

Case study: Ovacome

August 2021

Ovarian cancer mainly affects women over 55 and early diagnosis is key to effective treatment. Ovacome is a national charity providing support to anyone affected by ovarian cancer. They provide several services including a telephone helpline, online forums and support groups, regional events, leaflets, resources and a newsletter. They have just under 4,000 members and support around 18,000 people each year. They aim to reduce isolation, promote knowledge and help people feel supported.

Ovacome received £86,495 through the Coronavirus Community Support Fund (CCSF). The CCSF is a funding programme supported by a grant of £200 million from Government, distributed by The National Lottery Community Fund, to help organisations in England respond to the COVID-19 crisis and increase community support to people affected by the pandemic.

How was the CCSF grant used?

Ovacome has been concerned about low awareness of ovarian cancer risks amongst some ethnic groups. Partly this is due to a lack of tailored information in different languages but is also caused by cultural taboos and reluctance to seek help on sensitive subjects. Ovacome is keen to establish more services and create active communities outside of London.



We were most concerned about members and local communities from under-represented groups ... being extra affected by the pandemic, because they may not have been able to access knowledge about signs and symptoms anyway. And then all the barriers that come up as a result of the pandemic.” – Staff member

In early 2020, Ovacome was trying to tackle both issues through a pilot 'regional hub' in the West Midlands, which was focused on outreach and partnership with ethnic minority organisations. The pandemic forced Ovacome to suspend this work and switch their focus to making all services available online and over the phone. Simultaneously it made problems in the community more urgent by creating new barriers to accessing GPs and NHS services.

Ovacome used the CCSF grant to restart its work in the West Midlands and develop written and video

guides and resources in six community languages (Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi, Arabic, Polish and Urdu). Through the process of creating these, Ovacome established stronger links with these communities and helped connect people in support networks. Ovacome also used their grant to set up community language phone lines and run an awareness raising campaign in November 2020.

Quick facts:

Grant period: **June-December 2020**

Around **900 people** engaged with the new resources by early 2021, most of whom were in touch with the charity **for the first time**.

Three key messages:

- 1 The resources created through this project are now available for ongoing use across the UK so will have a valuable legacy. See the [Ovacome website](#)
- 2 To create resources, Ovacome established partnerships with local community groups. They hope these will be sustained so they continue to reach more people who need support.
- 3 The process taught Ovacome a lot about how best to engage different communities and they hope to start working in other regions as soon as possible.

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What difference did the CCSF grant make?

For people and communities

Ovacome's work supports people and communities in two main ways. Firstly, by raising awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer, diagnosis and treatment options, they aim to promote knowledge and improve the experience of anyone affected by ovarian cancer. Secondly, by connecting people affected by the disease, they create communities of support that help people cope by giving them someone to talk to and practical advice.

The CCSF grant helped Ovacome to adapt these services so people could keep benefiting from them during the pandemic. This meant they reached more people who needed support and in particular reached people in underserved communities. The new resources created through the grant also helped Ovacome engage NHS services and support them to work better with patients who do not speak English. This has included web-based meetings between Ovacome, clinicians and patients conducted in community languages, which ensured people get tailored and sensitive information that they understand. Meanwhile some of the volunteers and other partners who worked with Ovacome on the project have used their new knowledge to become 'ambassadors' in their communities by speaking at online events and other forums, thereby raising awareness further.



I've really appreciated the support. Just being able to see other people, talk to other people. Especially the way this year's been, not being able to get out. – Beneficiary

Key legacy from the experience:

Ovacome's community volunteers contributed to content, translation and dissemination of the new materials and demonstrated the principle of "nothing for us without us" in action. Through this project Ovacome has learnt how to effectively co-produce resources with communities, which will shape how they approach all future work.

Want to know more?

Website: <https://www.ovacome.org.uk/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/Ovacome>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ovacome/>

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCO7_bZ-f5dRmccXeC5s2tkw

For volunteers

Ovacome used the task of creating the guides as an opportunity to engage partners like Near Neighbours, Sampad and Yemeni Community Association. Thanks to the CCSF grant Ovacome were able to offer financial support to encourage partners to get involved.

Around 20 volunteers worked on the guides and were recruited through various routes but mainly through word of mouth. Many of the volunteers have personal experience of cancer and felt passionate about the project. They reported feeling uplifted by the opportunity to do something that addressed a clear need in their communities and pride in the quality of the work. One volunteer used her experience with Ovacome to help get a new job in NHS health promotion and is now using the resources as part of her work.



I ordered some of the leaflets as well in all the different languages ... because I work for six GP practices now I can take it along with me wherever I'm going ... so it's been useful.
– Volunteer

For the organisation and its staff

The CCSF grant benefited Ovacome as an organisation in several ways. Ovacome used the CCSF grant to recruit a new staff member to assist with the West Midlands work. She was looking for a career change from the business sector and has since stayed with Ovacome in a policy role.

As a relatively small organisation, the grant made an important contribution to their finances and put them on a surer footing during a difficult year.

The project has helped Ovacome get a better understanding of the needs of different communities and how to engage with them. Staff say that what they have learned from the project is helping them to feel more confident about reaching out to different communities and challenge inequalities.



Organisationally, we are getting better at providing inclusive services, we have gained so much during this work and it's been a massive learning curve. – Staff member