



PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE USE

**Multiverse Lab:
New online experience to shape the future of health research in North East
England**

“What is the health research breakthrough you hope to see in your lifetime?”

Residents living north of the Tyne are being asked to take part in a new interactive, online experience called Multiverse Lab that will shape the future of health research in North East England.

Created by the award-winning Unfolding Theatre, Multiverse Lab will gather the opinions of 2,000 people finding what matters to local people when it comes to their health. Visitors will be encouraged to add their voice by recording a message that will be shared with researchers and decision-makers to shape future health research in the region.

The project has been commissioned by VOICE, The National Innovation Centre for Ageing (NICA), National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), Newcastle University and The Newcastle Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

Whilst Multiverse Lab is a playful and fun online experience to take part in, health research is more important than ever in 2020. Many of the commissioning partners are leading ground-breaking and innovative research that are making life better for people living in the North East and beyond. This includes the work of Professor Roy Taylor; whose study into a low-calorie diet approach and its ability to put Type 2 diabetes in remission is informing new treatments for Type 2 diabetes patients. Most recently, NIHR Newcastle In Vitro Diagnostics Co-operative has been involved in national research efforts to accelerate how quickly promising Covid-19 diagnostics make it into real-world use.

Multiverse Lab features the talents of North East musicians and performers including Kay Greyson, Umar Butt, EJ Raymond and Tony Neilson who act as online Guides. The website also provides an interactive map that visitors can explore to discover 100+ years of health breakthroughs, as well as hearing about the cutting-edge research being carried out by researchers in our region. The hope is that this ‘Lab of Many Voices’ will grow over the next three months as more recordings are submitted and visitors can also listen to what health issues matter to other people living in the region. To give as many people as possible the opportunity to contribute their views, accessibility features have been built into the Multiverse Lab, including audio description and BSL interpretation.

Unfolding Theatre has built a reputation for creating innovative, joyful theatre and installations. Multiverse Lab builds upon the success of a similar project in 2018 called Multiverse Arcade, which was part of the Great Exhibition of the North. Multiverse Arcade inspired 20,000 young people to think about the future and provided a platform for them to highlight the change they wanted to see in the world. The creative team for Multiverse Lab

includes designer Imogen Cloet and Teesside-based digital production developers TUCan Studios.

Although originally envisioned as a physical installation that would tour to community venues across the North of Tyne region, Unfolding Theatre is confident that Multiverse Lab will reach thousands of people living in the region.

Annie Rigby, Artistic Director, Unfolding Theatre says:

"Multiverse Lab has been an exciting project for Unfolding Theatre. We were delighted to explore how the approach we developed in Multiverse Arcade could be adapted to gather people's opinions about health research and have real impact. We are acutely aware of the health inequalities that exist in the North East. It is great to be part of a project that seeks to make under-represented voices heard and address the health issues that matter most to our communities."

"The challenge of reimagining the project as an interactive online experience has been something that we have relished. Throughout the process we've balanced thinking about the potential of digital reach, alongside the reality that not everyone has access to technology or is able to fully engage with online experiences. We're keen to ensure that those voices are not missing from our 'lab of many voices'. We are working extensively with partners to create a public engagement plan that will help us to reach 2,000 people that represent the diversity of the people living across the North East."

Professor Lynne Corner, Director of Engagement, UK National Innovation Centre for Ageing, Newcastle University says:

"Now more than ever we need to find ways to involve the public in health research so that it responds to our health needs. The pandemic has brought health inequalities in our local communities into sharp focus. Multiverse Lab is one of a number of ways we are reaching out to individuals and community groups to ensure health research responds to everyone's health needs and interests."

The North of Tyne is home to world-class scientific research that has been helping to improve physical health and wellbeing of the population for many years. We are delighted that Multiverse Lab is able to celebrate and highlight the awe-inspiring efforts of our local scientists and researchers who have committed their lives to advancing healthcare for us all.

We hope the people that take part in Multiverse Lab will not only enjoy the experience but also sign up to VOICE (a network of people across the UK interested in supporting health research) and join us in delivering local health research that makes a difference to all our health and wellbeing."

The free online experience launches on 8th October at <https://www.multiverselab.co.uk>.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

About Unfolding Theatre

Unfolding Theatre has established itself as one of the North East's leading contemporary theatre companies. Led by Artistic Director, Annie Rigby, it has built a reputation for innovative, joyful theatre. The company brings together surprising combinations of people to generate remarkable theatre. Collaborators include artists and people from other walks of life. Together they produce theatre with a wild sense of humour, strength of character and a delight in bringing people together. Described by the Guardian as “thrillingly talented people”, Unfolding Theatre’s productions have consistently attracted critical acclaim and awards. Audiences and participants in their creative processes describe positive, sometimes profound, personal impact. 2017 saw its biggest national tour to date, with the hit show, *Putting the Band Back Together*. www.unfoldingtheatre.co.uk

About the National Innovation Centre for Ageing (NICA) and VOICE

The National Innovation Centre for Ageing (NICA) is a world-leading organisation, created with a £40 million investment from the UK Government and Newcastle University, to help create a world in which we all live better, for longer.

NICA brings together cross-disciplinary professionals and researchers, clinicians, scientists, innovators and technologists working together with the public through our sister organisation VOICE, an international network of “innovation savvy citizens”, in a seamless way, exchanging their intelligence and background.

Together with VOICE we have developed a novel approach named Ageing Intelligence leveraging the experience and expertise of older adults together with other stakeholders while harnessing big data. Our role as a global observatory allows us to be uniquely positioned to help enterprises to capitalise their return-on-society and return-on-business in the longevity economies. You can find out more at www.uknica.co.uk and www.voice-global.org

About the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) is the nation's largest funder of health and care research. The NIHR:

- Funds, supports and delivers high quality research that benefits the NHS, public health and social care
- Engages and involves patients, carers and the public in order to improve the reach, quality and impact of research
- Attracts, trains and supports the best researchers to tackle the complex health and care challenges of the future
- Invests in world-class infrastructure and a skilled delivery workforce to translate discoveries into improved treatments and services
- Partners with other public funders, charities and industry to maximise the value of research to patients and the economy

The NIHR was established in 2006 to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research and is funded by the Department of Health and Social Care. In addition to its national role, the NIHR supports applied health research for the direct and primary benefit of people in low- and middle-income countries, using UK aid from the UK government.

This work uses data provided by patients and collected by the NHS as part of their care and support and would not have been possible without access to this data. The NIHR recognises

and values the role of patient data, securely accessed and stored, both in underpinning and leading to improvements in research and care. www.nihr.ac.uk/patientdata

About Newcastle University

Newcastle University, UK, is a thriving international community of over 29,000 students from over 130 countries.

As a member of the Russell Group of research intensive universities in the UK, Newcastle has a world-class reputation for research excellence in the fields of medicine, science and engineering, social sciences and the humanities.

Its academics are sharply focused on responding to the major challenges facing society today. Our research and teaching are world-leading in areas as diverse as health, culture, technology and the environment.

The Research Excellence Framework 2014 (REF) placed Newcastle University 16th in the UK for Research Power and the vast majority of our research (78%) was assessed to be world-leading or internationally excellent.

Newcastle University is committed to providing our students with excellent, research-led teaching delivered by dedicated and passionate teachers. This is reaffirmed by achieving the best possible outcome - a Gold Award - in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

Contact

For more information interviews, images, filming requests or any other press enquiries please contact: Helen Fussell – email helen.fussell@gmail.com or call 07801 369 778