NIHR | School for Social Care Research

ESSENCE- 2 (Economics of Social care compendium) continuation study

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Resources in social care are always scarce relative to need and want, and these constraints have intensified due to reductions in local authority funding. Consequently, tough decisions must often be made regarding the allocation of available resources.

The ESSENCE project compiled economic evidence on adult (and some child) social care services and provided access to decision-makers, managers, practitioners, carers and users of services to aid in their decision-making processes.

Extensive data searches were conducted across various databases. The ESSENCE Toolkit encompassed a comprehensive array of relevant research and presented it through individual case summaries (29 in total) and a searchable database of evidence (over 1300 sources).

All resources were developed and made publicly accessible on the project website (www.essenceproject.uk).

KEY MESSAGES FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE PRACTICE

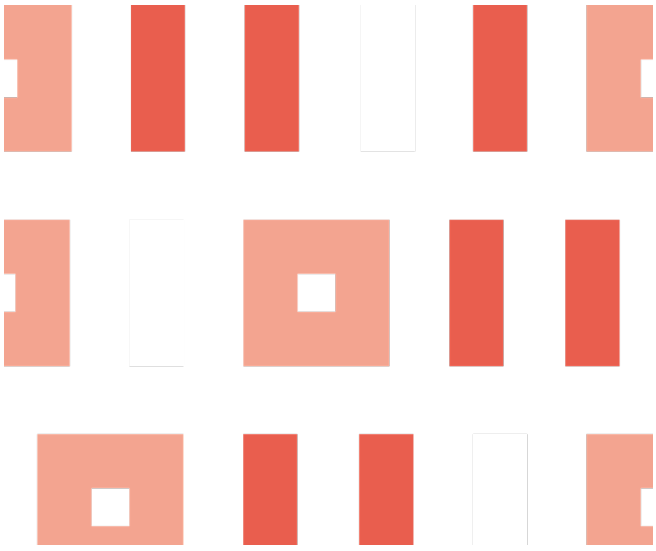
The ESSENCE Toolkit provides economic evidence in an easy-to-understand format to help decision-makers facing perennially difficult choices about how to allocate the limited resources at their disposal. It includes a collection of economic evidence, accessible through a searchable database, which covers what is currently available and what is coming soon. The database can be filtered to find evidence by intervention type, individuals supported by the intervention, evaluation method, source, and publication details.

Additionally, the ESSENCE Toolkit offers case summaries, each summarising the key information about the intervention, including its context, effectiveness, and cost-effectiveness. These summaries are designed to be easy to read and provide a quick overview of the evidence. Although economic evidence relevant to social care in England has been accumulating, there is still nowhere near enough such evidence available to inform decision making, whether at national or local level, or by commissioners or providers.

This shortage of evidence applies to adult

social care interventions – which we focused on in the first ESSENCE phase (up to 2019) – and to children's social care – which we started to look at in ESSENCE-2. Even when evidence exists, it is not always strong. For example, areas where robust economic evidence on interventions appears to be lacking include: advocacy, direct payment, drug and alcohol services, home care, meals services, safeguarding, social care support for disabled people and social work practice.

The ESSENCE Toolkit could help research funders identify gaps in evidence, which could guide future research in adult social care in England.



FINDINGS

The study looked at many different types of social care interventions.

We used a picture guide from the National Audit Office to help sort these interventions into groups for adult social care. Overall, we looked at 33 different interventions where there was economic evidence, including some that interface with other sectors, such as health, welfare, housing and leisure.

The case summaries cover the following interventions / areas:

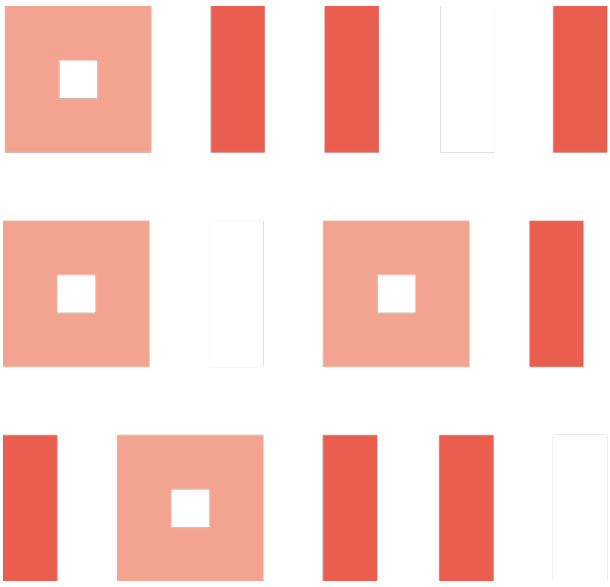
- A coping programme for family carers of people with dementia: economic evidence (updated)
- Advance care planning: economic evidence (updated)
- Advocacy for parents with learning disabilities. A small-scale social care intervention: economic evidence
- Annual health checks for older people with learning disabilities (new)
- British Red Cross ('Support at Home' hospital discharge scheme), a small-scale social care intervention: economic evidence
- Cognitive stimulation therapy: economic evidence (updated)
- Employment support for autistic adults: economic evidence
- Hearing dogs for people with severe and profound hearing loss: economic evidence (new)
- Help-at-home: economic evidence
- Home adaptations for older people (new)
- Home care reablement for older people: economic evidence
- Hospital discharge and intermediate care services for people who are homeless: economic evidence (new)
- Integrated housing with care and support for older people: economic evidence
- Interventions beyond medicine for dementia: economic evidence

