

A randomised controlled trial assessing effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of a primary care intervention to promote engagement in an online health community for adults with troublesome asthma: work in progress

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BACKGROUND

- 5.4 million adults in the UK receive treatment for asthma, with over 2 million experiencing suboptimal control of symptoms.
- This increases risk of an asthma attack and results in poorer quality of life, increased healthcare costs, and increased use of healthcare services.
- Supported self-management is an important element of asthma care that can reduce healthcare costs and improve quality of life.
- Online health communities (OHCs), which provide access to lay health advice and peer support, are increasingly popular, but there is little evidence on how they can be promoted in primary care.
- While qualitative evidence suggests benefits, robust evidence on promoting OHCs in primary care and improving clinical outcomes in asthma remains limited.

OBJECTIVE

- To test the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of an intervention to promote engagement in an OHC for adults with troublesome asthma, delivered in primary care.
- **Hypothesis:** engagement with the asthma OHC on an *ad hoc* basis over 12 months following promotion by a primary care clinician will improve asthma self-management and reduce healthcare use.
- Primary outcome: Asthma Control Test (ACT) score.
- Secondary outcomes: asthma exacerbations, healthcare use, quality of life, anxiety and depression scores, OHC engagement.

RRDNs	Practices	Surveys Sent	Eligible and Interested	Contactable Participants	Recruited	Withdrawn	Recruitment Rate (%)
East Midlands	15	11832	367	297	114	1	38.4
East of England	29	35941	1167	940	339	2	42.4
North Cumbria	14	8317	272	218	46	2	21.1
North East	7	3379	226	171	76	0	44.4
Northeast London	19	9618	221	179	77	4	43.0
Total	84	69087	2253	1805	712	9	39.4

Table 1. Table of practice involvement, survey distribution, survey response, and participant recruitment divided by Regional Research Delivery Networks (RRDN)

TRIAL DESIGN

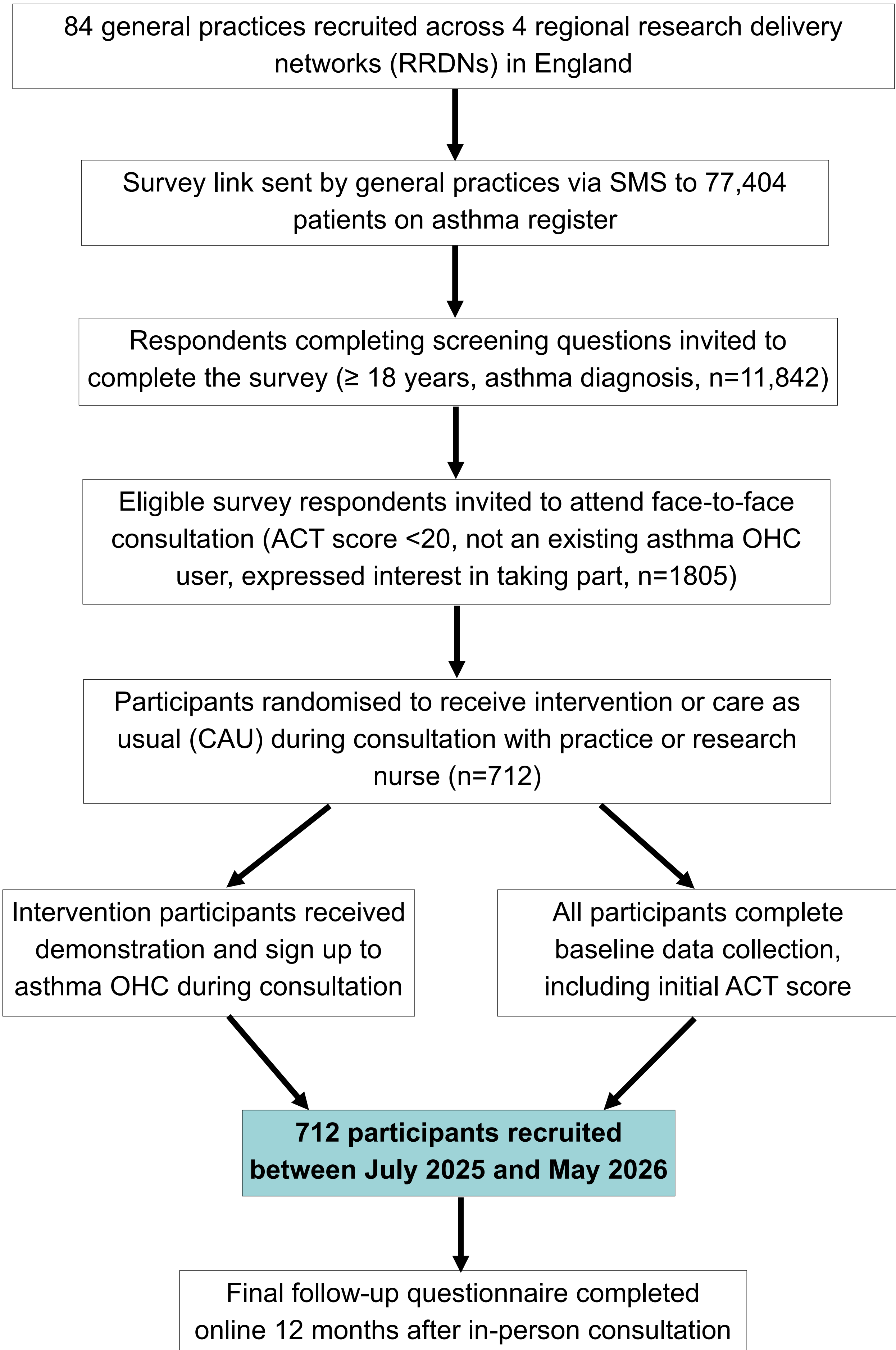


Figure 1. Flow of trial processes from general practice recruitment through to end of participant data collection.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

