



L-R: Professor Ioannis Vogiatzis of Northumbria University and Paul Court, Chief Executive of Healthworks

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## Partnership provides a boost for North East community health research

A pioneering partnership between Northumbria University and award-winning community charity [Healthworks](#) is making significant strides in tackling health inequalities across the North East.

The collaboration began during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the two organisations teamed up with Newcastle NHS Foundation Trust to carry out a ground-breaking research project funded by Northumbria University into long Covid rehabilitation.

This initiative led to one of the UK's first community-based long Covid rehabilitation programmes – an effort that has since influenced national health strategies and led both Northumbria and Healthworks into broader national research collaborations.

“This partnership started during a time of great uncertainty,” said [Professor Ioannis Vogiatzis](#), Professor of Rehabilitation Sciences at Northumbria University. “We were able to quickly mobilise our academic and clinical partners, deploying one of the first long Covid rehabilitation programmes in the UK. That early success helped Northumbria secure funding and join a [national research consortium](#) – and crucially, it demonstrated that NHS-funded community rehabilitation, delivered by organisations like Healthworks, truly works.”

The six-week long Covid programme, developed jointly by the two organisations, showed remarkable results, with 85% of participants reporting reduced fatigue, and more than half experiencing improved lung function.

It also introduced an innovative peer-support model that strengthened recovery through social interaction, with some participants continuing their rehabilitation in local community gyms.

Since then, the partnership between Northumbria University and Healthworks has grown to include a wide array of research projects and educational opportunities.

Healthworks is a clinical delivery site in national studies like [PERFORM](#) (Personalised Exercise-Rehabilitation FOR people with Multiple long-term conditions), which explores rehabilitation for people living with multimorbidity, meaning they have two or more long-term health conditions.

The charity also works with Northumbria to carry out cutting-edge research into hypertension, cervical screening uptake, sunbed alternatives, and stroke recovery, among others.

For Northumbria students, the partnership has become a crucial stepping stone into employability, with Healthworks regularly hosting placements for undergraduate and postgraduate students, many of whom later take up roles within the charity or other healthcare and NHS settings.

It is also creating new research opportunities, with a PhD studentship funded through the partnership which is focussed on hypertension management, ensuring scientific rigour in data collection and presentation, and community-based delivery.

“We currently have around 15 Northumbria graduates working with us,” said Paul Court, Chief Executive at Healthworks and Visiting Fellow at Northumbria University. “They’re involved in everything from cancer screening and lifestyle intervention management to strategic roles.”

This close relationship has become a model for community-integrated research, aligning with the NHS’s goal of decentralising health services to improve accessibility and outcomes.

As a National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) recognised research site, Healthworks offers Northumbria academics a powerful platform for funding applications, patient recruitment, and delivering real-world impact.

The strength of this collaboration was centre stage at the Healthworks [Research and Innovation in Health](#) event, held recently to mark the charity’s 30th year. The event brought together researchers, NHS partners, university students, and community members, reflecting on past achievements and exploring future opportunities.

“It was a fantastic day of connection, collaboration and conversation,” said Paul. “We showcased our joint work with Northumbria, from the PERFORM trial to initiatives targeting health inequalities, and discussed how we can continue to support workforce development and co-produced, evidence-backed health interventions.”

The event highlighted the growing research arm of Healthworks, its role in [Health Innovation North East and North Cumbria](#) (HINENC), and its commitment to supporting local communities through partnerships with universities like Northumbria.

As the North East continues to grapple with some of the UK’s most persistent health challenges, this partnership stands as a testament to what can be achieved when universities and community organisations collaborate in this

way.

To read more about the event and explore future collaboration opportunities, visit: [Reflecting on Our Research and Innovation in Health](#)

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