

Health & Wellbeing Awards 2026: Guidance notes for applicants

1. Introduction

The Royal Society for Public Health's (RSPH) national Health & Wellbeing Awards scheme celebrates and promotes the contribution and positive impact organisations have on the public's health.

There are six categories representing the breadth and reach of public health projects and programmes. See Section 6 for full details of the different categories and their entry criteria.

RSPH believes that improving the public's health and addressing the wider determinants of health requires the commitment of a broad range of organisations and professionals from all sectors. By recognising best practice and innovation, the Health & Wellbeing Awards help to improve the public's health.

The Awards criteria are strongly influenced by:

- The principles of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion¹
- The WHO's Health in all Policies² approach
- Marmot Review: *Fair Society Healthy Lives*³
- NICE Public Health Guidance⁴
- The NHS Five Year Forward View⁵

RSPH is looking for commitment to health improvement from the highest level of leadership through to delivery. To be shortlisted for an Award, organisations must be able to provide evidence of robust strategies that tackle health and wellbeing issues based on principles of best practice (see entry criteria in Section 6 below).

Winners of the Health & Wellbeing Awards will be shortlisted for the prestigious Public Health Minister's Award. A Department of Health Award Committee led by the Minister for Public Health in England will select a winner that will be publicly announced at the RSPH Awards 2026 ceremony on Thursday 26th November 2026. (See Section 7 for more information.)

¹ The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion: <http://www.who.int/healthpromotion/conferences/previous/ottawa/en/>

² Useful reading: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_in_All_Policies; and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-equity-in-all-policies>

³ Marmot Review: *Fair Society Healthy Lives*: <https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review>

⁴ NICE Public Health Guidance, National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, ref PHG, esp. NG44 (Community Engagement): <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/published?type=ph>

⁵ The NHS Five Year Forward view: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/five-year-forward-view/>

2. Why should your organisation or partnership enter the Health & Wellbeing Awards 2026?

The Health & Wellbeing Awards scheme supports and encourages best practice across statutory, community, voluntary and private sectors.

Achieving a Health & Wellbeing Award will provide your organisation with:

- Recognition of your organisation's achievements in public health
- Evidence for external agencies involved in monitoring standards
- Evidence to support tenders and bids for the commissioning of new service provision
- An excellent platform to showcase your initiative
- The opportunity to be considered for the prestigious Public Health Minister's Award
- A winner's logo, certificate and trophy, and case study featured on the RSPH website⁶
- Access to a network of like-minded organisations and individuals

For commissioning organisations: winning a Health & Wellbeing Award will confirm the effectiveness of your commissioning models of health and wellbeing services and will showcase your achievements.

For organisations supporting the design, development and/or implementation of public health initiatives: winning a Health & Wellbeing Award will showcase how far you have integrated health and wellbeing principles (from the Ottawa Charter) and the implementation of evidence-based practice.

For service provider organisations (projects or service delivery): winning a Health & Wellbeing Award is highly valued as evidence of externally verified best practice. It helps reinforce the health and wellbeing principles at the heart of your organisation. It is also an excellent management and organisational development tool, encouraging and supporting reflective practice and the development of appropriate professional skills.

For organisations seeking to showcase their internal workplace health and wellbeing initiatives: winning a Health & Wellbeing Award demonstrates an investment in this area and provides evidence to staff, clients and stakeholders that you are committed to supporting and improving the health and wellbeing of your workforce and take corporate citizenship seriously.

For organisations currently undertaking research and innovating service provision through technology: winning a Health & Wellbeing Award will provide you with a recognised endorsement, which will support the development of your research or product and raise your profile.

All finalists will receive two complementary places to attend the RSPH Awards 2026 ceremony event on Thursday 26th November 2026 where the winners will be announced. They will also have the option to buy additional tickets at a reduced rate.

3. What if my organisation does not win an award?

Whether you win an award or not, participating in the scheme will provide a valuable opportunity for reflection within your organisation on how effective your health improvement interventions are by mapping them against the RSPH criteria.

⁶ www.rsph.org.uk

Those who are shortlisted in each category but do not win an award will receive a finalist's logo and certificate, as well as having a brief case study featured on the RSPH website.

4. Who can apply?

The Health & Wellbeing Awards are free to enter and open to any organisation or partnership which promotes health and wellbeing as part of their commissioning/service provision role. This includes local authorities, health organisations (NHS and private), education providers, social enterprises, community and voluntary organisations, and private sector organisations.

RSPH is supportive of all organisations regardless of setting or size – it is the impact of your health improvement activity that counts. Please note, however, that your organisation must be based in the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) as RSPH is unable to accept international submissions at this time.

RSPH can only accept one application per organisation and your project may only be entered for one category (see Section 6) – with this in mind, please think carefully about which of your projects or programmes would be most suitable and which category it aligns with.

