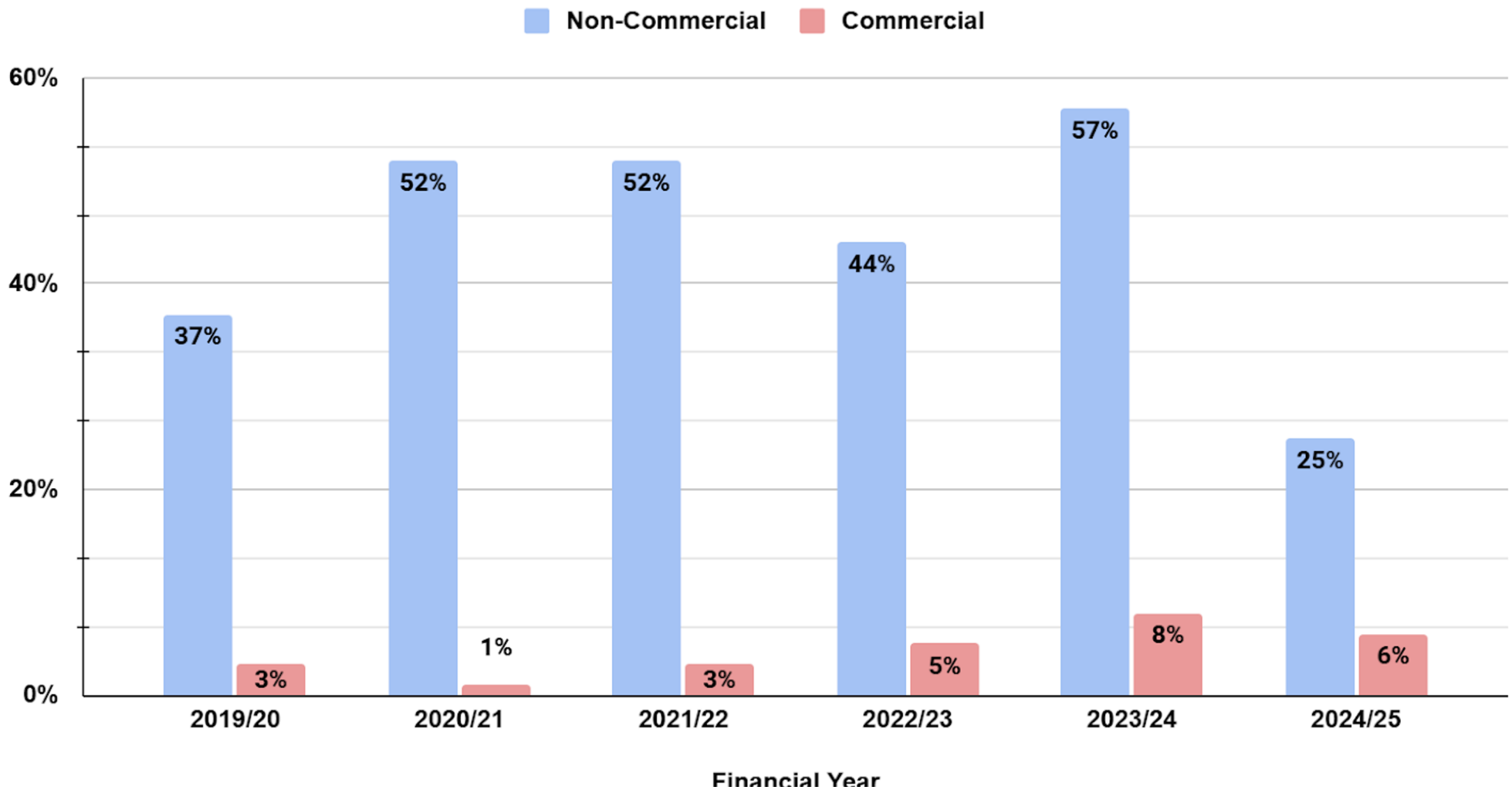
- **1,049,635 participants overall**
- **159,992** participants recruited through General Practice and Primary Care as a Managing Specialty
- **25%** of all **GP practices in England recruited** patients into CRN/ RDN **studies (not including PIC activity)**
- **1,626 practices** (as opposed to **223** NHS Trusts)

