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Plain English summaries in National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) funded research

**Introduction**

From **14 May 2014** researchers who apply for NIHR funded research will be required to produce a good quality plain English summary.

In 2012 INVOLVE[[1]](#footnote-1) was asked by the Department of Health to work with the NIHR Programmes and other key stakeholders to:

* review and develop the question and guidance for plain English summaries in NIHR funded research which are part of the Standard Application Form
* develop criteria and propose methods for assessing the quality of plain English summaries.

The review consulted with stakeholders and a report was submitted to the Department of Health in January 2013.

In July 2013 a NIHR stakeholder meeting discussed the recommendations and an implementation group was formed. Members of the group discussed the guidance with their organisations and the final guidance was agreed at the end of February 2014. This work will be assessed 12-18 months after implementation.

**Appendix A**: Guidance for researchers on completing the plain English summary section of the NIHR Standard Application Form

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**The importance of a plain English summary**

A plain English summary is a clear explanation of your research.

Many reviewers use this summary to inform their review of your funding application. They include clinicians and researchers who do not have specialist knowledge of your field as well as members of the public. If your application for funding is successful, the summary will be used on National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and other websites.

A good quality plain English summary providing an easy to read overview of your whole study will help:

* those carrying out the review (reviewers and board and panel members) to have a better understanding of your research proposal
* inform others about your research such as members of the public, health professionals, policy makers and the media
* the research funders to publicise the research that they fund.

**If we feel that your plain English summary is not clear and of a good quality then you may be required to amend your summary prior to final funding approval**.

It is helpful to involve patients / carers / members of the public in developing a plain English summary.

**Word length**

 to be completed by individual programme

**Content**

When writing your summary consider including the following information where appropriate:

* aim(s) of the research
* background to the research
* design and methods used
* patient and public involvement
* dissemination.

The plain English summary is not the same as a scientific abstract - please do not cut and paste this or other sections of your application form to create the plain English summary.

**Further guidance on writing in plain English is available online at NIHR Make it clear**  [www.involve.nihr.ac.uk/makeitclear](http://www.involve.nihr.ac.uk/makeitclear%20) .

**For further support and advice on writing a plain English summary, please contact your local Research Design Service** (where applicable). [www.nihr.ac.uk/research/Pages/ResearchDesignService.aspx](http://www.nihr.ac.uk/research/Pages/ResearchDesignService.aspx)

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**Appendix B**: Guidance for researchers on producing a plain English summary in a NIHR funding application available online at NIHR Make it clear.

**Writing a plain English summary in your National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) funding application**

**The importance of a plain English summary**

A plain English summary is a clear explanation of your research.

Many reviewers use this summary to inform their review of your funding application. They include clinicians and researchers who do not have specialist knowledge of your field as well as public reviewers. If your application for funding is successful, the summary will be used on NIHR and other websites.

A good quality plain English summary providing an easy to read overview of your whole study will help:

* those carrying out the review (reviewers and board and panel members) to have a better understanding of your research proposal
* inform others about your research such as members of the public, health professionals, policy makers and the media
* the research funders to publicise the research that they fund.

Getting your summary right now will save you time later. Use this summary as a foundation to build and adapt as your research develops. Consider the audience and what information they will need.

**The summary is important. If it is felt that your plain English summary is not clear and of a good quality then you may be required to amend your summary prior to final funding approval.**

Please also read the guidance for writing a plain English summary provided by the NIHR Research Programme that you are applying to.

It is helpful to involve patients / carers / members of the public in developing a plain English summary.

**Word length**

Individual NIHR Programmes will have different requirements for word length - some will be 300 words and others may be up to 750 words. The information will be available in their guidance for applicants.

**What to include in your plain English summary**

When writing the summary consider including the following information where appropriate:

**Aim(s) of the research**

* What are you aiming to find out?
* How will patients / carers / members of the public and services benefit from your research - either directly or in the longer term?

**Background to the research**

* Why does this research need to be done now?
* What is the scale of the issue? For example:
	+ - How many patients / members of the public are affected?
		- What are the costs to services?

**Design and methods used**

* What design and methods have you chosen and why?
* Who are your participants? (if appropriate)

**Patient and public involvement**

* How have patients / the public been involved in developing this research to date?
* How will patients / the public be involved in the conduct / management of the research?

**Dissemination**

* Who will the findings be communicated to and how?

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**How to write a plain English summary**

The people who will read your summary will be an interested audience, but are not necessarily specialists. Therefore write your summary with this audience in mind, for example at the same level as an article in a newspaper.

There are a few simple rules for writing in plain English. In summary these are:

* avoid wherever possible using jargon, abbreviations and technical terms – if you have to use them provide a clear explanation
* avoid complicated English or uncommon words
* use active not passive phrases, for example say ‘we will do it’ rather than ‘it will be done by us’
* keep sentences short
* think about the order and structure
* break up the text, for example use bullet lists
* ask patients / carers / colleagues to read a draft to find out if anything is unclear.

The plain English summary is not the same as a scientific abstract - please do not cut and paste this or other sections of your application form to create the plain English summary.

**For further support and advice on writing a plain English summary, please contact your local Research Design Service** (where applicable). [www.nihr.ac.uk/research/Pages/ResearchDesignService.aspx](http://www.nihr.ac.uk/research/Pages/ResearchDesignService.aspx)

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**Appendix C:** Plain English summary guidance for reviewers and board and panel members (to be included in their guidance and / or feedback form)

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The plain English summary is intended for an interested audience, who are not necessarily specialists. The summary should be written at roughly the same level as an article in a newspaper. With this in mind, please comment on the following:

1. Does the plain English summary give a clear explanation of the research?
	* Does it help you carry out your review? If not, why not?
	* Is the language used appropriate and clear? If not, where are there problems?
	* Are scientific terms, abbreviations and jargon explained? If not, which terms need explanation?
2. If this research is funded, the plain English summary will be published on a variety of websites, without the rest of this application form. Could this plain English summary be used on its own to describe the proposed research? If not, what further information is needed?

Further information for researchers on how to write a plain English summary and what to include in a summary is available online at NIHR Make it clear [www.involve.nihr.ac.uk/makeitclear](http://www.involve.nihr.ac.uk/makeitclear%20)

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1. INVOLVE is a national advisory body funded by and part of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). It supports public involvement in NHS, public health and social care research. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)