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# Improving community health networks for people with severe mental illness: a case study investigation

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## Plain English summary

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## Plain English summary

This research aimed to understand the personal networks of people with severe mental illness (SMI) – connections between people, places and activities – using an approach termed the community health network. The idea was to look at how personal networks were structured, impacts on well-being and the role of practitioners and organisations in accessing resources.

A five-module design was used across two study sites including a patient and public involvement team. Network data were collected from 150 people with SMI and there were 41 follow-up in-depth interviews; 42 organisation stakeholder or leader interviews; and 44 practitioner interviews.

Three types of personal networks were identified in the study sample: diverse and active; family and stable; formal and sparse. All networks included people, places and activity connections. Important factors for well-being included having close relationships and involvement in social and structured activities. Networks were important in shaping people's identity, for example through hobbies, work or relationship roles. Helping people with SMI become motivated to engage in activities was an important role; as one participant emphasised ultimately 'it is down to me' but practitioners can assist the process. Service providers acknowledged personal networks were important for recovery but recognised that the social aspects of supporting SMI, such as friendship and wider connectedness, can get overlooked.

The study identifies potential for people with SMI to become more active managers of their own networks, and roles for practitioner and service systems supporting this process.

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