

Report of: Synergi-Leeds Partnership

Report to: Leeds Health and Wellbeing Board

Date: 14 November 2024

Subject: Working towards racial equity in mental health: the Synergi-Leeds Partnership

Are specific geographical areas affected?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of area(s):		
Are there implications for equality and diversity, cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, access to information procedure rule number:		

Summary of main issues

Language is important, so throughout this document the term Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities is used to inclusively describe people who are not 'White British' and who have a shared history of racism and discrimination. However, it is acknowledged that people may prefer different terms, such as "BME," "culturally and ethnically diverse groups," or "racialised groups." Any variation in terminology used within this document reflects the language of the source material.

The Synergi-Leeds Partnership is an innovative and ambitious citywide approach focused on addressing ethnic inequalities in mental health. The partnership is jointly led by Leeds and York Partnership Foundation Trust (LYPFT) and Public Health in Leeds City Council (LCC), and the core programmes are delivered and supported by colleagues in LYPFT, LCC, Volition and Leeds Involving People. The expanding network or 'community of practice' of statutory and voluntary sector organisations plays a vital role in advancing the priorities outlined in the Leeds All-Age Mental Health Strategy and specifically in 'reducing the over representation of people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities admitted in crisis'.

The Partnership adopts a whole-system, life course approach, acknowledging the contribution of an individual's lived experiences and recognising that social, psychological, economic, and environmental factors can prevent or mitigate poorer mental health outcomes. Through co-produced 'Creative Spaces Events', the voices of people with lived experience are centred and creative methods are used to engage participants, challenge prejudices, and inspire those in positions of influence to take meaningful action.

The Synergi-Leeds Partnership was recently awarded the **Health Service Journal (HSJ) Award for Mental Health Innovation of the Year** and received commendation in the **HSJ Race Equality Award**.

Current work programmes for the Synergi-Leeds Partnership:

- **Developing Communication Principles:** Creating guidelines to encourage transparent discussions about ethnic inequalities, racism, and social injustice in strategic meetings. Synergi-Leeds is working with the Health Partnerships team to explore how the principles can be incorporated into the governance arrangements for the city, including within the Partnership Leadership Team (PLT).
- **Commissioning for Racial Equity:** Collaborating with commissioners citywide to explore practical approaches to achieving racial equity in commissioning, sharing national best practice, and providing support to ensure effective implementation.
- **All-Age Grants Programme:** Supporting grassroots initiatives that address the broader determinants of mental health across all life stages, while building community capacity, reducing stigma, and improving access to early intervention.
- **‘Remembering What’s Forgotten’:** Developing an ambitious creative programme, in collaboration with Words of Colour and local partners, to create a digital archive that will highlight the untold contributions to addressing ethnic inequalities in Leeds.

Synergi-Leeds is dedicated to bringing about a cultural shift in approaching ethnic inequalities in mental health. Operating as a community of practice, Synergi-Leeds is a vehicle to share good practice across the city and enhance the quality and depth of strategic, service-oriented, and individual discussions about racism, discrimination, and inequality. Many organisations with long histories of advocating for racial equity and justice in Leeds have joined the Network, amplifying voices and impact through collaboration.

It is important to acknowledge that this work stands on the shoulders of those who have long worked in this challenging space. The partnership honours the efforts of those who have paved the way for us to make further progress in addressing racial inequity in mental health. Synergi-Leeds welcomes the support of the Health and Wellbeing Board to expand conversations around influencing, informing, and enabling initiatives aimed at improving mental health outcomes for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities.

Recommendations

The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to:

- Note the headlines of this report and the progress made on the key work programmes of the Synergi-Leeds Partnership.
- Endorse a pilot of the Communication Principles to encourage transparent discussions in strategic meetings and support the incorporation of the principles into city governance arrangements, with PLT adopting them and evidencing their use.
- Request that Leeds signatories of the National Synergi Pledge develop at least one organisational priority that will contribute to reducing racial inequalities in mental health, co-produced with people with lived experience.
- To agree to a mapping exercise which ascertains the extent of services focused on or contributing to mental health support and intervention for Black and South Asian boys and men across the Leeds system.

1 Purpose of this report

1.1 Striving for racial equity in mental health: the Synergi-Leeds Partnership

1.2 This paper, along with the supporting documents, provides the Leeds Health and Wellbeing Board with an update on the Synergi-Leeds Partnership and its citywide efforts to address ethnic inequalities in mental health.

