

New Treatment Fund is improving and prolonging lives across Wales

Introduced in January 2017, the New Treatment Fund speeds up access to medicines recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the All Wales Medicines Strategy Group (AWMSG).

The Fund has shortened the timeframe in which new medicines must be made available from 90 days to 60. Due to its success, the average time taken to make medicines available has fallen to an average of 17 days.

The Welsh Government is providing £16 million annually to health boards and Velindre NHS Trust over the five years of this Government – £80m in total – for the New Treatment Fund.

This substantial investment in NHS Wales demonstrates the Welsh Government's commitment to ensuring that patients receive the latest recommended treatments quickly, no matter where they live in Wales.

One of the new drugs that has been made available thanks to the New Treatment Fund is the breast cancer drug Palbociclib, which was recommended by NICE for routine use in November 2017. The drug blocks the growth and spread of the cancer.

According to the latest figures available, 73 women in Wales are now receiving Palbociclib and the numbers are expected to grow.

Vaughan Gething said:

“Our New Treatment Fund is improving and prolonging lives across Wales.

“Due to the success of the Fund, the average time taken to make medicines available has fallen considerably. We have reached and far exceeded our 60-day target, which is a great achievement and is making a very real difference to people's lives.

“We are seeing our patients get faster access to the full range of new medicines coming through the appraisal pipeline from NICE and AMWSG. This includes new medicines to treat arthritis, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, asthma and breast cancer to name just a few.

“The prompt availability of Palbociclib, widely considered to be a game-changer in the treatment and management of metastatic breast cancer, is a prime example of the New Treatment Fund delivering what the Welsh Government intended.

“I am enormously proud of what we have achieved in the last two years and I want to see the Fund continue to go from strength to

strength. The people of Wales deserve only the best.”

Companies from across Wales to benefit from cutting edge technologies thanks to EU funding

An EU-backed project which has helped businesses in parts of Wales develop cutting-edge technologies and boost productivity is expanding to cover the whole of the country.

The Centre of Excellence in Mobile and Emerging Technologies (CEMET) was launched in 2016 and has already helped develop iPad software to detect sight problems in young children, a virtual system that improves safety for both children and workers on railways, and a product that communicates with children through a remotely-operated animal character that appears on a TV screen, amongst others high-tech innovations.

Led by the University of South Wales (USW) and backed with £4.3m of EU funds through the Welsh Government, CEMET has been working with companies in the Valleys, West Wales, and North Wales over the last two years. A further £1.2m of EU funds, announced today by the Minister for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates, will allow companies across the whole of Wales to benefit from the expertise. The pan-Wales CEMET is now a £8.9m project, with £5.5m of EU funding, and will run until March 2023.

Minister for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates said:

“This expansion will see CEMET build on the support it has already given to a number of SMEs to design and test new mobile and emerging technologies to create products and services for commercial success.

In an ever changing businesses landscape, mobile and emerging technologies play an ever important role for companies and it’s fantastic to see Government, Universities and businesses working together to look for solutions and innovations that are of real benefit to companies, consumers and the wider public.

This comprehensive package of support has already seen a number of businesses develop innovative, and in some cases truly life changing products and services. With this latest, welcome, EU funding allowing that invaluable work to reach all part of Wales, I look forward to seeing the project contribute to further business

successes in the coming months and years.”

Mark Griffiths, Co-Director of CEMET said:

“Since its launch, the project has gone from strength to strength and has given support to SMEs which are now rapidly expanding.

For example Motion Rail uses pioneering Virtual Reality technology to help children understand the dangers of the railway, while Evoke Education’s virtual avatar Moe has successfully encouraged a non-verbal child to speak and has gained interest from both the legal sector and child psychology experts.

We have also worked with a company which has put Augmented Reality in the hands of local high street retailers in South Wales and is gearing up to launch across the country.

With the support of this funding these entrepreneurs have been able to advance their ideas, develop cutting-edge products, and expand their businesses.

Now we are operating across the whole of Wales, CEMET will be able to provide support to more SMEs so they can develop their ideas and turn them into a market-ready product.”

