**Coordinating community-based support for healthy ageing**

**Context**

The UK has an ageing population with increasingly complex health and care needs, linked to growing rates of long-term illness and multi-morbidity, that are disproportionately high in the most deprived communities. The resources for formal health and care services (i.e. the NHS and Local Authorities providing social care) are increasingly restricted and are not keeping pace with demand. There is a growing evidence base on the role of local-level support, for example through VCSE (voluntary, community, and social enterprise) organisations, and connection services, such as social prescribing, for supporting people’s health and wellbeing as they age. Prevention of transitions to poor health and higher care needs, and reduction of health inequalities between the most and least deprived groups in society, is essential for the long-term sustainability of the health and care system. Within this context, the key challenge that this research will address is prevention or delay of transitions to more intensive forms of care as people age and mitigating the impact of those transitions when they do occur. The aim of this work is aligned with the UK’s Healthy Ageing Challenge: to decrease the probability of transitioning from one dependency state to another and thereby to attain an extra five years of active healthy life.

**Research context**

The Oxford and Thames Valley NIHR ARC has a research focus onimproving health and social care in the community (<https://www.arc-oxtv.nihr.ac.uk/our_work/Improving_health_and_social_care> ).

Previous work undertaken within this theme includes exploratory research on the potential role of social prescribing – linking patients with non-medical interventions such as exercise groups, creative arts, advice and peer support, and nature-based activities – for addressing the health and wellbeing needs of people living with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI), who currently have no treatment pathway within the NHS. Ongoing work led by Dr Caroline Potter at the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, in collaboration with researchers in Population Health and Primary Care, is investigating how community-based support from the NHS, local government, voluntary sector organisations, and informal carers could be coordinated at the neighbourhood level to support healthy ageing across the life course and reduce the speed and/or intensity of transitions to formal social care.

**Research project**

A postgraduate student from Oxford Brookes has the opportunity to work alongside the research team to develop their own project within this programme of work. Example topics include knowledge and uptake of social prescribing for a variety of health conditions, effectiveness of social care support provided by voluntary sector or independent organisations (e.g. private home care service providers), or citizen engagement to understand current gaps and needs in community-based support. There is opportunity for the student to analyse survey and interview data from a previous exploratory study of community-based support for people living with multiple long-term conditions, and/or for the student to collect new data through surveys, qualitative interviews or focus groups. The specific research question and project design will be discussed and agreed between the student, the research team, and the Brookes supervisor(s). Potential students are welcome to propose their project focus in line with their particular interests.