

Preston's economic development boosts health and wellbeing of local residents

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University of Liverpool led research shows that the city of Preston's approach to economic development is having a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of local residents.

The newly published paper by researchers from the University of

Liverpool, University of Central Lancashire, Lancaster University, and Centre for Local Economic Strategies, investigates the health effects of Preston's Community Wealth Building programme.

Preston, an economically disadvantaged city in North West England, has led the way in implementing a new approach to economic development known as Community Wealth Building. The approach involves investing local wealth into the local economy, encouraging the development of local enterprises, improving recruitment and employment conditions, and maximising socially productive use of land and property.

The researchers found that during the period in which Preston's Community Wealth Building programme was introduced, there were fewer mental health problems than would have been expected compared to other similar areas, as life satisfaction and economic measures improved.

They found that the introduction of the programme was associated with a 3% decline in antidepressant prescribing, and a 2% decline in the prevalence of depression. Additional analysis suggested that, during the same period, the [local population](#) experienced a 9% improvement in life satisfaction, and 11% increase in wages, compared to expected trends.

University of Liverpool's Professor Ben Barr, Principle Investigator of the research, commented: "As we emerge from a pandemic that has disproportionately affected the health and economy of the most disadvantaged places, new and inclusive approaches for economic recovery are needed. Our research provides valuable evidence that such approaches can help improve health as well as benefiting the local economy."

Compared to the rest of Europe, the UK experiences some of the largest differences in health between places. Wide economic disparities

between places within the UK are thought to underly these differences in health.

Professor Barr continues: "Our study indicates that the approach to economic development applied in Preston provides lessons for the UK government. Policies to 'level-up' the health, wellbeing and economy of disadvantaged places are often based on the principles of attracting inward investment into places such as Preston. However, such approaches have not always led to improved wellbeing and decreased inequality. Our research indicates that an approach focused on Community Wealth Building may be more effective at achieving wellbeing improvements and our work continues to understand this further."

Tom Lloyd Goodwin, Director of Policy and Practice, Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) said, "The findings of this research are exciting but not surprising to us at CLES—local governments are active participants in local economies and CLES is working in dozens of places across the UK to support the implementation of best practice in [economic development](#). Time and time again, we see local governments working with their partners to use their assets and influence to support local enterprise and good jobs, within environmentally sustainable limits. Community [wealth](#) building is emerging as a key tactic to realise this goal and this research continues to highlight its effectiveness as a driver of [health](#) and well-being."

More information: Tanith C Rose et al, The mental health and wellbeing impact of a Community Wealth Building programme in England: a difference-in-differences study, *The Lancet Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/S2468-2667\(23\)00059-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(23)00059-2)

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