- 1.3 The paper highlights the breadth and range of innovative work being delivered by the partnership and seeks the support and commitment of the Board and its members to influence other work programmes that affect mental health outcomes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.
- 1.4 Tackling racial inequalities in mental health and beyond requires a collaborative, system-wide approach. It is essential that racial equity is a priority across all health and wellbeing strategies in the city.

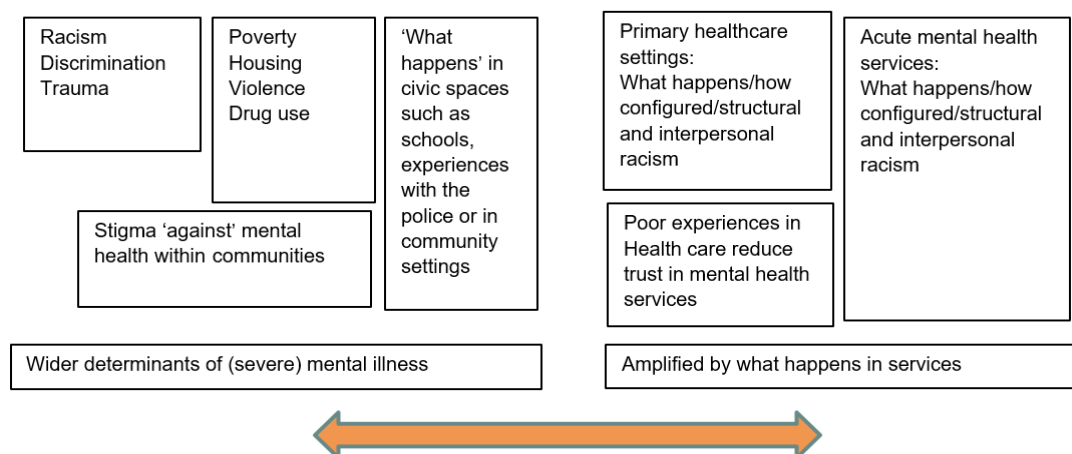
2 Background information

- 2.1 Ethnic inequalities in mental health have remained an intractable problem for many years. [Government statistics](#) published in March 2019 showed that Black people were more than four times as likely as White people to be detained under the Mental Health Act. Research also shows people from BME groups are overrepresented in inpatient and crisis services; are less likely to have GP involvement prior to their admission and are less likely to be referred for psychological therapy.
- 2.2 These figures not only reflect the high levels of mental illness within Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities but how people are racialised in the assessment and treatment of mental health conditions.
- 2.3 [Evidence](#) confirms that racism and discrimination have an impact on mental health and wellbeing. And certainly, in the last few years with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and the disproportionate impact of Covid 19 on minority ethnic groups, there has been an increased awareness about the relationship between systemic and structural racism, health inequalities and trauma.
- 2.4 In 2017, the Leeds Mental Health Partnership Board, responding to the disproportionately high detention rates in the city, committed to actively addressing this inequality. However, consultations with practitioners and strategic leaders revealed scepticism about the likelihood of meaningful change, given numerous previous unsuccessful attempts. Additionally, insights from local communities indicated a low level of trust and confidence in mental health services.
- 2.5 Engagement with the National Synergi Collaborative Centre helped us to reframe the issue. It became clear that past failures to achieve real change stemmed from several factors:
- Service user voices being marginalised,
 - Divergent views or opinions being overlooked, and
 - A fear among those in positions of power, particularly White people, of 'getting it wrong'.
- 2.6 In response to this reframing, the Synergi-Leeds Partnership was established as a community of practice. This partnership enables and supports candid discussions about racism and discrimination within the system, ensuring that the voices of people with lived experience are central to our efforts.

A key aspect of the partnership is recognising priorities across the **whole system**, adopting a public health approach and focusing on prevention, wider determinants, early intervention, and improving access, experience and outcomes in services. Past failures to

address this complexity within services and civic spaces have contributed to ongoing challenges. By developing a shared narrative, Synergi-Leeds created a framework to address racism, encourage difficult conversations, and prioritize service user and carer voices. The logic model illustrates how the approach is conceptualised:

Synergi-Leeds Logic Model



2.7 Over the last 6 years, with recurrent funding from Leeds ICB (for the last four years), partners in Leeds have worked together to re-build trust with communities and people with lived experience of mental ill health from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. A key element of the work has not only been **what** we do to influence work outside and within services but to provide challenge and support about **how** we have conversations about racism and discrimination.

