

Fresh actions set out to treat neurological conditions in Wales

The plan, first published in May 2014 focuses on raising awareness of neurological conditions, ensuring quick diagnosis of patients, providing fast and effective care, and helping people live with their condition. The plan also aims to improve the information available on neurological conditions and treatment; as well as help target research into causes, treatments and cures.

There are more than 100,000 people in Wales affected with a long term neurological condition. Conditions range from cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis to epilepsy.

Progress has been made against the priorities originally set in 2013 – 2017 detailed in the Annual Statement of Progress – Neurological Conditions published in March 2017. This includes a reduction in the average time an individual spends in hospital; falling from 6.4 days in 2010-11 to 4.2 days in 2015-16.

The length of stay following an elective admission has also reduced from 3.9 days to 2.2 days; a similar reduction has been seen for emergency admissions, from 9.2 days to 7 days.

Key actions of the updated plan build on the foundations of the previous plan and continue to drive forward the vision for improving neurological services across Wales more effectively and at a greater pace, in conjunction with Health Boards' local vision for their resident population.

Actions include:

- Raising awareness of neurological conditions by involving patients and carers in designing services
- Ensuring timely diagnosis of neurological conditions by calling on Health Boards to provide specialist advice within 24 hours (on 7 day week basis) for those admitted acutely to hospital with a suspected neurological problem
- Making sure those living with a neurological condition have access to care and support as close to home as possible by a flexible workforce with the appropriate level of evidence based knowledge, skill and expertise.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“We want to continue to ensure people affected by a neurological condition have timely access to high-quality care, integrated with social services where appropriate, irrespective of where they live and how these services are delivered.

“I’m pleased we have been able to build on previous progress in delivering this plan and develop a new and improved vision to safeguard the future of our services.

“We have already committed to investing £1.2m to improve access to neuro-rehabilitation services in Wales. The neurological conditions implementation group prioritises raising awareness of conditions, including the development of patient reported outcome measures (PROMs) and patient reported experience measures (PREMs) to consistently improve the service.

“We want health boards to use this funding to make tangible differences in the health, wellbeing and independence of people living with long-term neurological conditions.”

Council tax reductions increase thanks to £244m Welsh Government scheme

Last September, Local Government Secretary Mark Drakeford confirmed the Welsh Government would continue to protect vulnerable and low income households by maintaining full entitlements to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme until at least the end of 2017-18.

The decision has ensured almost 300,000 households in Wales continue to be protected from any increase in their council tax liabilities. Of these, 220,000 households pay no council tax at all.

Commenting on the new report, Professor Drakeford said:

“Despite the UK Government cutting our funding by 10%, the Welsh Government has worked with local authorities to secure reductions in council tax for vulnerable and low income households. This has been supported by the £244m we have provided through our local government settlement.

“This is in stark contrast with the situation in England where local authorities have been left to design their own schemes and manage the associated funding shortfall. This has resulted in more than two million low-income households having to pay more of their council tax bills.

“Low-income families in England are now paying on average £169 a year more in council tax than they would have if council tax benefit were still in place.

“We’re ensuring that local authorities in Wales will continue to be shielded from the costs faced by councils in England and those households which need the most support continue to receive it.”

Blindness from diabetes halves in Wales, new research shows

The research, conducted by the diabetic research unit at Swansea University, analysed new certifications for sight loss, and blindness in Wales due to diabetic eye disease between 2007 and 2015.

The research shows:

- There were 339 fewer new certifications for all levels of sight loss from any cause combined in 2014-15, compared with 2007-08
- There were 22 fewer people with known diabetes with sight loss due specifically to their diabetes. There was a 49% fall in new certifications for severe sight impairment, from 31.3 to 15.8 per 100,000 people
- During this observation period, 52,229 (40%) more people were diagnosed with diabetes in Wales.

Welcoming the research, Public Health Minister, Rebecca Evans said:

“Thanks to our national diabetic retinopathy screening programme, we are now successfully intervening at an early stage to prevent people with diabetes from losing their sight.

“The research shows us that earlier diagnosis of diabetic retinopathy and sight-threatening diabetic retinopathy since the introduction of screening has played a significant role, alongside other measures, such as improved diabetes management with timely onward referral and newer treatments.

“I’d like to pay tribute to all those within the NHS in Wales who have worked so hard in making this possible. This is another fine example of the Welsh NHS making a real difference to people’s lives.”

