

Health Secretary welcomes review findings into Sexual Health Services in Wales

The review was undertaken by Public Health Wales following consultations with a wide-range of stakeholders and overseen by the Sexual Health Programme Board.

The report acknowledges the significant contribution sexual health services in Wales make in the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections and in providing contraception.

The report does however highlight inconsistencies in sexual health service provision across Wales, including services provided by primary care, and accessibility to, and availability of, abortion services.

It also found that attendances at sexual health clinics have doubled in the last five years, which is putting pressure on existing service models.

Welcoming the report, the Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“My vision for sexual health services in Wales is one of modern services meeting the needs of all users. I am pleased to see the report praises the commitment of the sexual health workforce in Wales and the progress that has been made.

“We’ve made tremendous strides in recent years in reducing teenage pregnancies, but the burden of sexually transmitted infections remains considerable and it’s clear from this report that more needs to be done, particularly in respect of access and inequality.

The report’s recommendations include:

- Health boards to develop an understanding of the needs of their population and have a system in place to deliver services to vulnerable groups
- Considering amending the legal framework to allow patients to take medication for termination of pregnancy at home
- Enhancing the role of for primary care and pharmacies in sexual health provision, for example delivering over the counter oral contraception
- Health boards look at other opportunities to extend provision of Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC) in both primary and secondary care.

The Health Secretary added:

“We wanted an honest picture of services and now we have one to inform improvements. We will work with stakeholders to develop an implementation plan, and the Sexual Health Programme Board will remain in place to support and oversee the implementation of the recommendations over a two-year period.

“I’d like to thank the Public Health Wales reviewers for the collaborative way in which they undertook the review, and to all those who contributed to it.”

Dr Giri Shankar, Professional Lead Consultant for Health Protection at Public Health Wales, who oversaw the review on behalf of the organisation, said:

“While huge progress has been made in addressing teenage pregnancies, much work remains to be done on accessibility to services, risky behaviours, modernising information gathering systems, access to abortion services and moving care closer to patients.

“We are confident that the implementation plan coming out of the review will provide a great opportunity to make further progress in these key areas of need, particularly by harnessing recent advances in technology.

“We are grateful to Welsh Government for asking us to undertake this much-needed review of sexual health services in Wales. It was a collaboration between all partners involved in sexual health provision and has yielded rich information on the state of services in Wales.

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[Thousands in Wales missing out on help with Council Tax](#)

Finance Secretary, Mark Drakeford today urged people across Wales to check whether they were aware of the discounts and reductions they could be entitled to.

You may be entitled to pay less council tax if:

- you believe you live on a low-income
- you live alone, or with people / children who do not pay council tax
- you are a student
- you are disabled
- you are mentally impaired
- your property is empty.

The Welsh Government is working with local authorities and third sector organisations including Citizens Advice and Age Cymru, to make people more aware of the range of support available to help them pay their Council Tax bills. A new awareness raising campaign will be launched and a simple eligibility checker is available online. Reminders about the support available will also be sent to householders.

Professor Drakeford said,

“We know that thousands of households across Wales are not receiving the support they could be entitled to with their Council Tax. There are many discounts, reductions and exemptions available and these are all listed on our new website. A few minutes of your time, could mean significant savings to your outgoings.”

Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services, Alun Davies, said,

“Making Council Tax fairer is an essential part of our plans to reform local government in Wales.

“We’ve worked hard to ensure vulnerable households in Wales continue to receive Council Tax support as part of our national Council Tax Reduction Scheme. However, many households aren’t aware they could be eligible for the scheme or entitled to other discounts or exemptions. I would encourage everyone to check the website to see whether they could be paying less council tax.”

A full list of eligibility criteria is available on the Welsh Government website at gov.wales/counciltaxhelp

[Extra funding to help Mudiad Meithrin](#)

contribute to 1 million Welsh speakers

Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning, Eluned Morgan visited Cylch Meithrin Pont-y-pwl, a member of Mudiad Meithrin, on Monday 16 April to hear more about the work from Dr Gwenllian Lansdown Davies, Mudiad Meithrin Chief Executive.

The organisation will receive £3.031m per year for the next two financial years. This comprises £2.031m of annual funding and an extra £1m per year as part of the budget deal between Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Government.

The extra funding will allow Mudiad Meithrin to:

- offer additional support to establish new settings in priority locations across Wales where there is lack of Welsh medium provision
- develop alternative models for new cylchoedd meithrin
- strengthen Mudiad Meithrin's regional and national structures to support its increased membership.

Torfaen has been identified as one of the priority areas for development of new provision as part of this work. Mudiad Meithrin is working closely with local authorities and other partners to ensure additional capacity developed over the coming years is targeted effectively and enabling as many children as possible to start on the journey to bilingualism.

Announcing the funding, Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning, Eluned Morgan said:

“Reaching one million Welsh speakers by 2050 is a very ambitious target. Education, and early years education in particular, is key to this and this is why we have set targets to expand Welsh-medium provision by 40 Welsh-medium nursery groups by 2021 and by 150 Welsh medium nursery groups over the next decade.

