

# Shifting the Power in Research

Insights from our partnership with Wellcome Trust

Impact  
on Urban  
Health



## Research and Development transitioning to Innovation

Our partnership with Wellcome started back in 2020 just when the R&D team was starting out.

### **Our mission**

Our mission then was the same as it is now: to reduced health inequalities in urban areas

### **2020 – 2023 strategic objective**

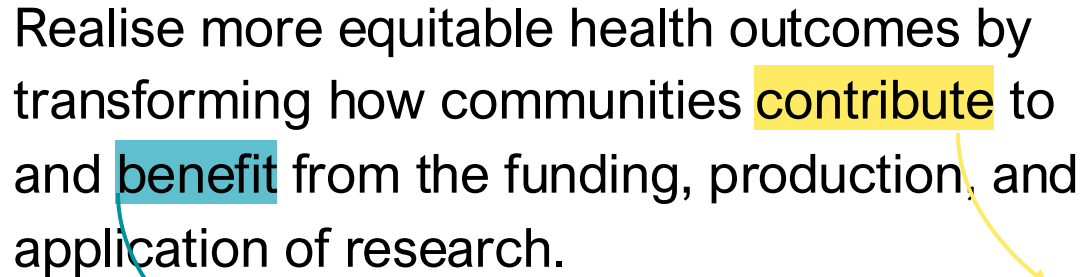
Realise more equitable health outcomes by transforming how communities contribute to and benefit from the funding, production, and application of research

### **2024-2025 Strategic Objectives**

How do we become a better funder and partner

What is the future of urban health?

Realise more equitable health outcomes by transforming how communities **contribute** to and **benefit** from the funding, production, and application of research.



The diagram features a central text block with two highlighted words: 'contribute' in a yellow box and 'benefit' in a blue box. A blue curved arrow originates from the 'benefit' box and points down to the left, leading to a text block. A yellow curved arrow originates from the 'contribute' box and points down to the right, leading to another text block.

New knowledge and innovation should build from the knowledge and experiences of communities facing health inequities and should improve their health and wellbeing now and into the future.

How research is funded, designed, and conducted is inequitable and often doesn't build on the skills, expertise, and assets that already exist in communities.

## Equitable funding

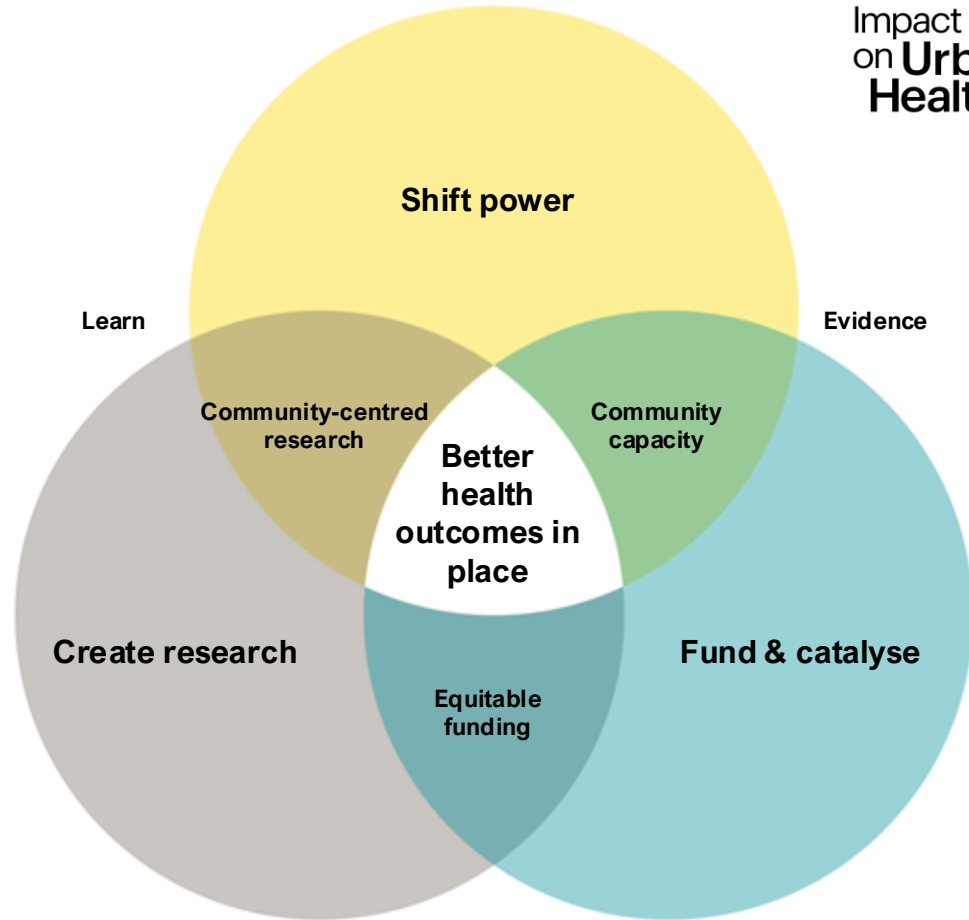
Develop equitable funding models that address power imbalances

## Community capacity

Resource and support communities to build and sustain capacity to access power through funding and research models

## Community-centred research

Create models and pathways for research that centres and is driven by communities disadvantaged by health inequities





# The investments

2020 - 2024

Impact  
on Urban  
Health





# The Giving Lab

Participatory grant making

Impact  
on Urban  
Health





Building a community-led fund that gives local people decision-making power and money to spend on their own ideas.