Dr Quentin Sandifer, Executive Director of Public Health Services and Medical Director of Public Health Wales said:

“We are delighted that this study shows there is such clear benefit

for our population in Wales living with diabetes to take up their offer of eye screening.

“Diabetic Eye Screening Wales invites patients registered with diabetes who are aged 12 and older for annual eye screening. We would encourage people living with diabetes to take up the offer when they receive their invitation.

“This is a great example of the NHS working together to improve outcomes for our population and is especially impressive as sight loss has reduced even through the number of people diagnosed with diabetes in Wales has increased over this time.”

Prof David Owens from the Diabetes Research Unit Cymru at Swansea University said:

“It is very rewarding indeed to see, after many years of dedicated research to determine the best method of screening for the presence of diabetic eye disease, that the main objective of reducing the number of new certifications for severe sight loss (blindness) by almost half has been achieved.

“Clearly, early detection and improved treatment for sight threatening diabetic retinopathy has been an essential element in this success, reaffirming the need for all persons with diabetes – from the age of 12 years onwards – to have regular screening.”

[Young Farmers show support to landmark health study](#)

Healthwise Wales was launched in 2016 to study the health and wellbeing of people in Wales and to help the NHS and social services plan for the future. The study, backed by the Welsh Government and led by Cardiff and Swansea Universities, asks participants to answer a 10-minute online survey about their health, lifestyle and wellbeing every six months.

Building on the momentum of the campaign, after it reached a milestone of 10,000 sign-ups, Young Farmers Clubs across the country pledged their support to promote the study to their members and help provide an accurate picture of Wales’s health.

Alice Hammond, Midwife Ultrasonographer with Powys Teaching Health Board and member of Radnor YFC said:

“Working in the health service I know the vital importance of having up-to-date information about people’s experience of health and health services. I am delighted that members of the Wales Federation of YFC will be helping to promote this important study that will help all of us to plan for the future health and wellbeing of Wales.

“With over 5000 members across 157 Young Farmers Clubs in 12 county federations, YFC Wales offers a great opportunity to reach out to young people across the country and encourage them to take part.”

Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Dr Frank Atherton said:

“Healthwise Wales is an ambitious project and I’m delighted that young people understand the benefits of such a significant study.

“Having Wales YFC show their support today is a great boost to the project that will enable us to build a clearer picture and help prepare for the future. However, despite reaching a huge milestone of 10,000, we still need as many people as possible to get on board to ensure the study’s success.

“I’m urging everyone over 16 to give just ten minutes of their time to provide basic health information that will generate important insights and treatments for generations to come.”

Only a year into the study, several significant health issues have already been covered and new surveys on dental health, mental health and skin conditions are set to be launched in the near future.

For more information and to complete the survey, visit: www.healthwisewales.gov.wales or call the Healthwise Wales team on 0800 917 2172 / 02920 768 090 between 8.00am and 7.00pm, Monday to Friday.

[Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol’s role should expand says review](#)

Last year the Education Secretary ordered a review into the body that supports the development of Welsh-medium provision within higher education, enabling more students to study a variety of subjects through the medium of Welsh.

The task and finish group, chaired by Delyth Evans, has made a number of recommendations, including:

- The role of the Coleg should be extended to be a recognised national strategic body for developing the Welsh language across the higher education, further education and work-based learning sectors.
- The Coleg should focus its marketing messages on promoting the Welsh language as a skill in the workplace, rather than marketing the Coleg as a separate body.
- It should focus on supporting schools by developing marketing materials for use by teachers, pupils and parents.
- Support Welsh-medium, bilingual and English medium schools.
- Redirect its promotional work to reach younger pupils in year 9 and 10, before they begin to make decisions about their post-16 education.
- Coordinate its marketing work closely with the marketing departments of individual further and higher education institutions to ensure clear and consistent messages to school pupils regarding the value of the Welsh language.
- The Coleg should continue to be funded directly by the Welsh Government.

Chair of the group Delyth Evans said:

“It was a pleasure for me to be the chair of this review and I am very grateful to the members of the group and to the organisations and individuals who contributed to the work.

“I hope the report and recommendations will assist to strengthen Welsh language provision across the higher education, further education and work-based learning sectors in the years to come.”

Education Secretary Kirsty Williams said:

“I would like to thank Delyth and the entire group for their thoughtful and constructive report. I will now study the findings closely and provide a full response in due course.

“The recommendations cover a range of new proposals to further develop Welsh-medium study post-16 for everyone and they offer a number of exciting opportunities.”