

# EHPS SYNERGY Grant Report

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I received this year's EHPS SYNERGY Grant to not only attend the SYNERGY Expert Meeting but to also assist with the organisation and running of the first hybrid SYNERGY Expert Meeting. The meeting entitled 'Behavioural science and public health: Enhancing impact through policy and practice during COVID-19 and beyond' was facilitated by Dr Marta Marques (Comprehensive Health Research Centre, NOVA Medical School, UNL, Portugal) and Professor Angel Chater (Centre for Health, Wellbeing and Behaviour Change (CHeWBeC), University of Bedfordshire, United Kingdom; Centre for Behaviour Change, University College London, United Kingdom). The meeting focused on the role of behavioural scientists (in particular health psychologists) in guiding and advising policy makers and public health officials on how to influence disease prevention behaviours effectively, with a particular focus on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic and what we can apply to other health concerns.

For myself personally attending the Expert Meeting was an incredible opportunity to learn from the many experiences shared by other attendees, invited speakers and facilitators in advising governments, policy makers and public health agencies. Since completing my PhD, I have worked in postdoctoral roles based in a wide range of healthcare settings including psychiatry and neuroimmunology – all with a heavy focus on translational research. How to effectively communicate research findings that are impactful

to non-research colleagues and lay communities is a constant challenge. This year's attendees came from Ireland, the UK, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Finland and Portugal across different settings including universities, public health advisory groups and government-backed agencies bringing a wealth of knowledge.

Along with the Expert Meeting attendees, a number of invited speakers also spoke during the two-day event on their experiences in policy and practice during the COVID-19 pandemic. On day one, we were joined online by Marijn de Bruin and Olivier Luminet from the Netherlands and Belgium respectively. Their talks were followed by a talk by Angel Chater (facilitator) on her role within the BPS COVID-19 Behavioural Science and Disease Prevention Taskforce. On day two, Molly Byrne joined us in person to speak about the Irish approach and the Behavioural Change subgroup within the Irish National Public Health Emergency Team. Online, Vivi Antopolounis from the Behavioural Science Policy Research Unit in the UK shared her experiences followed by Marta Marques (facilitator) who spoke about the COVID-19 Portuguese Behaviour Science Task Force. All speakers shared successes and challenges experienced over the past two years. Many spoke of the hours given up voluntarily in order to support their respective task forces trying to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

For the SYNERGY board, this year's Expert Meeting was the first time conducting the meeting in a hybrid format, and as the Grant and Liaison Officer of the SYNERGY board, I can say that we were definitely feeling the pressure. Following the

2021 online Expert Meeting, we had learnt a great deal about providing a good Expert Meeting to online attendees. The goal for this year was to combine that with the years of experience we have from in-person meetings in order to ensure everything ran smoothly in a hybrid format! Unfortunately for Marta, she wasn't able to attend the Expert Meeting and EHPS conference in-person; however, she still facilitated the Expert Meeting remotely online. Although I'm sure Marta would have much preferred to have been there in person – for us, it was a blessing in disguise. Marta's attention to online attendees, while Angel focused on those in the room in Bratislava, meant a fully realised hybrid experience for both online and in-person attendees. Some lessons for the future were learnt included: (1) the need more supportive technology that will allow easier discussion between online and in-person attendees; and (2) occasions for networking between online and in-person attendees needs to be included in the timetable.

The GROW model (Whitmore, 1992; 2017) helped form the structure of the Expert Meeting. Following the invited talks on day one, the attendees formed groups to discuss the goal and reality of bringing health psychology and behavioural science into policy and practice. On day two again following the invited talks, the groups discussed options (enablers to action and impact) and the way forward (recommendations). At the end of the second day, the whole group came together to begin forming a consensus on what should be included in the position paper. This position paper along with a SIG group will be the main outcomes of this year's Expert Meeting. For myself and the SYNERGY board, we'll bring everything we've learnt into next year's Expert Meeting at the 37th Annual Conference in Bremen, Germany!

## References

- Whitmore, J. (1992). *Coaching for performance: A practical guide to growing your own skills*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing
- Whitmore, J. (2017). *Coaching for Performance. The principles and practice of coaching and leadership*. 5th Edition. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.



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