



Russell George MS
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

4 April 2023

Dear Russell,

Thank you for your letter of 13 March, which requested a number of updates on Welsh Government's planned policies, strategies, plans and consultations to assist the Health and Social Care committee in developing their future work programme.

Please find the response to your requests below.

1. The women's health plan being developed by the NHS Wales Collaborative to deliver the ambitions set out in July 2022 in the quality statement for women and girls' health. In particular, we would be grateful for information about:

a. Your decision to ask NHS Wales to develop the women's health plan, when only some of the issues can be addressed by health services. For example, improving women's health depends on wider determinants such as poverty, research and development, not just the provision of clinical services:

I have been clear that we must change the way we provide healthcare for women and girls in Wales so they can access it in a timely way, so the NHS is responsive to their choices and needs and that research and development reflects women's and girls' lived experiences.

This is why we in Wales are committed to bringing all these important issues together in a Women's Health Plan, developed and owned by our NHS in Wales. And we have already taken important steps towards the creation of this plan.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

During December 2022, the NHS Wales Collaborative published [A Discovery Report: Foundations for a Women's Health Plan](#). Reporting the perspectives of women and girls across Wales, this document identified inequalities and gaps in current service provision, as well as opportunities for improvements in women's health.

Addressing existing inequalities in the way in which women access and experience healthcare in Wales is vital if we are to generate the improved experiences and outcomes we wish to see, and it is for this reason that NHS Wales has been tasked with developing a 10-Year Women's Health Plan.

However, there are of course wider social determinants of health which must also be addressed. My officials will therefore be working closely with colleagues from a range of policy areas to provide a coordinated approach to delivering the ambitions set out in A Healthier Wales.

b. The terms of reference for the clinical network on women's health, to help further our understanding of how service delivery (clinical/ health-related services) and wider policy decisions aimed at improving women's health will work together:

In line with the National Clinical Framework, a Women's Health Network is being created this year which will facilitate a more strategic and systematic approach to coordinating, delivering and assuring women's healthcare provision across Wales.

The Network will bring together clinicians from a variety of disciplines and sectors, patient representatives, academics and policymakers to deliver NHS Wales' Women's Health Plan, as well as determine and monitor key measurable outcomes and share best practice.

The terms of reference for the Network will be collaboratively defined by its constituent members, organisations and patient representatives, ensuring the needs and voices of women remain central to planning and development.

c. The plans for the dedicated research fund for women's health, including when it will be operational and who will oversee it:

Historically, women have been disadvantaged by a lack of research and data about conditions which affect them, or where clinical care is modelled on data and research primarily based on men and their experiences.

There are examples of vital research already underway in Wales to advance understanding of women's health conditions and evaluate existing approaches to treatment and support. However, there is both scope and need for an expansion of this research focus.

My officials are therefore working to support research opportunities into areas of women's health where there are known knowledge gaps. Meetings are scheduled during April to further progress this important work.

d. How sustainable co-production in the development, implementation and monitoring of the women's health plan will be resourced:

Sustainable co-production is central to effectively delivering the ambitions set out within A Healthier Wales and a duty placed upon all health boards in delivering services for their local communities.

Responsibility for establishing the Women's Health Network and fulfilling essential quality planning and control functions is made clear within the NHS Executive remit letter which will imminently be issued by the Welsh Government. The Network will replace the Women's Health Implementation Group (established in 2018) and act as the primary vehicle for designing and delivering the Women's Health Plan.

My officials meet regularly with representatives from the Women's Health Wales Coalition, which represents over 60 charity and third sector organisations, to ensure their perspectives and priorities, as well as those of the women they represent, continue to feed into the development of both the Women's Health Plan and the Women's Health Network. I am pleased to confirm that the Coalition has agreed to put forward representatives as part of the Network who will be pivotal in ensuring vital co-production is maintained as the Women's Health Plan is developed, implemented and its outcomes monitored.

e. Your specific priorities for women's health during this Senedd. We note that the quality statement includes a list of many different health conditions where there is gender inequality. How will work in these different areas be prioritised?

The Quality Statement makes clear my expectations for the delivery of health services for the women of Wales. This includes those conditions specific to women and girls, but also those areas where we know there exist gender inequalities in the care provided and the outcomes achieved.

The Women's Health Plan will set out how NHS Wales will meet these expectations as well as our broader ambitions for women's health. The workplan, inclusive of the prioritisation of activities and timescales for delivery, will be co-produced between the Women's Health Network and the NHS Executive.

2. The stroke implementation plan being developed by the Stroke Implementation Group to deliver the ambitions set out in September 2021 in the quality statement for stroke, including when you expect the plan to be published:

We recognise that our current model for the management of stroke has to change to reach the improvement in stroke outcomes we are aiming for. We are working towards that aim through the Quality Statement for Stroke and the development of an outcome-focussed Service Specification for Stroke.