## **Purpose from the people**

Participants define the purpose of TGL, owning its decisions and locating its benefit within their community.

## **Challenging established systems**

TGL understands that it's not just what gets funded, but the traditional processes themselves that do not work as they should to support the long-term prosperity of communities.

## **'At every step there is a handing over of power'**

Leading with values, TGL is creating a culture of continuous growth where people make their own choices, build their own skills, and claim their own power – then pass it on. Training people means the legacy of TGL lives beyond discreet projects.

## **Increased funding transparency**

Through TGL, people get involved in addressing the complexity of issues firsthand and realise that while many big problems can't be solved overnight, making tangible change is within reach.

## **Constant learning**

TGL is a live experiment that continually generates new insights and ideas. Learning activities have evolved to be agile, with quick turnaround cycles to rapidly share learnings across participants so everyone can keep building on them. TGL is a learning, growth, and development opportunity for every member who joins.



## The Giving Lab – bright ideas

### Participatory grantmaking in practice

Participatory grantmaking is widely talked about, but TGL demonstrates what it can look like in practice. Local community members can choose to participate in a lab focused on issues related to housing, work, or money. They can start an *idea team* to develop a proposal, budget and project plan that improves their local area. They can join as *community learners* to capture learnings, measure impact, and share stories of funded projects. Or, they can work across TGL providing *outreach and engagement* to bring new members in, or *facilitation* support for those in the labs.

### Agile, community-responsive learning

In contrast to conventional process evaluation, TGL's learning model is more continuous, adaptive, agile, and embedded. The skills and capabilities of community members are recognised and valued for what they already are, and learning is seen as an opportunity to expand and nurture this from that starting point. This enables TGL to define and respond to learning goals as they emerge; if members have particular learning interests to help them improve how TGL works, learning activities can be tailored to support that.

### Real life impacts

TGL is focused on creating positive impact within its communities. Some of these impacts are realised directly through initiatives that are proposed and funded through TGL's model. Other impacts are realised more indirectly, but are no less significant. For example, many TGL members have built skills and confidence in their existing abilities through training and experience in TGL, and have benefited from mentorship opportunities within the model. This has helped certain individuals to land jobs they may not have applied for or won had they not had the experience of participating in TGL.

# Centric community research

Investing in a community research start-up

Impact  
on **Urban**  
**Health**





Mobilising and growing community expertise in peer-to-peer research to create a base for social change grounded in the the nuance of shared experience



**Shifting the Power in Research provided early-stage ‘seed’ funding to support Centric to start up. Since then, Centric has been transforming how community insights drive creation of health research and interventions by launching initiatives with funders, healthcare providers, local authorities, and research institutions.**

### Expanding community capacity

Centric provides training, mentorship, and incubation for community members to add skills to their existing strengths as they develop their own practice of community research. This flips traditional structures that treat research skills as immutable and access to communities as something which can be obtained as needed. Instead, Centric finds people who are already part of the social and cultural fabric of their communities, and gives them the tools they need to conduct research and build their own practices.

### Communities telling their own stories

Centric's approach supports communities to own their own stories based on their own experiences. This secures the validity of the research – it's been analysed and explained by those who can be trusted by communities to understand context and experience.

### Truly working in partnership

Centric got together with Impact on Urban Health for a series of sessions on Race and Reflectivity. These sessions helped to orient future collaborations toward a relational, interaction- and dialogue-driven way of working, positioning Centric and Impact on Urban Health as real partners.

## Centric – bright ideas

### Community research as its own complete approach

Centric is developing community research as its own approach – not a practice to add on to research, but a way of conducting research in and of itself. Centric's research is led by and involves communities at every stage of research, sharing back knowledge continuously across design, data collection, analysis, evaluation, reflection and implementation. Community researchers' nuanced understanding allows them to analyse and interpret data they collect to insights that are both relevant to and recognised by the communities they come from. Having research in communities led by communities ensures data sovereignty.

### Collaborative community research literature reviews

Literature reviews are a core part of Centric's community research practice, helping to establish the 'theoretical nuance' for its primary qualitative research conducted in communities. Community researchers use lit reviews to highlight relevant frameworks that can help to interpret and articulate the wider resonance of community insights from nuanced insider perspectives. Literature reviews also provide a basis for action within formal systems that tend to rely on knowledge production artefacts to support decision making.

