



This factsheet sets out the key evidence gaps and ongoing research into the area. This is not a comprehensive view on all gaps and current research; rather it gives an indication of some of the key pieces of interest.

1. Evidence gaps

- **Causality remains a big gap in the evidence base.** A number of associations have been found, however the direction of the relationship is not clear. For example, we know that fruit and vegetable consumption is associated with higher levels of wellbeing in adults, however we do not know whether people who have high levels wellbeing eat more fruit and vegetables, or whether eating fruit and vegetables leads to higher levels of wellbeing. **Longitudinal data may shed light on causal direction**, however currently longitudinal datasets do not use consistent wellbeing and predictor measures at different time points.
- **When controlling for mental health status in analyses, few associations remain significant.** This is due to the strong inverse association between wellbeing and mental health. However, wellbeing and mental health are not simply the inverse of each other.
- **To date, there have been limited sub group analyses**, for example those with particularly high levels of wellbeing, particularly low levels of wellbeing, or where relationships are unexpected, for example people with low levels of wellbeing but good health or high levels of wellbeing but poor health.
- **There are also insufficient studies to allow for meta-analyses for many aspects of wellbeing.** Meta-analyses draw together results from multiple different studies on a related topic, which increase the power of the analysis.
- **There is limited data on what works to increase levels of wellbeing.** Whilst there is some evidence on what works, there is a need for more robust evaluations of specific interventions. There is also a need for more interventions in some areas. For example, we know that the environment in which people live is a key factor for their wellbeing, however we do not know what the most effective interventions for increasing opportunities to contact with nature are, or what the mental health impact of the built environment is.

2. Current/ongoing research

- **What Works Centre on Wellbeing (Cabinet Office and other government departments):** the Centre would support and act as a central repository for wellbeing research in addition to exploring and drawing together evidence on 'what works', i.e., interventions that can make

lasting improvements to the wellbeing of different groups and communities. The Centre has not yet been confirmed.

- **Claire Howarth (University of Warwick/Kings College London):** research is focusing on the impact of genetics on psychological wellbeing and the links between wellbeing, cognitive, behavioural and health outcomes using twin studies. This work includes a teenage wellbeing intervention study where teenagers complete a range of wellbeing tasks (e.g., an act of kindness, writing a gratitude letter) and individual differences are explored. Future work includes using Twitter to code tweets as positive and negative and linking them to participants' TEDS (Twins Early Development Study) data.
- **Longitudinal surveys:** for example, Millennium Cohort /Study, Understanding Society and Understanding Society all collect data on wellbeing, along with wider determinants of wellbeing (e.g., health behaviours, social relationships, employment, and neighbourhood). Longitudinal data may help us understand the causal direction of some relationships.
- **Lifelong Health and Wellbeing**
(<http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Ourresearch/ResearchInitiatives/LLHW/index.htm>): the project spans 2011-2015 and is led by the Medical Research Council on behalf of other research councils including the ESRC. The programme aims to target factors throughout life that may be major determinants of health and wellbeing in older age. It also aims to identify and develop effective interventions that lead to improved health and quality of life in later life.
- **Subjective wellbeing in Wales (National Centre for Social Research (NatCen)):** NatCen have been commissioned to analyse subjective wellbeing data from the National Survey for Wales.

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