

How to Create a Research Briefing or Policy Briefing



A short guide to the purpose of a research/ policy brief, the contexts in which you might create one, and top tips on how to start developing one for your work.

What a briefing is for

A *research briefing* or *policy briefing* is a short, standalone document that distils evidence for a particular reader and purpose. It is written to be read quickly and acted on. At NCCH we use briefings often – whether it be to prepare speakers for an APPG roundtable, to put a case in front of a civil servant, or to summarise research from the [Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities](#) programme. A good briefing provides a busy reader with the information they need to understand an issue or to make a decision, without necessitating that they go back to the underlying research.

What every briefing has in common

Whatever the audience, the craft is broadly the same:

- **Keep it short.** Most briefings run to two to four pages. Length is a discipline rather than a limit, as it forces you to decide exactly what matters.
- **Lead from the top.** The key messages come first, not last. Assume a reader may only take in the first half-page, and write accordingly.
- **Write for someone specific.** A briefing is pitched at a named audience at a particular moment, not at ‘anyone who might be interested’.
- **Use plain English.** Define or avoid technical terms – including ‘creative health’ – and make good use of headings, white space and, where it earns its place, one clear figure.
- **Keep it focused.** Instead of briefing on lots of topics at once and muddling up your message, consider creating different briefings for different purposes.

How your audience changes the briefing

The main difference between a *research briefing* and a *policy briefing* is not length or format — it is what the reader wants from you. Think: ‘what do I want this reader to know, and what do I want them to do?’ This tells you where your briefing sits on a spectrum from evidence-led to ask-led.

Research briefings (evidence-led)

Here the reader wants an overview of what the evidence shows from a specific research programme. The writer typically leads with the findings, allows a little room for method and nuance, and lets the implications follow. Depending on the audience of the briefing, it may or may not include a written ‘ask’.

Example:

As Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities moved towards its final year, the programme team wanted to increase their focus on dissemination and policy impact. As a first step, we created a 'policy placemat' (figure 1) – a type of briefing more commonly used in Australia and Canada which entails presenting information on one A5-sheet of paper, for use at in-person meetings. A copy of the briefing can be placed at each seat, much like how you would find a placemat for your food.

