

Quicker access to specialist NHS care for Armed forces' veterans in Wales

£100,000 additional funding will go to Veterans NHS Wales, the UK's only dedicated national service to support the emotional and mental health needs of armed forces veteran by providing dedicated veteran's therapists in each health board area.

The Welsh Government already invests £585,000 a year to support the service.

The additional funding will allow the service to increase Consultant Psychiatrist sessions by 50% and offer more veterans' quicker access to a specialist doctor for medication options, reviews and second opinions. It will also provide more dedicated support to veteran therapists enabling them to concentrate on providing interventions to our veterans who need support.

Latest figures show more than 2,879 veterans have received care from Veterans NHS Wales since it was set up in April 2010.

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

"As we approach Remembrance Sunday, the entire country will pause to reflect and remember the sacrifice of our armed forces personnel in conflicts and wars across the world. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to both current and former armed forces personnel.

"I'm determined to ensure our veterans receive the very best healthcare. The new investment I'm announcing today will ensure veterans receive faster access to assessment and treatment services, ensuring they receive the care and support they need."

Dr Neil Kitchiner, the Director of Veterans' NHS Wales Director and its Consultant Clinical Lead said:

"I am very grateful to the Welsh Government for their continued support to VNHSW. This increase funding of £100,000 announced today will allow us to increase our Consultant Psychiatrist sessions by 50% and offer more veterans' quicker access to a specialist doctor for medication options, reviews and second opinions.

"We will also increase our part-time administrator's hours which will allow them to be more accessible to telephone and email queries from veterans and referrers. It will also speed up referral to assessment times. The inclusion of a fulltime psychology graduate for the first time will enhance training and support to our Peer Mentors in delivering guided self help interventions and improve our data collection, analysis and reporting to our key

stakeholders.”

Ken Skates extends no daytime lane closure pledge for A55

Significant Welsh Government investment over recent years means no planned daytime lane closures will be required before the end of next summer. This extends the pledge which has seen no works on that section of the route during the day since early April.

Emergency work will continue to take place whenever and wherever necessary to ensure road users are safe.

The news comes as the Welsh Government publishes the recommendations from its report into further A55 resilience improvements, with all construction work as a result of the study completed overnight until at least next September – a priority for Mr Skates.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“I know only too well how important a fully functioning A55 is to communities across North Wales and my commitment to delivering improvements to this vital economic artery is unwavering.

“This year has seen the culmination of four years of imperative work to bring the A55’s tunnels up to modern standards, alongside recent road surface improvements, flood alleviation work, urgent maintenance work and more. With the proposed Deeside Corridor, Third Menai Crossing, Caernarfon to Bontnewydd bypass, A55 roundabouts at J15 (Llanfairfechan) and J16 (Penmaenmawr) and A55 J13 (Abergwyngregyn) to J12 (Tal y Bont) schemes all at various stages of planning or delivery, this Government term will likely see the biggest investment in roads in North Wales for decades, maybe ever. That’s something I’m extremely proud of.

“Whilst the nature of projects both past and future means daytime work is unavoidable as times, I’ve been very clear of my wish to minimise daytime work where ever possible. I’m delighted, therefore, to confirm that improvement works planned until next September will see no daytime lane closures at all on this stretch. All such planned work will be completed overnight or under narrow dual lanes. This has all been made possible due to the Welsh Government’s commitment and investment in the A55.

“The decision brings with it obvious costs and challenges, and I’d like to put on record my thanks to the many contractors, shift workers and agents who will continue to work long, unsociable hours in all conditions so that disruptions to road users can be kept to a minimum.”

In April, the Cabinet Secretary commissioned a study to identify possible improvements to further enhance the resilience of the A55.

The report’s recommendations, in outline, include interventions that aim to reduce the levels of congestion at critical times, improve communications with the public and better incident responses.

Ken Skates added:

“The study has considered all aspects of the road from Holyhead to Post House, associated routes such as the A494 corridor from the Ewloe Interchange to Drome Corner and diversion routes.