In the last decade, EU-funded projects have created 45,000 new jobs and 13,000 new businesses across Wales, while also helping more than 85,000 people into employment.

Funding support for non-UK EU citizens ahead of Brexit

The Welsh Government’s Supporting EU Citizens Grant Scheme will provide short-term funding for projects in Swansea, Merthyr, Newport and North Wales.

Third sector organisations currently supporting EU citizens in their local communities will benefit, meaning they can safeguard key services and prepare for new systems which are expected as part of the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union.

It is estimated the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union on 29th March will affect 80,000 EU citizens living in Wales.

The organisations receiving funding are:

- Swansea Bay Regional Equality Council – support for staff who specifically deal with issues facing non-UK EU citizens and workshops/advice surgeries to allow non-UK EU citizens to gain practical advice
- Merthyr Valleys Homes (in partnership with Polish Community of the Valleys Association) – information
- blitz including sharing information online and running drop-in advice days. Training sessions for the public and organisations about the rights of EU nationals in relation to settlement status
- Newport Mind – produce a formal report based on outcomes from focus groups and events summarising the main issues identified in both promoting the Settlement Scheme and the barriers encountered in engaging with the Scheme.
- North Wales Regional Equality Network (in partnership with BAWSO) – support for a specialised advice worker to provide advice and guidance to non-UK EU citizens in North Wales.

Announcing the funding at the Equality and Human Rights Commission's event in Conwy yesterday (Thursday 7th), the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, Jane Hutt, said:

“With the continued and growing uncertainty those from European Union countries living in Wales are facing, it is imperative the correct information and support about rights and the Settled Status system are shared.

“We recognise that, in preparation for the EU Withdrawal, communities need additional and tailored support – that's why our excellent third party organisations and services are best placed to assist.

“We have a responsibility to every member of our communities, regardless of their nationality or immigration status. Wales will continue to need migration from EU countries to sustain our economy and public services. We need to utilise every tool at our disposal to ensure these people are reassured that we value their contributions to our country.”

Additional to the grant scheme, the Welsh Government has already agreed £1.3million funding for an EU Citizens' Rights Project to provide: additional resources to existing advice service providers, establish specialist exploitation in the workplace advice, deliver training to local authorities about eligibility for services for non-UK nationals, undertake research to identify inequalities and provide a website about the rights and entitlements of migrant communities in Wales. The EU Citizens' Rights Project will become operational in March.

Transforming eye care services in Wales: Those at highest risk of going blind to receive prioritised treatment in UK first

It is estimated around 111,000 people in Wales are living with sight loss. This is predicted to increase by a third by 2030 and double by 2050.

Evidence suggests around 10% of new patients are at risk of irreversible sight loss compared to about 90% of follow-up patients.

Following concerns raised by consultant ophthalmologists and RNIB, the Welsh Government commissioned an NHS-led group to review the issues facing patients on waiting lists, particularly those who require ongoing treatment.

The £3.3m investment will allow health boards in Wales to start the necessary changes to transform their services.

Actions include:

- expanding services already established to move care closer to home, to ensure patients are seen in the most appropriate setting
- redesigning pathways to those nationally agreed
- introducing and further development of virtual clinics
- expanding the skill mix of staff, to include nurse injectors and optometrists to safely share care between community and hospital eye care professionals.

From April 2019, new guidelines will require hospital eye services to have procedures in place ensuring patients receive their assessment or treatment by the most suitable person within a clinically appropriate time. This means that those high risk patients who need to be seen quickly due to their condition, should experience fewer delays.

The measures are based on priority and urgency of care required by each patient. Priority is the risk of harm associated with the patient's eye condition if the target appointment date is missed. Urgency is how soon that patient should be seen given the current state and/or risk of progression of the condition.

Wales is the first UK nation to introduce a measure of this kind for eye care patients.

Health Minister, Vaughan Gething said:

“Ensuring good eye care is absolutely vital, so we do not want people to risk their sight by having to wait a long time for a follow up appointment after having initial assessment.

“The £3.3m investment I’m announcing today will allow health boards across Wales to make the necessary investments to start to transform eye care services. This and the new measure we are putting in place will go a long way to improving services for people in Wales.”

