

Research Briefing January 2026

News and Events

- This year, the [NIHR celebrates 20 years](#) of supporting health and care research across the UK. Over 2 decades, it has helped turn research into better care, new treatments and real change for patients and the public. The anniversary year will celebrate that impact and the people behind it. A programme of activity will run throughout the year, including [new prizes for rising research leaders](#) and research delivery leaders. Applications for the prizes are now open, closing on Wednesday 18 March, with winners receiving a £10,000 professional development prize. Find out more [here](#).
- **Shaping the Future of Health and Care Applied Research**, Tuesday 23 June 2026, 10:00 - 15:00, In-person event (The Maltings, Ely, CB7 4BB) Free event. Join the Applied Research Collaboration EoE when they launch the [next iteration of ARC East of England](#) and explore how we can shape the future of health and care research together. [This event](#) is open to anyone with an interest in [ARC East of England research](#) and a desire to collaborate, learn, and contribute to improving health and care through applied research. You can register [here](#).

New Funding and Training opportunities

- [£55m to fund mental health research in under-served areas](#) The NIHR is investing almost £55 million in 5 additional [Mental Health Research Groups \(MHRGs\)](#). This brings the NIHR's ambitious mental health research pipeline closer to full capacity. The expansion will boost mental health research in areas of England that have a high burden of mental ill-health and limited ability to carry out research to tackle it

New Research

- [Rapid test enters trial to diagnose winter respiratory infections](#) -New trial investigating whether a 60-second test could cut the time to diagnose winter respiratory viral infections. If proven to be accurate, the point-of-care test could provide the NHS with a highly scalable, low-cost diagnostic tool. This could help clinicians make faster decisions and improve patient care during future winter periods, when hospitals face intense pressure from respiratory infections.
- [A new NIHR-funded study aims to prevent thousands of people at risk of liver disease from needing hospital care](#). The newly-launched study, the DIAGNOSIS of liver disease in primary care (DIALS) trial, has been awarded £3.4million by the NIHR. It is the largest liver study in the history of the NHS. It will see around 42,000 people across the UK being screened, via their GPs, for early signs of liver disease.

Research Findings

- [Menopause linked to loss of grey matter in the brain, poorer mental health and sleep disturbance](#) according to a study, published in [Psychological Medicine](#), which found that hormone replacement therapy (HRT) does not appear to mitigate these effects, though it can slow the decline in reaction times.
- [Community screening study could prevent emergency diagnoses in children with type 1 diabetes](#) - The ELSA (Early Surveillance for Autoimmune diabetes) study Launched in 2022 tests blood samples from children aged 3-13 for autoantibodies, which are markers of type 1 diabetes that can appear years before symptoms develop. Over 17,000 children have already been screened as part of the study, led by the University of Birmingham and funded by Diabetes UK and Breakthrough T1D. The results from the first phase have been published in [The Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology](#)
- [Slimming injections linked to faster weight regain than traditional dieting](#) according to a study which has found that people who come off weight-loss injections such as semaglutide (Wegovy) and tirzepatide (Mounjaro) can regain the weight they've lost 4 times faster than those who use traditional dieting and exercising. The Oxford-led research, published in the [British Medical Journal](#), examined 37 studies, with over 9,000 participants, who stopped taking weight management medicines after being on them for an average of 39 weeks of treatment. Participants were followed for an average of 32 weeks after stopping.

- [Targeting the immune system could prevent future heart attacks](#) according to Cambridge researchers. Results of this research published in [Nature Medicine](#) indicate that low-dose treatment with aldesleukin could prevent repeat heart attacks by reducing inflammation. The results arose from two related clinical trials known as IVORY and IVORY-FINALE, largely funded by the Medical Research Council.
- [Experts say, lack of support for people on weight loss drugs leaves them vulnerable to nutritional deficiencies](#) - research published in [Obesity Reviews](#), , found a lack of robust evidence surrounding nutritional advice and support and the impact this has on factors such as calorie intake, body composition, protein adequacy, and patient experiences.
- [‘Revoice’ device gives stroke patients their voice back](#)- Researchers have developed a wearable, comfortable and washable device called Revoice that could help people regain the ability to communicate naturally and fluently following a stroke, without the need for invasive brain implants. Paper published in [Nature Communications](#).
- [Autistic adults have an increased risk of suicidal behaviours, irrespective of trauma](#)- Autistic people are more likely to report suicide-related behaviours and psychological distress irrespective of previous traumatic experiences, according to new research from the University of Cambridge. Given that autistic people are recognised as a priority group for suicide prevention in the UK, these findings have important implications for national suicide prevention strategies. The results are published today in the journal [Autism Research](#).
- [A potential breakthrough for treatment-resistant depression](#)- Almost 30% of adults treated for depression do not respond to their first 2 treatments. They are diagnosed with treatment-resistant depression (TRD) associated with poor quality of life and linked to many symptoms. The PAX-D study assessed the use of pramipexole as a treatment for TRD. Pramipexole is a drug currently used to treat symptoms of Parkinson's Disease. Findings showed pramipexole significantly improved symptoms after just 12 weeks. Additionally, a lot of participants were no longer considered to have depression following treatment.
- [Anti-oestrogen treatment offers added benefits for breast cancer](#) - A low dose of megestrol acetate (a synthetic version of progesterone) has already been proven as a treatment to help patients manage hot flushes associated with anti-oestrogen breast cancer therapies, and so could help them continue taking their treatment. The PIONEER trial has now shown that the addition of low dose megestrol to such treatment may also have a direct anti-cancer effect. Results are published in [Nature Cancer](#).
- [Finger-prick blood test could transform patient access to Alzheimer’s research](#) A groundbreaking NIHR-supported international study has shown that Alzheimer's disease biomarkers can be accurately detected using simple finger-prick blood samples. These samples can be collected at home and posted to laboratories without refrigeration or prior processing. The research has been published in [Nature Medicine](#).
- [Midlife depressive symptoms linked to increased dementia risk](#) The new study analysed data from the Whitehall II study, funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and Wellcome. Researchers found six depressive symptoms, when experienced in midlife, can predict dementia risk more than two decades later, a new study led by University College London (UCL) researchers has found. Midlife depression has long been considered a risk factor for dementia in later life.
- [MRI scan breakthrough could spare thousands of heart patients from risky invasive tests](#)-according to researchers from UEA. In collaboration with researchers at the University of Leeds and Newcastle University, the team developed a way to estimate this crucial measurement of blood oxygen using a standard cardiac MRI.