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A shared reflection report from award recipients at the European Health Psychology Society Conference 2025

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Abstract

In August 2025, the 39th Annual Conference of the European Health Psychology Society brought us together in Groningen, Netherlands, with more than 800 academics, researchers, students, and practitioners from over 50 countries participating. This year's conference theme was "Putting Health Psychology to Work: Prevention, Practice, Policy", focusing on the application of health psychology in practice and bridging the research with real-world practice. This reflection report, written from the perspective of conference grant award recipients, aims to provide insight into the experience of attending EHPS for early career researchers, future attendees, and prospective applicants. We reflect on key aspects of the conference, including participation in the CREATE workshop on open science, engagement with the scientific programme, and opportunities for networking and professional development. We were selected for these awards based on the relevance and quality of our ongoing research in health behaviour and intervention development, as well as our contribution to the conference programme. Receiving the conference grants allowed us to attend and fully engage with the event, including participation in the CREATE workshop on open science, with a particular focus on preregistration and registered reports. We highlight how the CREATE workshop supported the development of practical open science skills, how the scientific programme encouraged critical reflection on translating research into practice, and how informal and structured networking opportunities nurtured a strong sense of community within the field. Overall, this report outlines not only what we learned but also how the conference contributed to our development as early-career researchers within health psychology.

Key words: Health psychology, Early career researchers, Open science, Professional development, Scientific conference

Introduction

The 11 of us, as early career researchers, were extremely grateful to be able to attend the 39th Annual Conference of the European Health Psychology Society Conference, having been awarded CREATE Workshop grants (Rebecca Trower, Dario Leanza, Brona Mulligan, Abdulmalik Yemi Olaosebikan, Valentina Rossi, Lucia Volpi) and Conference grants (Madeleine Warmer, Marina Hinssen, Ivana Ivančić, Lucia Kupkovicova, Jennifer Töws, Mariana Brazão).

For some of us, this was our first time attending the conference and presenting our research, while others had attended an EHPS conference before and already had high expectations. Regardless of prior experience, the welcoming atmosphere of the 2025 Conference, its diverse, engaging program covering multiple areas within health psychology, as well as the networking opportunities, made the experience both inspiring and motivating for our ongoing and future work. During the opening ceremony, awards were presented to recognize excellence in the field, poster prizes were given as part of the conference program, and several social events were organized after the sessions, all of which contributed to fostering connections among participants and creating a pleasant and engaging atmosphere. The following sections provide a detailed overview of the scientific program, the CREATE workshop, and networking opportunities, highlighting experiences that we thought were particularly valuable for early-career researchers.

CREATE Workshop

This year's CREATE interactive workshop, "Open Science Practices: Preregistrations and Registered Reports", offered a practical introduction to open science in health psychology. Guided by Dr. Emma Norris (Brunel University London) and M.Sc. Rory Coyne (University of Galway), who presented insights from their own open science experience, participants explored how preregistrations and registered reports can strengthen transparency, reproducibility, and trust in psychological research.

The two-day workshop covered quantitative, qualitative, and evidence synthesis preregistration approaches, with participants familiarizing with the Open Science Framework (OSF) and its preregistration templates. We learned about the two-stage Registered Reports process, where research questions and methodology are peer-reviewed before data collection begins. We found the approach of journals offering in-principle acceptance regardless of final results a very promising development in scientific publishing. The workshop also introduced five open science practices that researchers can implement regardless of one's open science experience:

preregistering studies, uploading papers as preprints, sharing code on OSF, publishing anonymized data with appropriate licenses, and publishing data notes.

The sessions combined hands-on exercises followed by discussions among teams of researchers who do research on similar topics. Participants were divided into groups based on shared research themes (health behavior change, healthcare, inequalities/climate/inclusion, and applied health) and worked collaboratively to prepare a systematic review preregistration, which was then peer-reviewed within groups. This combination of peer feedback and practical exercises was helpful not only for understanding the technical aspects of these processes but also for learning about the diverse ways in which other labs implement open science practices. Eventually, the new insights and practical skills gained from the workshop enabled us to directly apply this knowledge to our preregistrations for our ongoing research projects.

For many of us, this was our first CREATE experience, and it served as the perfect stepping stone into the EHPS network, helping us feel more confident and less alone when approaching the main conference. We left the workshop encouraged, equipped with new skills, and connected to a community of researchers equally committed to advancing open and rigorous scientific practice.