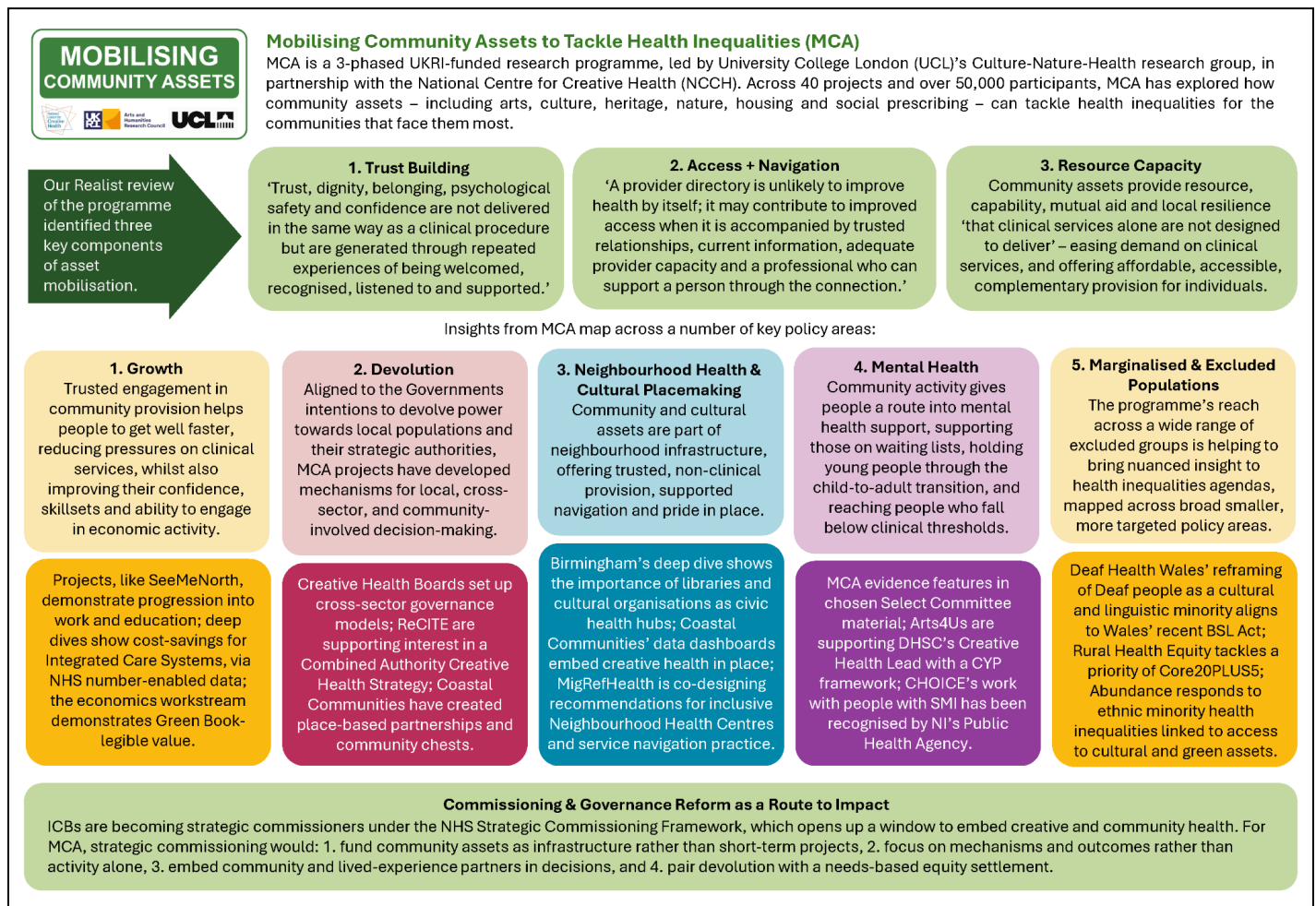


Figure 1: A policy placemat from the *Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities* programme, created to brief a group of advisors on the team's plans for policy dissemination

The target audience for our briefing was our group of advisors. The placemat provided them with a high-level overview of findings from across the seven year programme, along with an introduction to how the work might map across a range of national policy priorities. It served the purpose of stimulating conversation about our plan for influencing policy, helping us to gain expert advice and adjust our plan ahead of implementation.

Policy briefings (ask-led)

Here the reader is a decision-maker with little time and competing demands. The briefing leads with what the writer wants them to do and explains why it matters now. The evidence is still there – often coming from a broader range of sources – but the briefing connects this explicitly to a live policy agenda and evidence is arranged tightly in support of recommendations.

Example:

NCCH's [Creative Health and Neighbourhood Care](#) briefing is a good example of a policy briefing. It sets creative health within the neighbourhood health agenda and makes the case for specific action. This briefing was created following a Roundtable with the [All-Party Parliamentary Group on Creative Health](#). The roundtable and briefing were designed to show the relevance of creative health to the Government's recently published [10 Year Health Plan for England](#), specifically focusing on its goals for neighbourhood healthcare and 'moving care closer to home'. The roundtable carefully balanced the voices of policymakers, health leaders, creative health practitioners, and people with lived experience of creative health's impact. The evidence used throughout the briefing was designed to balance these diverse voices, whilst creating a coherent and compelling narrative about the place of creative health in neighbourhood healthcare.

What to include

However you pitch it, a briefing usually carries similar building blocks, such as:

1. **Title:** often followed by a one-line summary of the message.
2. **Key messages:** three to five points that carry the whole briefing.
3. **Context:** why this, and why now.
4. **Evidence or findings:** kept tight, to support the message.
5. **Recommendations or implications:** tailored around the powers of target audiences.
6. **Signposting:** contact details or further reading, for those who are interested.

Here are some top tips when you are developing your briefing:

- **Lead with the point, not the background:** the reader can reach the context if they want it.
- **Function over form:** the layout can be a good way of impressing upon an audience or adding a welcomed dose of creativity, however, it should not come at the cost of important insights or the clarity of information.
- **Make accessible and reuse:** a good briefing can become great source material for future signposting. At NCCH, we often see our briefings find new and unexpected uses. Having a link readily available makes it easier to share the resource to new audiences, when stakeholders mention the topic in passing at meetings or events.