Commercial

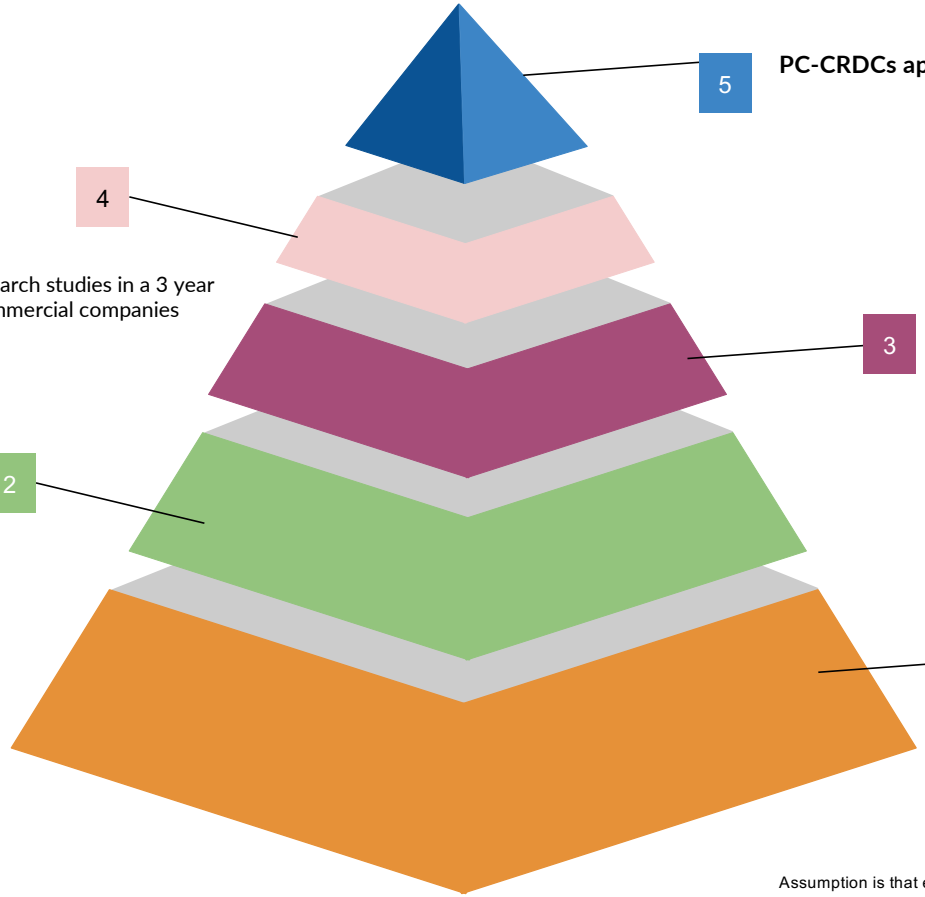
- **380** GP Practices recruited into industry studies
- **6%** of all practices (slightly lower that 2023/24FY)
- **42,140** industry recruits

NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research

Figure 5. Percentage of GP practices recruiting across England by FY



General Medical Practice Research Activity - Nov 2025 (2022-25)



5 **PC-CRDCs appointed in Nov 2025 (n=14)**

4 **PC-CRDC Eligible (Commercially Research Active) (n=24 Practices)**

More than 4 commercial research studies in a 3 year period, relationships with commercial companies

3 **Limited Commercial Research Active (n=746 Practices)**

Carrying out between 1 and 3 commercial research studies every 3 years, often observational rather than interventional but keen to do more

2 **Non-Research Active (n=1299 Practices)**

21% of General Practices have not been involved at research at all

1 **Non-Commercially Research Active Only (n=4930 Practices)**

Experience of non-commercial research but may be open to commercial research

Assumption is that each General Medical Practice is only in a single Tier
Data is 2022-25 Data Cut taken from ODP on 13/10/2025

NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research

Learnings

Learning

1. Recognise context e.g. clinical workload
2. Local leadership / mentorship is important
3. Must create “headspace” for research through infrastructure funding
4. Have a clear escalator of activity e.g. PIC -> Recruiting-> Commercial
5. Costings must be realistic
6. Agile team support is critical
7. Provide R and D support
8. Provide learning resources
9. Incentivise successful delivery

NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research

Thanks for listening and best wishes to Primary Care Research Northern Ireland

philip.evans@nihr.ac.uk

How to get into research delivery

- Talk to your academic department
- Consider higher degree course

- Sign up for PACT
- Do NIHR Good Clinical Practice (GCP) training
- Talk to your partners
- Sign your practice up for RCGP Research Ready
- Explore potential studies re.g. PIC or non-commercial
- Explore NIHR Learn and RCGP resources (RCGP Research Engagement Hub)
- Associate PI scheme
- Clinician Researcher Credentialing