2.8 The Synergi-Leeds Network represents over 50 organizations, with the Synergi-Leeds Core Group overseeing the work programme. The Core Group includes the Senior Responsible Officer who is the Deputy Director of Psychological Professions (Leeds and York Partnership Foundation Trust or LYPFT), Head of Public Health (Public Mental Health – Leeds City Council or LCC), Mental Health Inequalities Lead (Adults) (LCC), Third Sector Involvement Lead for Community Mental Health Transformation (Volition) and Clinical Engagement, Access and Inclusion Coordinator (LYPFT). Synergi-Leeds also would like to honour the late Annette Morris, Involvement Lead at Leeds Involving People, who sadly passed away in July. Her passion for social justice and race equality made an enduring impact on the work of the Synergi-Leeds Partnership.

2.9 In June 2022, Synergi-Leeds requested additional system leadership support from the Partnership Executive Group, and Jim Barwick, Chief Executive of Leeds GP Confederation, offered to provide strategic support. The Synergi-Leeds programme currently reports to the Leeds Mental Health Delivery Group, the Leeds Mental Health Partnership Board, and the Health and Wellbeing Board. A sponsorship group, comprising senior representatives from LYPFT, LCC Public Health, and the GP Confederation, meets as needed to guide the work programmes and provide feedback.

3 Main issues

3.10 Current Progress and Approach

- 3.11 The importance of building strong, trusted and collaborative relationships in this area of work cannot be under-estimated. This work ‘moves at the speed of trust’ and with the support of the Synergi-Leeds Partnership there has been significant progress.
- 3.12 The Synergi-Leeds Partnership has 5 areas of focus as part of our approach:
1. Whole-systems life course approach
 2. Surfacing the impact of racism and discrimination
 3. Epistemic Justice
 4. Psychologically informed
 5. Diverse and inclusive leadership
- 3.13 By adopting a whole-system, life course approach and focusing on informing, influencing, and enabling, the partnership has made an impact at the system-wide, organisational, and community levels. More details about our recent work programmes are provided below.
- 3.14 **National Synergi Pledge:** The Synergi Leeds team were instrumental in key statutory and third sector organisations across the health and care sector becoming signatories to the National Synergi Pledge, which lists seven commitments to initiate action around reducing ethnic inequalities in mental health. Signing the Pledge has impacted the work of several organisations and services across the city.
- 3.15 **Developing Communication Principles:** The University of Leeds has recently conducted research within the mental health system focusing on the talk and silence surrounding the social injustice of ethnic inequalities in mental health. The final paper is in draft but in collaboration with the Synergi-Leeds Partnership, a set of communication principles have been developed to support conversations about ethnic inequalities, racism and social injustice in strategic meetings, promoting positive and transformative change. Synergi-Leeds is working with the Health Partnerships team to explore how the principles can be incorporated into the governance arrangements for the city, including within the Partnership Leadership Team (PLT). The partnership seeks the Board’s endorsement to proceed with the pilot and support the promotion of any additional resources that are developed.
- 3.16 **Commissioning for Racial Equity:** To capture the work of Synergi-Leeds, the co-founding agency of the National Synergi Collaborative, Words of Colour, produced and directed a [60-minute documentary](#) on the work in Leeds. This led to further conversations with commissioners to think about ‘commissioning for racial equity.’ Practical approaches discussed included specifying cultural competency training; enhancing workforce diversity; improving ethnicity data recording and specifying culturally appropriate interventions within contracts. A recognised current gap is understanding what services provide mental health support and interventions for Black and South Asian boys and men across Leeds. In November 2024, Synergi-Leeds will host a Creative Spaces Event, bringing together health and social care commissioners to highlight best practice from within Leeds and wider, and centre the voices of those with lived experience.
- 3.17 **All-Age Grants Programme and Capacity Building:** Synergi's all-age community grants programme supports grassroots organisations addressing the broader determinants of mental health. The goals of the programme include building capacity, reducing stigma, increasing trust, and facilitating access to early intervention. Collaboration amongst grant holders is encouraged, to enhance the effectiveness of projects and to unify efforts to address the complex challenges of mental health inequalities. The partnership awards £50,000 per year and in the first two years, over

1,200 individuals directly benefited from the grants, with more than 6,000 engaging with various projects. In addition, the first-year grant holders collectively secured an additional £113,000 in funding. The programme is now in its third year, with a new funding round focusing on transitions and young adults.