Examples of creative health briefings

Examples from NCCH

For more examples, visit our dedicated page for policy briefings and evidence submissions:

<https://ncch.org.uk/resources/briefings>

Examples from Across the Field

These examples come from a range of different stakeholders from the UK, demonstrating the breadth of approaches to research and policy briefings:

Developing creative health provision

(2023) University of Huddersfield

<https://research.hud.ac.uk/media/assets/document/hhs/Developing-Creative-Health-Provision.pdf>

Mobilising arts and creativity to improve health and wellbeing

(2021) Fuse - Centre for Translational Research in Public Health

<https://fuse.ac.uk/research/briefs/Mobilising%20arts%20and%20creativity%20to%20improve%20health%20and%20wellbeing.pdf>

Talent25 Research Briefs

(2025) Professor Bertha Ochieng, De Montfort University

<https://talent25.org.uk/programme-impact/#briefs>

Using Arts and Creativity to Improve health and wellbeing, education and social outcomes

(2025) Bradford Health Determinants Research Collaborative (HDRC), including University of York, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, and National Institute for Health Research

<https://zenodo.org/records/15533504>

The benefits of creative activities for the wellbeing of children and young people

(2026) NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) North East and North Cumbria

<https://arc-nenc.nihr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Creative-Health-Evidence-Briefing-FINAL.pdf>

SENsory Atelier: Transforming SEND Education through Arts and Culture

(2025) Marianne Scahill-Pape, Lisa Jacques, Abi Steady, University of Leicester Institute for Policy

https://figshare.le.ac.uk/articles/report/SENsory_Atelier_Transforming_SEN_D_Education_through_Arts_and_Culture/30836330?file=60270053

Arts and Cultural Engagement as a Vital Public Health Asset

(2025) Creative Synthesist

https://www.creativesynthesist.co.uk/_files/ugd/81a11e_d15feaf6fb1e4138a4ae3e1bdf6327bd.pdf

Social prescribing: arts, heritage, and culture

(2023) National Association for Social Prescribing (NASP)

<https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/media/dxslrxu/nasp-briefing-arts-culture-heritage.pdf>

UK Arts & Health: The Time is Now

(2026) Jameel Arts & Health Lab

https://crooked-antechinus.files.svdcn.com/production/images/April-20-Post-Event-Roundtable-Brief_Final-1-1.pdf?dm=1780476830

The Arts, Health & Wellbeing: Why the arts make us happier and healthier

(2018) Cultural Learning Alliance

<https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Arts-Health-and-Wellbeing-Briefing.pdf>

The Art of Belonging: Supporting social integration of young forced migrants in urban contexts through cultural place-making

(2022) Professor Joanna McIntyre, University of Nottingham Institute for Policy and Engagement

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/policy-and-engagement/documents/policy-briefs/policy-brief-migrant-inclusion.pdf>

Briefing examples from Parliament

These examples do not focus on creative health or health humanities, but they are a good example of how parliamentary librarians and POST librarians make sense of Government policies and laws on behalf of public, professional and media audiences.

Examples from the House of Commons:

Adult social care reform in England (2026) David Foster

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-12218/CBP-12218.pdf>

Maternity services in England (2026) Manjit Gheera and Rachael Harker

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-10447/CBP-10447.pdf>

Infants, Parents and Carers Bill 2026-27 (2026) David Foster

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-11085/CBP-11085.pdf>

Health bill 2026-27: Progress of the bill (2026) Devyani Gajjar, Bukky Balogun, Manjit Gheera and Thomas Powell

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-11078/CBP-11078.pdf>

Examples from the House of Lords:

Health Bill (2026) Eve Collyer Merritt

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/LLN-2026-0052/LLN-2026-0052.pdf>

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (2025) Heather Evennett

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/LLN-2025-0018/LLN-2025-0018.pdf>

Creative Education Access Bill [HL] (2026) Isabelle Kemp

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/LLN-2026-0044/LLN-2026-0044.pdf>

Examples from POST:

Geographical differences in healthy life expectancy (2025) Laura Steel, Sonja Stiebahl and Clare Lally

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PB-0067/POST-PB-0067.pdf>

Trust, public engagement and UK Parliament (2025) Lily Gibbs and Natasha Mutebi

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PB-0066/POST-PB-0066.pdf>

Men's Health (2023) David A. Ramsay and Sarah Bunn

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PB-0056/POST-PB-0056.pdf>

Evaluating the integration of health and social care (2020) Dr Janet Harris and Dr Rowena Bermingham

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PB-0035/POST-PB-0035.pdf>

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