Association of Medical Research Charities
Pooling outcome data and identifying pathways to impact

The AMRC explains how the use of the researchfish platform has enabled them and their members to pool research outcome data across charities and identify pathways to impact.

The Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) is the UK's national membership organisation for health and medical research charities. With over 140 member charities who fund research across the full spectrum of human health, the AMRC's mission is to bring together and support health and medical charities to produce high-quality research. They do this by influencing policy and research and highlighting the sector's contribution to patient and public health.

Following the publication of their second sector impact report based on researchfish data from over 6,000 awards from 44 AMRC member charities, researchfish talked to Dr Jocelyn LeBlanc, Research, Data and Impact Manager, AMRC, about how their members use the platform to collect, analyse and report impact data.

Dr LeBlanc explained why reporting impact is important to the AMRC and its members. "Our members are charities so most of their research is made possible through public donations. When an organisation is spending peoples' hard-earned money there is an obligation to let the public know how their money is being spent and what impact it is having. This is important for the credibility and reputation of the charity, which also affects future fundraising. Impact is also key for charities to assess their current funding methods and shape their future research strategies."

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> Dr Jocelyn LeBlanc
> Research, Data and Impact Manager

"For the AMRC, reporting impact of the sector is important to show the collective difference charities make and to highlight the unique role charities play in the wider picture of medical research. This feeds into our policy work and having hard numbers and stories enables us to build an evidence base to support statements about why charities matter."

Key impact metrics

The AMRC published their second sector impact report based on researchfish data from over 6,000 awards from 44 AMRC member charities. They created an infographic to accompany the full report, and on the first page you can see some of the key metrics that highlight the difference charities make.

These metrics can be grouped into two categories – metrics that are most likely to represent real impacts for patients (for example medical products and policy and practice influences) and metrics that represent capacity building and facilitation of future impact (partnerships, further funding, skills and capacity building, and engagement activities).

What prompted the AMRC to use the researchfish platform?

As an organisation that represents and supports over 140 charities of different sizes and health focuses, the AMRC needed to find a common method to collect impact data that would work for a large number of their members.

"Because researchfish provides a standardised question set, and because most of the major UK funders of medical research ask their researchers to report via researchfish, it was the obvious choice. It's really the only way to enable cross-funder pooling of data and to demonstrate the breadth of real-world impact that charity funded research has."

Before researchfish

Before the AMRC and some of its members adopted the researchfish platform, charities each did their own thing, mostly collecting information about the results of projects through annual reports, surveys, and interviews with researchers. "Some had bespoke systems in place to standardise this process across their portfolios. And many charities, particularly the smaller ones with less time and resources, simply didn't track this information in a consistent way. There was certainly no opportunity to do a sector-wide impact report like the two that we've now been able to publish."

"Without researchfish to collect research outcomes, we would probably try to pick a few key metrics and survey our members for the information and then pool this data together. We would be restricted to outputs that are most easy to track and we could miss out on a lot of the key things we care most about– the things that most closely translate to real benefit for patients."

The bigger picture

"researchfish allows us to see the bigger picture, like overall numbers or distributions of outcomes, as well as dive into the details of specific projects to find compelling case studies. It's a one stop shop, making it more efficient for us to pool data across charities rather than reaching out individually and getting data that way. It's less work for us and for our members. Going forward there is real potential for more data sharing and benchmarking across other funders and sectors."

Future challenges

"One challenge is that impact is cumulative and doesn't necessarily follow a linear path. It is difficult to link up different projects to show the path from initial investment to impact. Data sharing and longitudinal tracking will hopefully facilitate this."

Something that we are trying to encourage our members with is using the data more so that the data isn't just collected and left there. It needs to be used and reused and communicated to a variety of audiences, including the researchers who provide the data. If they know someone is actually reading their submissions and then featuring them in case studies and including their data in reports, then they are probably more likely to be thoughtful and thorough in their submissions.

A long-term challenge is making use of this wealth of data to make predictions and guide strategic decisions, to ultimately maximise the impact of research. It's great that researchfish is expanding into data intelligence tools and services.

Data sharing between charities

"We know that charities fund collaboratively and that they spark new partnerships and further funding. Data sharing is key to linking all of this up to tell stories of pathways to impact."

"Also, building supportive communities is one of our priorities as an organisation. Through our deal with the MRC and researchfish, we have enabled many of our members to use researchfish who otherwise might not have. We've built a community of researchfish users and we've encouraged shared learning through workshops and meetings. Impact is such a big focus for us and we also have broader communities, like our impact coffee club that we organise with the NIHR to bring together a diverse group of people to discuss impact."

About Interfolio

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