“As a result, we will be implementing a number of interventions we can put in place quickly to improve the travel experience whilst considering other potential improvements for the future. These ‘quick win’ measures will complement existing plans along this key strategic route and help minimise the frequency and impact of incidents and breakdowns.

“I hope today’s announcements will mean communities and businesses in North Wales and beyond can look forward with confidence to continued improvements and limited disruption, with the prospect of major improvements to come.”

A55 / A494 network resilience study WelTAG stage 1 report –
<https://beta.gov.wales/a55-a494>

Bumper £2.3bn building fund for schools and colleges

The money will allow the flagship 21st Century Schools and Education Programme – a major, long-term and strategic capital investment programme – to continue for a second wave of investment.

Band A of the Programme will conclude in 2019 after a £1.4bn spend over five-years. This second wave of investment, Band B, will comprise two funding streams; one using traditional capital, and one using revenue funding, via a

new form of Public Private Partnership called the Mutual Investment Model (MIM).

Local Authorities and Further Education Institutions have proposed £2.3bn of projects, which meet the investment objectives of Band B of the Programme including:

- addressing growth in demand for Welsh medium education
- reductions of surplus capacity and inefficiency in the system
- expansion of schools and colleges in areas of increased demand for educational services
- address condition of educational assets
- making assets available for community use where demand exists.

The Welsh Government is committed to supporting all of these projects, subject to approval of business cases.

Speaking at the opening of Ysgol Cybi, a new 540 place Welsh medium primary school in Holyhead delivered by £9.7m of Band A funding, Kirsty Williams said:

“I am committed to raising standards, reducing the attainment gap and delivering an education system from the ground up that is a source of national pride and confidence. The 21st Century Schools and Education Programme is one of the means to achieve this ambition and represents the largest investment in our schools and colleges since the 1960s.

“The first wave of funding provided through the Programme will see investment of more than £1.4 billion over the five year period ending 2019, supporting the rebuild and refurbishment of more than 150 schools and colleges across the Wales.

“This is why I am delighted to announce a second wave of investment for the Programme, which will begin in April 2019.

“We will work closely with our partners to agree the pace of delivery and put in place investment plans that are affordable and meet our shared ambition to create sustainable learning environments that meet the needs of our communities.”

Announcements on individual Band B projects will be made in conjunction with local authorities in due course.

Statement by the First Minister of Wales Carwyn Jones: Carl Sargeant

First Minister of Wales Carwyn Jones said:

"This is an awful situation for everyone. I want to talk about Carl and his family today.

"We're all very shocked by what happened this week. There is great hurt, anger and bewilderment.

"Carl was my friend. In all the years that I knew him I never had a cross word with him. For 14 years we worked together. He was a great Chief Whip and a Minister who served his country with distinction.

"I cannot conceive of what Bernie and the family must be going through.

"There are a lot of inaccuracies in the press and many of you have questions to ask about what happened last week. Everybody is grieving and it is not appropriate for me to get into the precise detail. These are matters for the future – things that will need to be properly disclosed through what should be a coroner's inquest.

"As there will in all probability be an inquest, I and my team will, of course, be cooperating fully with any questions that are raised there.

"The family deserve to have their questions answered and if that isn't possible through the inquest then I will endeavour to make that happen through other means.

"There is a legal process to go through and I am obviously acting within that. I welcome any scrutiny of my actions in the future and it is appropriate for that to be done independently.

"I quite properly did all that I could to make sure that everything was being done by the book. I had no alternative but to take the action that I did and I hope that people will understand that.

"Carl was a true force of nature – he drove through more legislation than any other minister. Not just through force of argument, but through force of personality.

"Wales has lost a person of great warmth, ability and charisma. These are the darkest days any of us can remember in this institution – but they are darkest of all for the family, and we must respect their right to grieve in peace at this time."

Carl Sargeant

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“Carl was a friend as well as a colleague and I am shocked and deeply saddened by his death. He made a big contribution to Welsh public life and fought tirelessly for those he represented both as a Minister and as a local Assembly Member.

“He will be a great loss both to our party and to the Senedd. My heartfelt sympathies are with his family at this difficult time.”