Scientific program

The scientific program at EHPS 2025 provided a rich opportunity to engage with current developments in health psychology, but more importantly, it prompted us to reflect on how theory is actively being translated into practice across diverse contexts. Keynote talks, oral presentations, symposia, roundtables, poster sessions, and state-of-the-art (SOTA) discussions educated us on a wide range of topics, advancing both theoretical understanding and practical applications. The sessions highlighted innovative research and practical approaches to health behaviors, chronic illness, digital health, and inequalities, showing how theory is being translated into action.

The conference theme, Putting Health Psychology to Work: Prevention, Practice and Policy, was evident throughout. A key takeaway for us was the complexity involved in applying theoretically grounded interventions in practice. Several sessions highlighted that even well-designed interventions are shaped, and often constrained, by social, structural, and policy-related factors. This reinforced the importance of considering context early in the intervention development process, with co-creation and user-centered design being recurring themes, emphasizing how context influences intervention success.

We found the sessions on digital and hybrid interventions especially insightful. Presentations demonstrated how tools such as mobile applications, virtual reality, and online platforms are being used not only to deliver interventions but also to enhance engagement and accessibility. One presentation that stood out showed how virtual reality could be used to improve hand hygiene in community care. This prompted us to think more critically about how immersive technologies could be integrated into behavior change interventions in ways that go beyond novelty and offer genuine behavioral impact.

The half-day workshops on adapting and implementing interventions in real-world contexts provided valuable guidance on scaling up interventions, addressing dropout, and ensuring strong theory-based design. One of us stated, *“It made me reflect on whether my own intervention is truly feasible beyond a research setting and prompted me to think of ways to do this”*. We also particularly enjoyed presentations on weight stigma and physical health behavior, which clarified the complex pathways through which stigma can influence behavior, both directly and indirectly, reinforcing the need to address psychosocial factors alongside behavioral targets. Similarly, the roundtable on stress and health behaviors provided useful insight into the complexity of this link, including its temporal dynamics, behavior-specific patterns, and person- and context-related moderators. One participant reflected: *“I believe that a better understanding of within-person fluctuations in the stress–health behavior link could make behavior change interventions far more successful. The roundtable made me realize how much of this link remains to be understood and what methodological questions arise in this area of research.”*

Another key highlight was symposiums such as “Making Ontologies Useful and Usable for Behavior Change Research”, which prompted us to think more critically about how behavioral science knowledge is structured and applied and the potential of ontology tools to improve clarity and precision in intervention design. The session “Explaining the Unknown: What We Know About Communicating Uncertainty in Healthcare” also challenged our assumptions about how information is presented to patients and raised important considerations for how a lot of us should communicate risk and evidence within health interventions.

Similarly, the oral session on the acceptance and feasibility of new health technologies encouraged us to think more realistically about the challenges of implementing digital tools in practice. While many of the examples, such as AI-supported obesity training and smart-home systems for individuals with mild cognitive impairment, demonstrated clear potential, they also highlighted barriers related to usability, integration, and long-term engagement. This prompted us to reflect on how feasibility and acceptability must be considered alongside innovation when developing digital interventions. Beyond these areas, symposia on menstrual health, sustainable diets, climate-related behaviors, and digital mental health featured the broad societal relevance and interdisciplinary scope of contemporary health psychology research, encouraging us to think more broadly about the potential impact and scope of our own research.

The keynote talks further shaped our reflections – Prof. Ellen Smets, Prof. Theresa Marteau, Prof. Justin Presseau, and Prof. Sabine Sonnentag. Prof. Ellen Smets work on clinical communication highlighted the nuanced realities of patient–provider interactions and the role of health psychology in improving these exchanges amid evolving digital contexts. Prof. Theresa Marteau prompted us to think more critically about the role of policy in shaping large-scale behavior changes to protect both human and planetary health. One of us reflected: *“Prof. Marteau’s keynote really inspired me to think in systems when designing future research, and to set priorities with shared societal needs in mind”*. Prof. Justin Presseau’s systems-based perspective encouraged us to consider how multiple behaviors interact and compete, which has clear implications for designing more holistic interventions. Prof. Sabine Sonnentag focused on the workplace, showing how job design, job crafting, and stress management and recovery approaches support employee well-being. Her three-layer approach was extremely useful in guiding both organizations and individuals to foster healthier working lives.