- 3.18 Creative Spaces Events and the Voice of Lived Experience:** Synergi-Leeds is dedicated to incorporating service user and carer voices into the work. The Creative Spaces Events, developed in collaboration with Words of Colour, serve as a vital platform for this. These hybrid events focus on co-production and creative methods to challenge narratives around ethnic inequalities. By involving individuals with lived experience, carers, and strategic leaders, creative formats—such as podcasts, poetry, and film—are used to foster open discussions about racism and build trust within communities.
- 3.19** The partnership secured funding for the ambitious creative programme “**Remembering What’s Forgotten,**” co-produced with local artists and curators with lived experience. Launching in September 2024, the exhibition and a permanent digital archive will highlight the untold contributions to addressing ethnic inequalities and promoting mental health for ethnically diverse communities. This project aims to celebrate past and present efforts and will guide future actions to reduce ethnic inequalities in mental health. In collaboration with Words of Colour, Synergi-Leeds has developed an ambitious creative program co-produced with local partners, including Touchstone, Heritage Corner and Khadijah Ibrahim, with project allies such as Thackray Museum of Medicine and West Yorkshire Playhouse, alongside grassroots organisations, carers, Black and South Asian men with lived experience, artists and curators.
- 3.20 Impact and Reach**
- 3.21** Operating as a partnership, with membership across statutory and third sector organisations, Synergi-Leeds is by its nature a vehicle to share best practice across the city; through the National Pledge (detailed above), our bi-monthly network meetings, Creative Spaces events and the community grants programme. The mission of Synergi Leeds is to influence and activate approaches to reducing inequalities in mental health. This testimonial provides an example of our ‘spread’, influencing work across the employment sector:
- 3.22** *“Getting an insight into the Synergi way of approaching things has been very inspirational as we continue in our mission to diversify our network further so that it can truly reflect the diversity of our local business community” - Leigh Staunton, Mindful Employer Network, Leeds Mind*
- 3.23** Signing the Synergi-Leeds Pledge has impacted the work of several organisations and services across the city, as described in the testimonials below.
- 3.24** *“Synergi is a powerful piece of work that has influenced the Senior Leadership in Leeds, including myself. Shining a light on an often-hidden issue with real life testimony so that context is understood, has changed decision making in the city. For example, how population health priorities and outcomes are set now consider the ambitions of Synergi” - Jim Barwick, Chief Executive of Leeds GP Confederation*
- 3.25** *“As a provider of mental health services and a member of Synergi, we signed the pledge, and are committed to becoming more anti-racist and as a consequence have developed specific training for our employees and Trustees”. - Sinéad Cregan Director of Development and Innovation, Inspire North*

- 3.26 With one primary area of focus on civic spaces and the wider determinants, Synergi-Leeds continues to influence broader work across the city. Synergi-Leeds is a key partner of the Leeds Mental Health Anti-Stigma Partnership and members of the core group are currently supporting the Leeds Marmot City work and developing work that focuses on racism and discrimination.
- 3.27 Focussing on work within mental health services, the partnership is supporting the implementation of the [Patient and Carer Race Equality Framework](#) and the network were recently consulted on the draft LYPFT Health Equity Strategy.
- 3.28 Collecting comprehensive data on service access, experiences, and outcomes for Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities is challenging. Stigma surrounding mental health often leads to underreporting, and there is inconsistency in ethnicity recording across health and social care systems. Synergi-Leeds aims to track Mental Health Act detentions by ethnicity in Leeds over time; despite some caveats with the data, there are indications that detentions among these communities are decreasing.

4 Health and Wellbeing Board governance

4.1 Consultation, engagement and hearing citizen voice

4.2 Synergi-Leeds is dedicated to incorporating service user voices into our work and our Creative Spaces Events have been an important 'engine' for us to do this. In addition, the engagement and involvement leads from LYPFT, Volition and Leeds Involving People have been and continue to be members of the Synergi-Leeds Core Group, directing our work and ensuring the voice of lived experience is at the centre of our work.

4.3 Our ambitious creative programme "**Remembering What's Forgotten,**" involved extensive consultation with people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities to capture the last 50 years of community history and inform our next steps as a partnership.

4.4 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

4.5 Work around racial inequality in mental health is important for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. Addressing racial inequality can help reduce stigma and improve access to care. Outcomes of our work will reduce the prevalence of poor mental health in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and improve mental health outcomes by reducing systemic inequity.

4.6 Racial inequality intersects with other social determinants, such as socioeconomic status and access to resources, which compounds the challenges faced by marginalised groups. Addressing these issues holistically is crucial for effective EDI efforts.

4.7 Tackling racial inequalities in mental health is part of the broader movement for social justice, aiming to create a fairer and more equitable society for everyone.

