

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Empowering communities: drawing on evidence to build successful community engagement initiatives

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Background: Although community engagement is seen as key to achieving citizen-centred and collaborative healthcare systems, organisations and neighbourhood networks are still searching for effective ways to engage citizens in shaping the health and care landscape. Many Dutch regions are currently implementing and fostering community engagement initiatives; however, little is known about which engagement approaches are effective under which circumstances, and how to implement such initiatives successfully. This holds especially true for initiatives focusing on disadvantaged groups.

The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment and the University of Tilburg, in co-design with stakeholders of six Dutch community engagement initiatives, are conducting a mixed-methods multiple case study evaluating six community engagement initiatives. The study is following the realist evaluation methodology to investigate which community engagement initiatives are effective in improving communities' health outcomes and the sustainability of healthcare systems.

The University of Maastricht is investigating the dynamics between health and citizen participation on a neighbourhood level. As barriers and possibilities for participation are supported by material and spatial components of the environment and constructed in the lack of daily contacts between neighbours and professionals, the study conducts an in-depth ethnography of the life of inhabitants of three low-income neighbourhoods in Maastricht. Local experiences of non-participation are gathered and related to the social and material conditions of the neighbourhoods.

Aims and objectives: The workshop's main objectives are to present two distinctive investigations into community engagement and to provide professionals with the analytical tools and the evidence-base to build their own successful initiatives that can help improve communities' health and wellbeing.

Format: During the session, we will briefly present our investigations, focusing on our preliminary results. In an interactive group session, we will examine the common lessons learned, including the often divergent ideas and motivations that organisations and communities have regarding community engagement. Discussions about the key enablers and barriers for community engagement initiatives will inspire participants to reflect upon and implement their own initiatives.

Target audience: Our target audience includes participants involved or interested in developing and implementing community engagement initiatives, in co-design with communities themselves. Participants will share their own thoughts and experiences during the session.

Learnings/take away: Participants will learn that community engagement is expected to bring a wider range of services together that reflect citizens' more holistic views and needs. However, barriers including service fragmentation which hampers professionals' willingness to take on board citizens' more holistic views, will need to be addressed before this can be achieved. Participants will gain insight into the key enablers for overcoming these barriers, like addressing power imbalances between professionals and citizens and within communities. Participants will also learn of the supportive conditions for community engagement such as informal contacts and the availability of publicmeeting places. This will enable them to overcome barriers and build a vision for community engagement that is shared between professionals and citizens.

Keywords: community engagement; co-production of health; disadvantaged neighbourhoods