- Peer-led self-management for people with severe mental health issues. A small-scale social care intervention: economic evidence
- Person-centred support for people living with dementia in care homes: economic evidence
- Providing debt advice: economic evidence
- Short breaks for adults with learning disabilities and behaviour that challenges: economic evidence
- Signposting and navigation services for older people: economic evidence
- Social prescribing (new)
- Specialist nursing support (Admiral Nursing) for unpaid carers of people with dementia: economic evidence (new)
- Support for unpaid carers: economic evidence
- Telecare for older people
- Transition into and from hospital for people with social care needs: economic evidence
- Vision rehabilitation services: Economic evidence (new)
- Strengthening adult safeguarding responses to self-neglect: economic evidence (in preparation)

We also produced a map of social care interventions for children where there was economic evidence; this map was based on Foundations, the national What Works Centre for Children & Families; https://foundations.org.uk/.

We gathered economic evidence from various databases with the help of our experts. Then, we summarised our findings in different ways to make them easy to understand.

We created individual summaries for some interventions. Each summary was short and simple, starting with the background of the intervention and explaining how it works. We also described how effective and cost-effective the intervention is, and what people think about it. Plus, we provided links to more information and contact details for experts on each intervention. Currently, we have 26 case summaries covering 21 adult care services. Case summaries for children have not been generated yet, but relevant evidence has been added to the database.



We also made a searchable database of evidence. This lets people look up information about completed studies and ongoing projects. They can search by keyword or filter the information to compare different studies. Right now, the database has 1300+ entries covering a wide range of projects and publications.

We included a glossary to explain key terms used in the summaries and in

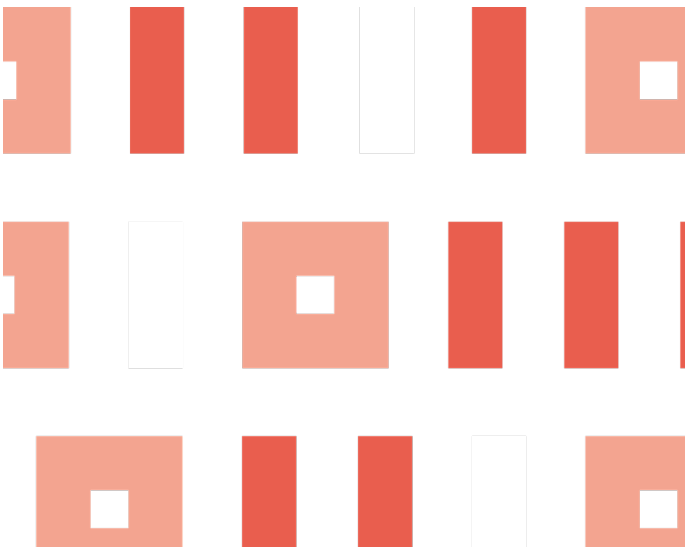
economic evaluations, both to help readers understand the concepts and to engage better with the implications of the evidence. We also provided resources and training materials on our website for people interested in learning more about economic evaluation in social care.

All of our resources are available on the project website for everyone to access. Building in part on the ESSENCE project, we established the Social Care Economics NEtwork (SCENE) in 2023 to bring together economists and others working on or interested in economic topics in social care.

Currently, the network has 60 members spread across the UK, primarily based in universities, the Local Government Association, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and the Department of Health and Social Care.

The objectives are to encourage mutual learning and the development of methods, disseminate information to support pathways to impact, and support capacity-building (both in conducting social care economics studies and in using the evidence that they generate).

Project website



Research Team

Martin Knapp
Michela Tinelli
Annette Bauer
Helen Weatherly
Ben Schlaepfer

Contact

Martin Knapp

London School of Economics and Political Science
Care Policy and Evaluation Centre
Houghton Street
London
WC2A 2AE

Email
m.knapp@lse.ac.uk

PARTNERS

University of York

NIHR | School for Social Care Research

The NIHR School for Social Care Research (SSCR) is a research and capacity-building partnership between leading centres for social care research across England.

To find out more visit:

sscr.nihr.ac.uk