“We were the first government in the world to have an eye care delivery plan, and I’m pleased we are leading the way again by being the first country in the UK to introduce a performance measure of this kind for eye care.”

RNIB Cymru’s Director Ansley Workman said:

“Cancelled and delayed eye clinic appointments can leave patients at risk of irreversible sight loss. No one should lose their sight because of a treatable condition. That’s why it’s so important that all health boards meet the March 2019 deadline for implementing the new Measures and prioritise patients based on their risk of coming to harm.

“This investment from Welsh Government is vital and should transform services across Wales, making sure that those at greatest risk of permanent sight loss are treated quickly and effectively.

“We want to thank Welsh Government for their continued commitment to improving eye health in Wales. Now it is up to health boards across the country to make this positive change happen for their patients and lead the way for the rest of the UK.”

[Llangefni Link Road final section completed](#)

During the visit to Anglesey today, the Minister said the completed scheme would bring great benefits to the local area and Anglesey as whole.

The Llangefni Link Road connects Coleg Menai and Bryn Cefni Business Park, key sites in the Anglesey Enterprise Zone, with the A5114 and A55 and will improve traffic congestion in the town centre. It is also vital in facilitating the delivery of Grwp Llandrillo Menai’s Masterplan to develop their Llangefni Campus into an internationally-renowned Energy and Engineering Training Facility and supporting the expansion of Bryn Cefni Business Park.

The Link Road has been delivered in four sections with the Welsh Government

investing more than £10 million in the scheme.

Ken Skates officially opened sections one and two of the link road in March 2017, before section four was opened to traffic in December 2017.

The project as a whole has received funding from the Welsh Government, Isle of Anglesey County Council, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.

Ken Skates said:

“A high quality and connected transport system is absolutely vital to achieving economic growth in North Wales and I am delighted to officially open the final section of Llangefni Link Road which is key in enabling people to access jobs and services.

“This is an important project that will bring benefits both to the local area and to the island of Anglesey. It is also a great example of partnership working, with the Welsh Government, Isle of Anglesey County Council, Grŵp Llandrillo-Menai and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority all contributing to the successful delivery of the scheme.

“I am particularly pleased that the scheme has helped support the construction of new business units on Bryn Cefni Industrial Estate and an extension to the Anglesey Business Centre, helping local businesses to grow and providing welcome job opportunities.

“The link road is also essential to the development of Grwp Llandrillo Menai’s Pencraig Campus which will provide high quality education and training.

“The Welsh Government is investing hundreds of millions of pounds in transport infrastructure in North Wales and the Llangefni Link Road is a vital part of our vision of delivering better transport connectivity.

“The completion of this scheme is a clear demonstration of our commitment to Anglesey and the wider area.

“Following the recent news about Wylfa Newydd, we continue to put pressure on the UK Government into assuring us they are doing everything possible to bring this project to Anglesey and move things forward.”

Anglesey’s portfolio holder for Highways, Waste and Property, Councillor Bob Parry, said:

“The Llangefni Link Road will help secure significant economic benefit opportunities for Llangefni and Anglesey. It will provide a

key driver for the expansion of the Grŵp Llandrillo Menai campus and further training opportunities for our young people. The project will also improve access to our Enterprise Zone sites and A55 expressway, and help overcome traffic constraints in Llangefni.

“I’d like to thank the Minister, Ken Skates, and the Welsh Government for their support in bringing this project to fruition. I would also like to thank both contractors, Alun Griffiths and Jones Bros, for their excellent work alongside the project team.”

Anglesey Council Leader, Councillor Llinos Medi, added:

“Investment in infrastructure projects like the link road are key in delivering our economic vision for Anglesey. The County Council will work to secure additional support and commitment to finance other projects to drive economic regeneration on the Island. Our initial focus will be on the north of Anglesey given recent announcements in the area; and we will continue to work with partners locally, regionally and nationally to strengthen our economy; support businesses and provide employment.”

Dafydd Evans, chief executive of Grŵp Llandrillo Menai said:

“As a College, we are very pleased to see this final section opened as it will allow the campus at Llangefni to develop into a strategically important location for skills development.”