Programmes/projects which are delivered by more than one organisation as a partnership or consortium can also be entered. All organisations involved must be detailed on the application form, however one must act as the lead contact responsible for the entry. Please note that if an organisation enters as part of a joint application, it will be unable to submit another separate one.

RSPH welcomes applicants from previous years to enter again. If you are planning on resubmitting a project from a previous application, please indicate this on the application form. Please also consider who should be the most relevant contact at your organisation for all correspondence and queries, ensuring that their details are submitted as part of the application.

5. What does the assessment process involve?

To win a Health & Wellbeing Award, applicants should provide evidence of best practice in commissioning, development (including research) and/or implementation and impact of activities/projects designed to improve health and wellbeing at a population and community level or within a setting such as the workplace, schools, care homes or local communities.

There will be a lead assessor and a panel of judges for each category. Each panel will comprise of a subject expert panel chair and between three and six peer assessors through which the assessment of each application will take place. The assessment will be made using the set criteria and best practice principles outlined in Section 6.

Following the assessment, each applicant will be recommended or declined for an award. Using a numeric scoring system, each panel will shortlist up to three organisations, one of which will be chosen as the category winner. The panel's decision about each award will be final.

The shortlists will be announced in June and the category winners will be announced and presented with their award at the RSPH Awards 2026 ceremony on Thursday 26th November 2026. The Health & Wellbeing Awards are made every two years.

Please note that due to the high volume of applications received, RSPH is unable to provide feedback to applicants who are not shortlisted.

6. Entry criteria

As mentioned above, the Health & Wellbeing Awards assessment criteria are strongly influenced by the principles of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, NICE Public Health Guidance, the Five Year Forward View, the Marmot Review: *Fair Society Healthy Lives*, as well as the WHO's Health in all Policies approach.

The core principles of the criteria are:

- **Building on national public health policy and evidence:** To reduce inequalities and promote equity, including action on the social, cultural, economic and environmental determinants of health (including poverty)
- **Creating supportive environments:** promotes healthy settings, where people are born, grow, work, live, and age
- **Strengthening and promoting community action:** to empower individuals and communities to gain control over their lives and ensure long-term sustainability through health improvement projects/programmes
- **Implementing population targeted community engagement strategies:** Harnessing public input and opinions in health improvement projects/programmes and policy making, ensuring that the concerted efforts reflect the real priorities and needs of the community
- **Developing a broad understanding of health improvement:** to help individuals make informed choices about their health across the life course.

Furthermore, applications should include information that reflects the following quality elements for effective health improvement/promotion:

- Leadership and innovation
- Stakeholder engagement in design, planning and implementation
- Measurement of impact and effectiveness
- Partnerships to appropriate levels (community or geography)
- Project/programme described is evidence-based or has contributed to the establishment of evidence on its effectiveness in promoting and improving health and wellbeing
- Sustainability, scalability and accountability

Please also consider the following key elements specific to each of the six Award categories:

a) Arts & Health

This award provides an opportunity for organisations whose work has furthered the contribution of the creative arts to health and wellbeing in the following ways:

- High quality creative arts and / or music provision that addresses significant health and wellbeing issues affecting individuals, families and the wider community
- Supporting patients, families and healthcare staff involved in the planning and delivery of creative arts and music provision for health and wellbeing
- Strong partnership working between creative artists, musicians, the NHS, public health professionals and other stakeholders
- Attention given to sensitivity towards issues of cultural diversity and social inclusion
- Helping to reduce health inequalities and increase health equity
- Supporting people to lead healthier lives.

b) Community Health Development

This award is an opportunity for organisations and individuals to gain recognition for their community-led approach to health improvement⁷. It will celebrate the work of a successful place-based initiative that is improving the health of residents and the environment of a community in a way that contributes to long-lasting change. Applications should demonstrate:

- Utilisation of community development approaches
- Communities and local organisations working together to analyse local health needs and prioritise actions to improve health and wellbeing, build resilience and reduce inequalities
- Community structures that are capable of delivering services, representing communities, influencing local/national public services and policy makers
- Comprehensive and integrated place-based approach that demonstrates community engagement and governance.
- Helping to reduce health inequalities and increase health equity
- Supporting people to lead healthier lives.

c) Health & Wellbeing in Workplaces

This award is an opportunity for employers to show their commitment to the health and wellbeing of their workforce through the application of the following principles based on NICE guidance on healthy workplaces⁸:

- Making health and wellbeing an organisational priority – good practice around this includes:
 - a) Having a named senior manager who makes employee health and wellbeing a core priority
 - b) Having an organisational health and wellbeing strategy
 - c) Integrating a health and wellbeing in relevant plans, policies and communications
 - d) Empowering a team of workplace health champions with autonomy and support to design and implement health promoting initiatives
 - e) Measuring the impact of health and wellbeing policies and initiatives.
- Embedding health and wellbeing within the organisation's management processes and procedures, for example by inclusion in the skills and knowledge requirements of line managers and in their performance reviews
- Committing to recognition of both physical health and mental health. This means that as well as promoting healthier behaviours and safety in the workplace, organisation also promote mental health through supportive policies and activities aimed at increasing employee resilience
- Enabling employees at all levels to have an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes around practices that have a direct impact on them, for example by having mechanisms for staff to contribute to organisational plans and policies.
- Helping to reduce health inequalities and increase health equity
- Supporting people to lead healthier lives.

⁷ "Community-led development is an approach to social change that is based on the premise that changing situations of disadvantage and social injustice cannot be achieved by top-down solutions alone. Because of the complexity of the factors that contribute to and perpetuate inequality and disadvantage, including institutional discrimination and the sense of alienation experienced by disadvantaged groups and individuals, change also requires community-led action, whereby those who are affected by social injustice bring their collective experience to bear in defining the issues they face; identifying what needs to change; identifying solutions and acting for and influencing change." (Scottish Community Development Centre, 2008)

⁸ Healthy workplaces: improving employee mental and physical health and wellbeing:
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs147>

d) Healthier Lives

This Award recognises the effectiveness of projects and programmes that support people to lead healthier lives. The greatest influences on people's health and wellbeing come from outside health care, including factors such as education, employment, housing, and community. This award recognises the effectiveness of projects and programmes that improve the lives of those experiencing health inequalities, support people to lead healthier lives, increase life expectancy and improve health behaviours. Good health is an asset. It is necessary for a prosperous and flourishing society. The greatest influences on our wellbeing and health are factors such as education, good employment and safe and secure housing, and the extent to which community facilitates healthy behaviours and social connection.

Applications should demonstrate:

- The implementation of approaches which support the reduction of health inequalities, increase health equity and increase healthy life expectancy
- Changing the way with talk about wellbeing so that the focus is on health as an asset, rather than ill health as a burden
- Promotion of strategies that support everyone to live a healthier life
- Support for local action to address inequalities in health
- Impact as to what you have achieved as a result of collaboration and partnership working
- Beneficiary and community impact
- Improving health across the life course within communities or settings such as the workplace, schools or care settings. This may include changes to the natural or built environment which encourage healthy behaviours
- Implementation of community/population approaches to health improvement, including increasing physical activity, promoting healthy food and weight, reducing smoking, alcohol and substance misuse, and promoting good mental health or sexual health
- How health inequalities have been addressed through approaches such as equality impact assessment (EqIA) and/or working with groups represented within the equality act as demonstrating one or more protected characteristics.

e) Health at Every Age Award

This award celebrates programmes that improve the health and wellbeing of a specific age group, either through improving their health in the here and now or protecting their future health. We expect to see tailored interventions and programmes of work that relate specifically to at least one of the five stages of the life course articulated in The Marmot Review 2010 and which contribute to the goal of health equity in each of these life phases.

Submissions should demonstrate:

- Novel approaches to keeping populations healthy in the here and now, as well as in creating opportunities for individuals to be healthy in the future. This could include work focused on pre-natal or post-natal care, programmes of work to improve the mental health and emotional wellbeing of young people, health screening initiatives for older age groups and community-focused approaches to improving health and wellbeing of a targeted population group
- As with all categories, we would expect to see evidence of the needs assessment underpinning your intervention and we encourage approaches that can demonstrate effective co-production
- Applications should demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of age as a protected characteristic, as described within the Equality Act 2010. This understanding will also be reflected in the design, delivery and evaluation of the programmes or interventions.
- Helping to reduce health inequalities and increase health equity
- Supporting people to lead healthier lives.

f) Mental Health & Wellbeing

The focus of this award is the promotion of mental health and the prevention of mental illness across the life course. Projects/programmes should demonstrate:

- A clear understanding of mental health and wellbeing and the importance of addressing both physical and mental health and wellbeing
- A targeted approach to promoting mental health, preventing mental illness or suicide, or improving the lives of people experiencing mental health problems
- The appropriate use of measures to evaluate mental health and wellbeing and the impact of your initiative.
- Helping to reduce health inequalities and increase health equity
- Supporting people to lead healthier lives.

7. The Public Health Minister's Award

Established in 2014, the Public Health Minister's Award recognises excellence and innovation of public health schemes delivered by organisations operating in England across all sectors.