4.8 Resources and value for money

4.9 Currently, the only substantively funded aspect of Synergi-Leeds is for the Mental Health Ethnic Inequalities Lead (Adults) and the community grants funding, both hosted and overseen by Public Health in LCC. The leadership provided by LYPFT and Public Health, and the commitment of all core group members, are a result of individual passion, commitment to the work, and support from respective organisations, but capacity is

limited. Synergi-Leeds already over-delivers in terms of work programmes, reach and impact, when compared to other similar networks across the country and so offers value for money. As the Synergi-Leeds network has developed so have the demands around co-ordination, liaison and requests for input, support and training from multiple organisations.

4.10 The Public Health team in Leeds City Council currently receives recurrent funding of £100,000 from Leeds Integrated Care Board (ICB) and manages the Mental Health Ethnic Inequalities Lead (Adults) post and commissions the grants programme.

4.11 Legal Implications, access to information and call In

4.12 There are no legal or access to information implications of this report. It is not subject to call in.

4.13 Risk management

4.14 Changes in current capacity, current funding or engagement from partners, both within the core group and the network, could impact on the delivery of the Synergi-Leeds work programmes and the reach of the work.

4.15 Addressing racial inequality in mental health is bigger than one specific organisation. Solutions are rooted in social and racial justice which requires endorsement across all organisations in Leeds, across strategically positioned leadership and with commitment from all organisations. The risk is without this system-wide support and focus, efforts to reduce racial inequalities in mental health will fail.

5 Conclusions

5.16 Despite the challenges, those involved in the Synergi-Leeds Partnership take great pride in the relationships built among culturally diverse groups and organisations, valuing the ongoing shared learning. As we move forward as a partnership, next steps will be informed by the narratives captured in *Remembering What's Forgotten*, ensuring that we honour 50 years of community history, whilst prioritising mental health and racial justice in Leeds. However, achieving lasting change will require a whole-system approach, along with the courage to embrace new ways of thinking and acting and Synergi-Leeds welcomes the continued support and advocacy of the Health and Wellbeing Board to do this.

6 Recommendations

The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to:

- a) Note the headlines of this report and the progress made on the key work programmes of the Synergi-Leeds Partnership.
- b) Endorse a pilot of the Communication Principles to encourage transparent discussions in strategic meetings and support the incorporation of the principles into city governance arrangements, with PLT adopting them and evidencing their use.

- c) Request that Leeds signatories of the National Synergi Pledge develop at least one organisational priority that will contribute to reducing racial inequalities in mental health, co-produced with people with lived experience.
- d) To agree to a mapping exercise which ascertains the extent of services focused on or contributing to mental health support and intervention for Black and South Asian boys and men across the Leeds system.

7 Background documents

Appendix 1 – Synergi Leeds Annual Report 2022

Appendix 2 – Addressing Mental Health Inequalities Grant Funding – Year 2 Report

Appendix 3 – Synergi-Leeds Approach Poster

Appendix 4 – National Synergi Pledge Commitments

Appendix 5 – Communication Principles

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Implementing the Leeds Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-30

How does this help reduce health inequalities in Leeds?

The proposals in this report directly contribute to the three pillars of our Best City Ambition, particularly the Health and Wellbeing pillar, that in 2030 Leeds will be a healthy and caring city for everyone: where those who are most likely to experience poverty improve their mental and physical health the fastest, people are living healthy lives for longer, and are supported to thrive from early years to later life.

Outcomes of our work will reduce the prevalence of poor mental health in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and improve mental health outcomes by reducing systemic inequity. Racial inequality intersects with other social determinants, such as socioeconomic status and access to resources, which compounds the challenges faced by marginalised groups. Tackling racial inequalities in mental health is part of the broader movement for social justice, aiming to create a fairer and more equitable society for everyone.

How does this help create a high quality health and care system?

By prioritising racial equity, health and care systems can create a more just, effective, and responsive environment that benefits all individuals and communities.

Addressing racial inequalities helps eliminate barriers that prevent marginalised communities from accessing healthcare services, leading to a more inclusive system that serves everyone effectively. Focusing on racial equity can also inspire innovative practices and policies that enhance service delivery, benefiting the entire health system.

With a stronger focus on the wider determinants of health and prevention, demand for intensive or crisis services will reduce and mental health outcomes will improve.

How does this help to have a financially sustainable health and care system?

Focussing on racial equity and reducing prevalence of mental ill health in Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority communities, promoting help-seeking earlier and improving experiences and outcomes for those from ethnically diverse communities will reduce demand on high-cost secondary mental health interventions.

Future challenges or opportunities

Addressing racial inequality in mental health and beyond is bigger than one specific organisation. Solutions are rooted in social and racial justice which requires endorsement across all organisations in Leeds, across strategically positioned leadership and with commitment from all organisations. There is an opportunity in the future to ensure racial equity is a priority across all health and wellbeing strategies in the city.