### Incubating new ideas in the community research network

Centric is a network, and it supports its members in their own entrepreneurial pursuits. A number of community researchers in this network have built on their work with Centric to propose and launch their own specialised initiatives related to community research. For example, [Cenethics](#) is specialising in supporting youth-led research and [Cen Giving](#) is supporting community projects in Ghana and Nigeria. Centric mentors, supports, and collaborates with these 'spin-outs' however it can, building its capabilities and capacity as individual members build their own.





### History & methods of community research: a literature review

Centric's foundational literature review builds the theoretical foundation for the practice of community research. In addition to solidifying the precedent for community research from an academic perspective, the publication serves as a primer for those who are unfamiliar with community research, what it is and isn't, what it's for, and what it looks like in practice. The report also maps existing community research models and programmes and also reframes the concept of 'research ethics' and what this means for the practice of community research.

This publication includes a foreword by Gabrielle Allen at Impact on Urban Health.

# Health and Social Equities Collective

Dismantling structures

Impact  
on Urban  
Health





HSE Collective

Impact  
on **Urban**  
**Health**

**Working across academia, health and social care, and community organisations to build a more inclusive knowledge base and use this learning to dismantle the structures underlying health inequities.**



**Shifting the Power in Research, along with Wellcome and Nuffield Foundation, provided early-stage funding to help the Collective expand its membership and co-create its ways of working. This is helping the Collective do essential background work to prepare for larger grants providing longer-term funding.**

## HSEC – bright ideas

### **Operationalising equity in working practices**

Wherever possible, the Collective seeks to operationalise its 40+ members' consensus on how equity should be accounted for in its working practices. One approach they are trying is collective grant-writing days, where key sections of grant proposals for longer-term, sustained funding will be opened up for broad-based collaboration.

### **Collectively identifying priorities**

Funding from Shifting the Power in Research has helped members to make space to share learning and co-create the Collective, defining what it could be and how it could look. This work has been based on a shared desire to proactively identify what can be done differently in order to make change. Areas of priority identified so far have included barriers in education pathways, inverting power structures, and forging stronger links between policy and community.

### **A responsive, dialogical relationship between grantee and funder**

The Collective has worked closely with the Shifting the Power in Research partnership to find ways to enable the Collective's work. This has included figuring out a way to specify milestones that are not tied to pre-defined deliverables, but are instead specified in relation to more emergent outcomes around process, learnings, and relationships, as these are more significant markers in the Collective's journey.

# Clearview Research

Rethinking decision-making in research

Impact  
on **Urban**  
**Health**





[ClearView Research](#) are a research consultancy specialising in working with groups who are typically underrepresented in research.

Shifting the Power in Research commissioned ClearView to identify existing models for community advisory and governance. ClearView's work led them to an exploration of options for how funders might redefine their power.

**Redefining power in funder–  
community partnerships**

When working with communities in partnership, funders often want the communities to have power – but this reveals an assumption that these communities don't already have their own power.

**Different partners, different  
roles**

As partners, funders don't just provide money – they also provide an influencing function, helping to bring about change in the wider landscape. They can provide more than just funding to their community partners. Building skills, such as in advocacy, can help recognise the resources and expertise communities already have.

**From benevolence to self-  
sufficiency**

Funders need to reflect on their claim to excess power. Funders direct their attention toward addressing inequalities. This work justifies their continued existence, but funders could instead judge how well they are doing based on how close they are to being unnecessary. Power is defined as the agency and ability to influence, and self-sufficiency of communities should be the mark of this.



**Shifting the Power Fund**  
For launch 2025

The culmination of insights from this work and other investments made through this partnership.

IOUH and Wellcome have established a devolved. This fund will be entirely community-led with the an advisory board making funding decisions. The fund will support projects identified by local community researchers to address health inequity.

It builds on the intention of the IOUH x Wellcome partnership and will continue explore how community-centred research and funding models can help address health inequities in South London and beyond and, as a result, make research more accessible to communities in our place.

# Rooted By Design

Community knowledge ecosystems

Impact  
on Urban  
Health





[Rooted by Design](#) are social designers who centre the experiences, needs and futures of UK Black communities in their work to reimagine Black futures.

Shifting the Power in Research has funded this project to imagine how the design of governance can be decolonised in future.

### **Creating the future**

Whereas the ‘Rethinking power’ project looked at solutions which already exist, ‘Exploring community research eco-systems’ highlights opportunities for the partnership to invest in local knowledge systems and ways of leading going forward.

---

### **Research already happens in communities**

Existing community assets must be acknowledged. Knowledge is already being created within communities, but not in ways that funders necessarily expect. There is a need to respect and amplify spaces where this knowledge creation is already happening.

A man in an orange shirt and dark shorts is pushing a wooden pallet loaded with black plastic bags on a city street. In the foreground, several Lime bicycles are parked along the curb. The background features a building with a large window and a wall covered in colorful graffiti.

# Thank you

[gabrielle.allen@urbanhealth.org.uk](mailto:gabrielle.allen@urbanhealth.org.uk)

Impact  
on **Urban**  
**Health**