[“Loneliness and social isolation is a growing threat to public health: We must tackle it together”– Huw Irranca-Davies](#)

The Welsh Government is today launching a national conversation on what can be done to combat loneliness and social isolation in Wales.

The National Survey for Wales 2016-17 found that 17% of the population of Wales, around 440,000 people, reported being lonely, while younger people were more likely to be lonely than older people: 20% of 16-24 year olds were lonely, compared with 10% of those aged 75 or over.

Loneliness and social isolation can result in a number of physical and psychological problems including premature death, sleep problems, high blood pressure, poor quality of life, increased risk of heart attack and stroke, depression and suicide. Research demonstrates that loneliness has an effect on mortality that is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

The economic consequences of loneliness and isolation can also be significant. The Eden Project found the cost of social isolation and disconnected communities in Wales could reach £2.6bn a year.

The Welsh Government's Programme for Government, Taking Wales Forward includes a commitment to develop a nationwide and cross-government strategy to address these issues. The strategy will cover people of all ages and all backgrounds.

The Welsh Government's proposed approach to tackling the issues is to focus on intervening early to prevent chronic loneliness, given its wider effects on health and well-being, and resultant pressure on NHS and social care services. However, there is also a need to ensure that support is available for those who are, or who become, chronically lonely.

The Welsh Government has identified some areas where action can make a significant contribution to reducing loneliness and social isolation:

- Early years – Improving an individual's experiences in childhood will play a significant part in shaping their future, including developing strong and positive relationships later in life;
- Housing – Ensuring people live in safe and secure neighbourhoods, in the right accommodation;
- Social Care – Providing compassionate, dignified care plays a critical role in ensuring people can be healthy and remain independent for longer;
- Mental Health – Ensuring people maintain good mental health is crucial in maintaining good health, well-being and independence, with access to

appropriate support services when necessary;
- Skills and employability – Ensuring people have the right skills to secure decent, sustainable employment opportunities.

Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

"Loneliness and social isolation are growing problems not just here in Wales but across the UK and beyond – and with 1 in every 5 people now experiencing loneliness and/or social isolation. More of us now understand these can affect anyone, at any age, for a wide variety of reasons. They can, and do, have a significant impact on people's physical and mental health. It risks becoming a major public health crisis unless we act now, and work together to tackle the problem.

"As a government, we are committed to securing the best possible health, well-being and quality of life for all people in Wales. Preventing people from becoming lonely and isolated must be a national priority for us, because it will not only improve people's lives, but it will also help reduce demand for health and social services in the future.

"However, neither the Welsh Government nor one agency on its own can combat these issues. As a government, we need to be able to foster the right environment and create the right conditions for others to design and deliver solutions that best meet their needs.

"I am keen to hear from people living in all parts of Wales as part of this consultation process. Working together, we can ensure our communities and the social fabric that binds them together, are as resilient as they can be."