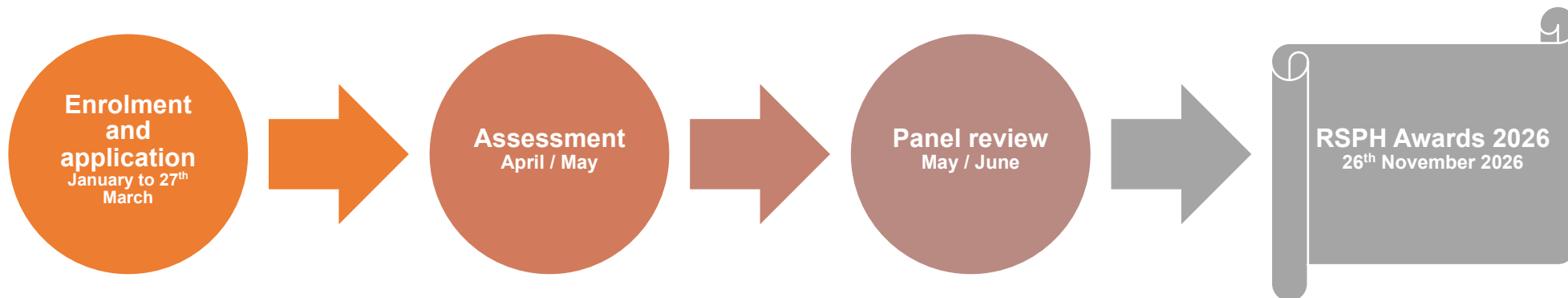
The winning organisation will be announced alongside those of the Health & Wellbeing Awards at the RSPH Awards 2026 ceremony.

Entering the Health & Wellbeing Awards is the only route to the prestigious Public Health Minister's Award which is given by England's Public Health Minister– it cannot be entered individually or separately.

Eligible winners of the Health & Wellbeing Awards will be recommended for the Public Health Minister's Award for consideration by the Public Health Minister. As the Public Health Minister and the Department of Health are responsible for public health in England only, unfortunately winning organisations based solely in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland are not eligible for the Award.

The Public Health Minister's Award is normally awarded to only one organisation annually; however, a joint award can be made to up to two organisations at the Public Health Minister's discretion.

8.The Process



Categories	Assessment	Selection of winners	Awards ceremony
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Arts & Health•Health at Every Age•Community Health Development•Health & Wellbeing in Workplaces•Healthier Lives• Mental Health & Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Submissions will be assessed on their application and supporting documentation.•Assessment panels will meet and undertake moderation to ensure consistency and fairness in the review of submissions.•Up to 3 organisations may be shortlisted for each category award.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Shortlisted applicants will be considered for the category award at a review panel including an independent assessor and senior officer of RSPH and the category lead assessor.•Category award winners will be chosen at this point.•All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application (shortlisted or unsuccessful)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Winners will be announced at the RSPH Awards event•Each shortlisted organisation will be given two complimentary tickets•Further tickets will be available

9. Application / evidence requirements

Your submission must include an application form with all fields completed and three pieces of evidence that demonstrate the following:

- A. Evidence of outcomes achieved.** Please include an item which supports the achievement of the outcomes described in Q12 of the application form. Examples of evidence are evaluation, activity or impact reports.
- B. Public Health objectives of the organisation.** If you are a sole trader, you may submit a description of organisation activities that specifies what you do and why. If you are a commercial company, you may submit your Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy or Occupational Health / Workplace Wellbeing Strategy or Policy. Please indicate in the application form the relevant pages or sections of the document which your programme supports.
- C. Testimonial for the applying organisation.** This could be from a partner organisation, a commissioner/funder, sponsor or regulatory body.

Examples of accepted evidence include reports, publications, presentations, video and audio files. However, please note that **you may only submit three items**, so please consider carefully which will support your submission most effectively.

Please ensure that all supporting evidence is clearly identifiable as belonging to your application either in the file names or in the documents themselves.

10. Enter now

The Health & Wellbeing Awards 2026 will open on Monday 26th January and **close at 5pm on Friday 27th March 2026**. Applications received after this date will not be considered.

To enter, please visit <https://www.rsph.org.uk/membership/rsph-awards.html> to register and request your application pack. The pack will consist of the application form and these guidance notes to support its completion.

Completed applications should be sent to awards@rsph.org.uk. RSPH recommends that you use WeTransfer (<https://wetransfer.com>) to do this. It is a free-to-use service that enables the sharing of files of up to 2Gb.

If your entry is shortlisted, RSPH would like to use some of the information provided in this application form in a case study to be published on the RSPH website. Therefore, if there is anything you would prefer was not to be made public, please ensure that you indicate this clearly where appropriate. RSPH may also require supporting images for promotional purposes, however you will be contacted regarding those separately.

11. Queries and further information

If you have any queries about the awards or the application process, please email awards@rsph.org.uk