Across sessions, it became clear to us that many countries face similar health challenges, with a comment from one of us being *“There was a real sense that everyone was grappling with similar challenges, which made the discussions feel particularly relevant to our own work”*. This shared reality created fertile ground for cross-national dialogue, solution-sharing, and

interdisciplinary exchange. Discussions emphasized the importance of evidence-based, multidisciplinary approaches that integrate perspectives from health, sustainability, and broader social systems when addressing complex and interconnected health-related behaviors. Overall, EHPS 2025 demonstrated how contemporary health challenges of the 21st century are being addressed through equally contemporary interventions. Researchers across sessions showcased how technology-enhanced approaches (e.g., virtual reality, online interventions, and mobile applications) can be used to design effective, evidence-based health interventions. Importantly, sessions highlighted that no one-size-fits-all solution exists. Instead, it was strengthened that effective intervention development requires multidisciplinary collaboration, sensitivity to contextual and cultural factors, and the integration of multiple perspectives to address complex health behaviors in real-world settings.

Our Networking Highlights

At the EHPS 2025 Conference, networking was thoughtfully built into both the CREATE program and the wider conference schedule, giving early career researchers many chances to connect, collaborate, and learn from one another.

Informal conversations continued during coffee breaks and evening gatherings. These coffee breaks also provided an excellent opportunity to network with researchers from various countries and fields, and for those among us who were early-stage PhD students, helped to form a small and supportive community. Several of us connected with other PhD students and academics working on related topics, enabling a fruitful exchange of experiences, inspiring ideas, challenges, and moments of mutual understanding. These interactions helped us build not only meaningful professional connections but also genuine friendships. Amidst the intensity of the conference days, the mindfulness sessions also offered a welcome chance to pause and recharge, which we particularly appreciated.

Throughout the main conference, networking continued in a variety of settings. Poster sessions, symposia, and a particular highlight was the conference dinner in the imposing Martini Church and the lively performance by the EHPS band made for truly unforgettable moments. Beyond the formal sessions, social activities, including a treasure hunt in the heart of Groningen, encouraged informal exchange and strengthened our sense of community. Challenge Night was a memorable highlight. Senior researchers and younger fellows took the stage to share honest and often humorous stories about academic missteps, embarrassing moments, and unexpected setbacks. The evening created a supportive mood that encouraged openness. The message was clear that everyone encounters difficulties in their scientific journey. Special Interest Groups (SIGs) meetings added another valuable opportunity for connection. These sessions allowed attendees with similar research interests to meet and learn about ongoing projects and ways to get involved. For newcomers, the SIG meetings were a helpful entry point into smaller networks within the broader EHPS community.

Networking efforts concluded with the CREATE Meet-The-Expert (MTE) session. Early career researchers met Professor Ellen Smets and Professor Theresa Marteau during the conference, and Associate Professor Justin Presseau joined virtually on September 10th. The conversations were friendly and personal, touching on career paths, collaboration, communication, and the challenges of academic progression. Participants appreciated the chance to ask questions and receive practical advice from experienced colleagues. Networking also extended to reflections on international career pathways. Conversations with peers and senior researchers helped participants to better understand differences across research opportunities in different countries.

Together, the CREATE events and the wider conference activities created a welcoming environment that supported meaningful connections, professional growth, and a strong sense of belonging among early-career researchers in health psychology.

Thank you to the organizers

We would like to sincerely thank the organizers for a well-planned conference. Beyond the smooth logistics, what stood out to us was how the organization actively facilitated both learning and meaningful interaction throughout the event. The structured format ensured that each presenter had the opportunity to discuss their work in depth, which made these sessions feel more engaging and interactive than traditional poster formats. In addition, the organizational support provided (e.g., printing services, accommodation partnerships, EHPS app) contributed to a smooth and inclusive conference experience. The balance between sessions, breaks, and social activities provided space not only to absorb information but also to reflect and connect with others. The conference, the location, which had a local park that offered a perfect opportunity for a brief movement after long periods of sitting, and the excellent catering. Overall, we left the conference not only with new knowledge but also with a stronger sense of belonging within the health psychology community.

Conclusions

In conclusion, participation in the conference was an enriching experience that exceeded our expectations. We are all very grateful for the support provided by these grants, without which we would not have had the opportunity to attend and benefit from such a valuable experience. We sincerely appreciate the opportunity and sincerely hope to take part in future editions of the EHPS conference.

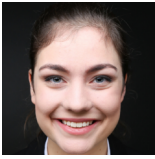


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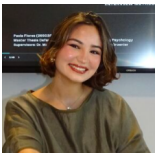
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