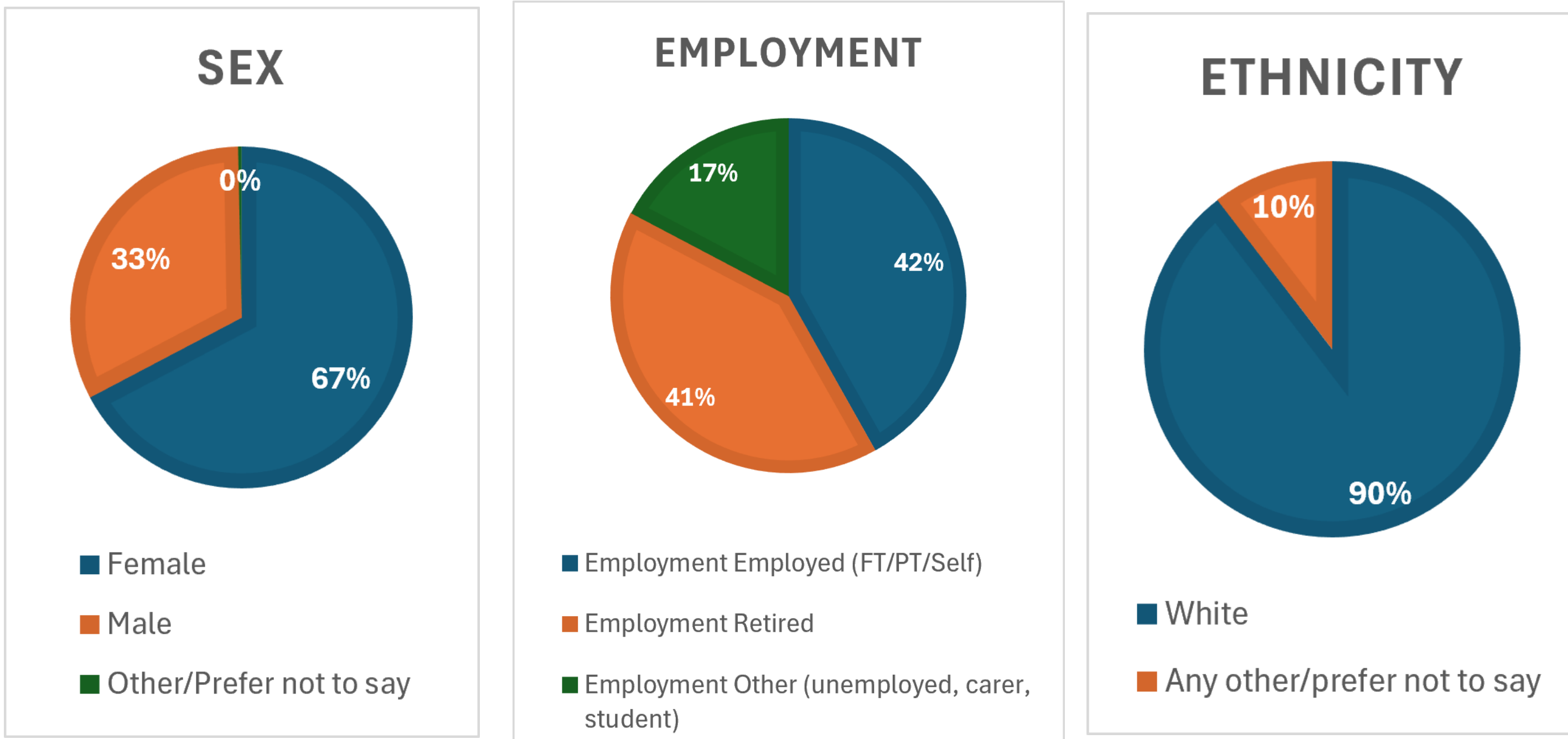


Figure 2. Demographic characteristics of trial participants (n=712). Values are percentages. Mean (SD) age 58 (14) years.

CURRENT PROGRESS

- Recruitment concluded in May of 2026 with an overall recruitment rate of 39.4%. Data collection will be completed in June 2027.
- Participants were demographically less diverse than in previous feasibility study conducted in London, reflecting the prominent representation of participants from the East of England.
- Exit interviews with nurses delivering trial consultations showed positive experiences with asthma OHC platform.
- Current 12-month follow-up rate of 84%, showing promise for rigorous statistical analyses.
- Asthma OHC engagement data from hosting platform will be collected for intervention participants and used to assess network dynamics, user engagement, and clinical outcomes.
- **Possible implications:**
 - Potential for reduced asthma symptoms and better quality of life for asthma patients.
 - Potential for improved self-management and reduced healthcare use and costs.
 - Asthma OHC engagement could be incorporated into primary care and self-management for asthma patients.