“As the Welsh-medium early years and childcare specialist, Mudiad Meithrin has a vital role to play so I am delighted to announce this extra funding to help them contribute to this target.”

Dr Gwenllian Lansdown Davies, Mudiad Meithrin Chief Executive added:

“The additional investment by Welsh Government will enable Mudiad Meithrin to open more Welsh-medium childcare provision – a key element of the government's language strategy, ‘Cymraeg 2050’. The early years is integral to the success of that strategy and this investment highlights its importance.”

[TrawsCymru extends and improves vital Aberystwyth to Cardiff service](#)

TrawsCymru is the Welsh Government funded, long-distance bus network for Wales comprising a number of routes, the latest of which will connect Aberystwyth with Carmarthen and Port Talbot before continuing on to Cardiff.

Before the end of last year, Ken Skates announced additional funding to local authorities to enable them to introduce a package of improvements to the TrawsCymru bus and coach connections linking Aberystwyth with Carmarthen, Swansea and Cardiff.

Following feedback from passengers, the service has introduced a modern wheelchair accessible high floor coach on the daily Aberystwyth to Cardiff long distance service, which will provide a more comfortable journey for longer distance passengers, complemented by the introduction of a shorter route which will offer quicker 'end to end' journey times.

The service will be operating a more comfortable long distance coach equipped with coach style seating, on board toilet and free WiFi.

Furthermore, TrawsCymru Day Ticket will be valid on the service, so people can visit Cardiff for the day from Aberystwyth and return for £10 (adults) and £7 (young persons). Also, the Welsh concessionary travel passes valid for use on the service.

This coach service will also call at Port Talbot Rail Bus Interchange at the Parkway station.

A daily TrawsCymru T1S bus link will also be maintained between Aberystwyth, Lampeter, Carmarthen and Swansea with additional short journeys between Carmarthen, Cross Hands and Swansea being operated during the day (weekdays and Saturdays)

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“In 2016, when we took on the running of this route, we intended to not just maintain the continuation of this critical service, but to strengthen it.

“We have listened to passengers and have introduced coaches onto this key route, and have significantly reduced journey times. Along with the additional stop in Port Talbot, this long-standing service will add more value to already vital public transport links to and from rural Wales, giving passengers extra choice on this key strategic route.”

Further information on the TIC service including a timetable, when it becomes available, can be found at www.trawscymru.info (external link).

[Give the gift of life – become a living donor](#)

In Wales, 31 people became living donors in 2017-18 and around 1,100 living kidney transplants take place in the UK each year.

Kidneys are the most common organ donated by living people; however there are approximately 5000 people waiting for a new kidney on the transplant list in the UK.

A successful transplant from a living donor (rather than one from someone who has died) is the best treatment for most people with kidney failure. This offers the recipient the best opportunity of success as 82% of kidneys donated by a living donor will still be working after 10 years. This compares with 75% for kidneys transplanted from deceased donors.

Other advantages include:

- reduced waiting time as transplants can take place sooner, when the intended recipient is healthier, aiding recovery
- the possibility of avoiding dialysis altogether, increasing the recipients life-span following a transplant.

Other organs that can be donated by a living person include part of a liver, a segment of a lung and part of the small bowel. The Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“Living donation plays a vital role in saving and transforming lives, offering more patients with kidney failure, and other diseases the possibility of a successful transplant.

“Often, living donors are close relatives or friends but you can still donate an organ to someone you do not know.

“I’m proud that we are leading the way on organ donation in Wales, but while there are people dying waiting for a transplant, we must work harder to further increase awareness of the possibility of living donation.”

Mike Stephens, a Consultant Transplant and Organ Retrieval Surgeon at University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff has first hand experience of how organ donation transforms lives. He said:

“Donating a kidney is a very personal decision and is not something everyone feels comfortable with. Only you can decide if it’s something you would like to volunteer to do.

“Healthy people who wish to help a loved one or a stranger with kidney disease may volunteer to give a kidney.

“Generally people who receive a kidney from a living donor live for longer than those who receive one from a deceased donor and much longer than they would be expected to live if they did not receive a kidney transplant.

“Living kidney donation allows the operation to be planned at a time that is convenient for the recipient, donor and clinical team.”

Ann Marsden, who works as a Living Donor Transplant Co-ordinator at the University Hospital of Wales, has helped to facilitate over 500 life-saving kidney transplants involving living donors over the past 16 years. She said:

“I’ve seen how this selfless act of giving can transform the life of someone suffering with kidney disease.

“Living kidney donation can often be the best long-term form of treatment for a patient with kidney disease, especially if the transplant can be performed before the need for kidney dialysis.

“The operation success rate is excellent and patients receiving a kidney from a living donor can expect to benefit from a fully functioning kidney for 15 to 20 years on average.”