Quality Statement for Stroke

The Quality Statement for Stroke was published in September 2021. This sets out the Welsh Government's vision for stroke services for the next 5 years and gives clear aims for all people of all ages in relation to stroke. These aims have been translated into clear outcomes for three population groups:

- Population Group 1 - All people in Wales who have not had a stroke.
- Population Group 2 - All people in Wales who have had a stroke.
- Population Group 3 - All people in Wales who care for a loved one who has had a stroke.

A Service Specification

For the next step, we are currently producing an outcome-focussed service specification for stroke to underpin the quality statement. This will outline the standards for stroke care, support local planning and drive performance improvement for stroke services in Wales. It will contain a clear emphasis on prevention and the outcomes that matter to people.

The service specification is being developed by a sub-group of the Stroke Implementation Group, led by the Clinical Lead for Stroke in Wales and comprises clinical, third sector and academic partners.

The immediate focus is on population group 2; a service specification is in development for this group and a pathway is being developed. The pathway has been co-produced and is being endorsed through a series of engagement events that are currently underway. For population groups 1 and 3, a similar approach will be followed and appropriate partnership groups established. The stroke association is heavily involved in this work.

We anticipate this work will be completed by late summer and supported by a new data dashboard for stroke developed by the NHS Wales Delivery Unit.

Public awareness

Public Health Wales will be facilitating rerunning the FAST campaign to improve public awareness of the signs of stroke, and discussions are taking place to develop a sustainable solution for future campaigns.

Workforce and Comprehensive Regional Stroke Centres and Operational Delivery Networks

A new Workforce Subgroup has been set up as part of the new Stroke Programme to develop four Comprehensive Regional Stroke Centres and Operational Delivery Networks. We are confident these centres and networks will improve the outcomes for people in Wales who have had a stroke. The development of this new model will enable us to transform stroke care and develop pathways to get people directly to the stroke care and treatment they need without going to A&E first.

However, across the UK there is a shortage of the specialist clinicians required to operate Comprehensive Regional Stroke Centres effectively, and in particular, to undertake mechanical thrombectomy. A robust workforce strategy will therefore be developed in parallel to the Comprehensive Regional Stroke Centres. Workforce Subgroup will look at the requirements for a robust, sustainable stroke workforce and their training needs. The group will work towards developing the appropriate solutions for Wales. Members of the subgroup have already met with colleagues in NHS England to discuss and learn from their experiences of developing a workforce strategy for the development of Comprehensive Regional Stroke Centres.

Thrombectomy service for Wales

Welsh Government strongly supports the plans to develop a thrombectomy service for Wales. We have been making incremental improvements in the number of people accessing thrombectomy, and our rate has doubled in the last 12 months. There is more to do but steps are being taken to accelerate the numbers of people having a thrombectomy facilitated by the drive being taken to establish Comprehensive Regional Stroke Centres. Under the governance of the Stroke Implementation Group, a National Thrombectomy Oversight Group meets every 2-3 months. This group seeks to identify areas in the patient pathway that can be improved and put in place actions to address these. Some of the improvements that have been seen are as a result of the actions taken by this group.

3. The final report on the evaluation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. Our understanding is that the final report is due to be published before the end of March 2023; could you confirm this date:

The report will be published on 30th March 2023, with a written statement on the WG website and a press notice issued by the University of South Wales.

4. When the Health Planning Guidelines and health board allocations will be published (as they have been in recent years):

I wrote to NHS Chairs setting out the NHS Wales Planning Framework for 2023-26 on 28th November 2022. The framework sets the direction for our NHS organisations in Wales to inform their planning for the 2023-26 planning cycle. Given the complex planning environment we are all having to face at the present time, in both the short and medium term, and recognising the financial and system pressures, a modified approach for the next planning cycle has been adopted.

The planning framework sets out a smaller number of priorities with the need for delivery in the next financial year. These are:

- A closer relationship with the NHS and Local Government to tackle delayed transfers of care
- Improving access to primary care services
- Urgent & emergency care
- Planned Care, Recovery, Diagnostics and Pathways of Care
- Cancer services and reducing the backlog of patients waiting on the cancer pathway
- Mental health and child and adolescent mental health services

I also refer you to my written statement issued on 7th February which can be found online [HERE](#). NHS organisations will be required to submit their plans by 31st March 2023 and they will be robustly assessed.

Finally, the health board allocations for 2023-24 have been published and are available online in [Welsh](#) or [English](#).

I hope you find this information useful.

Yours sincerely,



Eluned Morgan AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services