



Wales Alliance for Mental Health

Priorities for the Next
Welsh Government 2026

June 2025



Introduction

The Wales Alliance for Mental Health (WAMH) is a collaboration of Wales' national mental health and suicide and self-harm charities. Our members are Adferiad, Beat eating disorders, Mental Health Foundation, Mental Health Matters Wales, Mind Cymru, PAPHYRUS Prevention of Young Suicide, Platform, and Samaritans Cymru. This manifesto reflects areas of common concern across our organisations.

As an Alliance, we advocate for the voices of people who access support from us and everyone who needs help with their mental health. We believe protecting and improving the nation's mental health takes a cross-government approach, focussing on early intervention, prevention and being trauma-informed.

Together, we are committed to ensuring that people experiencing mental ill health in Wales are treated with compassion, have their voices heard and receive the right support as quickly and as close to home as possible.

The Welsh Government's commitments within the ten-year Mental Health and Wellbeing and Suicide Prevention and Self-Harm strategies have the power to make a real difference to the lives of the people of Wales. With greater cross-sectoral collaboration and open conversations to identify solutions to the challenges we are currently facing, we can move closer towards developing a system that is based on informed consent, is strengths-based, least restrictive and with person-led care at its heart.

We acknowledge the significant developments and improvements achieved since the last Senedd election, including:

- A Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy that aligns to our values and approach
- Heightened awareness of the inequalities within mental health
- The creation of a Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing
- The creation of the NHS Executive and development of a Strategic Programme for Mental Health overseeing transformative change

However, despite these steps, too many of us continue to struggle because our basic mental health needs are not being met. This is leading to a significant rise in demand for mental health services across the lifespan. People are then being repeatedly let down because access to appropriate support is not timely enough to help them recover. If we acknowledge that mental health is profoundly shaped by our experiences and circumstances, then ensuring comprehensive support before and after mental health services is key for both prevention and for ensuring the most effective use of our limited resources. This will take committed leadership and common purpose across all sectors and as an Alliance, we stand ready to collaborate with any incoming Welsh Government to achieve this change.

Our Vision for Mental Health in Wales

Mental health is an integral and essential component of the right to health”¹

We know that our mental health touches every aspect of our lives. When we experience periods of mental ill health, we need support that reflects our needs, is compassionate, respectful and treats not just the presenting issue but the underlying experiences that have impacted on us.

We envision a society that creates the conditions for us all to thrive, feeling safe to speak about our mental health and able to seek help at an early opportunity so that accessing more intensive support from the mental health system is reduced.

We want a person-centred, recovery-oriented, and rights-based mental health system in Wales which provides the highest standard of care for all. This system must:

- Respond to the needs of everyone, taking an integrated, community-embedded approach to mental health care
- Be explicitly anti-racist and rights focused meaning everyone has equity of access to the support they need, when they need it
- Take a lifespan approach with a commitment to providing responsive, holistic support that recognises the different influences at each stage of life
- Recognise and offer quick, early support for everyone, building a cohesive network to aid recovery

We need a system that recognises that some of the most effective protections against mental ill health lie outside of the NHS, which means addressing the social, economic, and political determinants of mental health.

We need a system with a workforce that is supported and resourced appropriately and has the conditions for staff to work in a trauma informed way to work seamlessly across statutory and third sector partners to deliver care and support.

Above all, we need a system where everyone, but particularly those in leadership roles, recognise the need to go beyond understanding that inequality exists, to taking meaningful, measurable action. This means improving access and providing the highest standard of care for all communities in Wales, regardless of background.

Delivering this vision will take determined, focussed leadership, transparent and effective allocation of resources and a change in culture for how we support people with experiences of mental ill health.

Failing to deliver this vision risks missing an opportunity to truly transform how we meet the needs of people experiencing mental ill health, especially by listening and acting on their views to support recovery.

¹ World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) “Mental health, human rights and legislation: guidance and practice – 2023” (pg17) <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/373126/9789240080737-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

WAMH believes

the next Welsh Government should:

1. Prioritise Mental Health

Prioritise improving and supporting the mental health of the Welsh population, including measurable and impactful cross-government action through the Programme for Government

2. Increase Investment in Prevention

Increase investment in preventative and protective measures in the first and subsequent budgets, to reduce pressure on the mental health system and improve population mental health

3. Reform Mental Health Services

Set out an ambitious, resourced programme of reform to create an equitable, easily accessible and fair mental health system that is least restrictive and free from stigma

4. Prioritise the Needs of Babies, Children and Young People

Develop a clear strategic response to reduce rising mental health need among babies, children and young people by prioritising whole family support in the early years and ensuring quick access to support

5. Tackle the Causes of Poor Mental Health

Set out clear, deliverable actions to tackle the social and structural causes of mental health inequity with tangible improvement goals by the end of the Senedd term, particularly focused on thriving communities, safe secure affordable housing and eradicating poverty

6. Develop a Robust Measurement Framework

Deliver a robust and transparent data system that focuses on the quality and benefits of service provision and people's experiences within the first year of the new Welsh Government

7. Develop the Mental Health Workforce

Support and resource a stronger and united trauma-informed and rights-focused workforce from initial training and qualification through to continued professional development

8. Strengthen Mental Health Legislation

Commit to reviewing and strengthening the legislative framework for mental health in the first legislative programme to ensure it is rooted in a rights-based accessible approach that provides least restrictive safeguards

9. Support Third Sector Collaboration

Set a clear direction around embracing and embedding integrated and collaborative partnership between statutory and third sectors ensuring co-production in the development and delivery of mental health provision

Understanding the Need for Change



The mental health environment in Wales is a complex and evolving landscape set against a backdrop of traumatic and challenging industrial and social historical events. Whilst there has been positive progress, there remain persistent challenges. Mental health impacts on and is impacted by so many aspects, and our understanding continues to evolve. In 2022, The London School of Economics and Political Science conservatively estimated that poor mental health costs the Welsh economy approximately £4.8 billion per year.² Understanding this complex and costly burden – both economic and human

– is the crucial first step towards a truly transformative approach to mental well-being across Wales.

The lack of robust, publicly available data in Wales severely hinders our ability to measure the effectiveness of mental health interventions and policies. Despite this, we can draw together the following picture of mental health based on the available data and what we hear directly from people.

Mental health stigma and discrimination continues to be a significant issue. Whilst we have seen a period of improvement in public attitudes towards mental health, due to increased awareness and campaigns such as Time to Change Wales, the most recent [Attitudes towards Mental Illness Wales 2024](#) survey indicates a deterioration in empathy and shows how fragile these hard-won gains can be. Despite this, encouragingly, there is a growing willingness among employees to be more transparent with their employers about their wellbeing.

We also know that the mental health of the nation is getting worse and public and third sector services are struggling to meet an increased level of complex need and demand. The demand for services for children and young people is on the rise with 1 in 6 children and young people in Wales now having a diagnosed mental health condition, with increasing numbers seeking help through school-based counselling or primary child and adolescent mental health services.

² McDaid, D. & Park, A. (2022) [The Economic Case for Investing in the Prevention of Mental Health Conditions in the UK](#), London: [Mental Health Foundation](#)

This rising demand is hardly surprising when we consider the events of the past five years. From the dislocation and isolation of the global pandemic, through economic uncertainty, the inequality crisis, political instability and international conflicts, the protective and resilience factors for our mental health have been lost or pushed to their limit. With poverty, homelessness and discrimination rising combined with ongoing financial challenges, both within our public services and individual households, we have seen communities coming under unprecedented pressure.

The heartbreaking truth is that the number of lives lost through suicide in Wales is not falling, with figures remaining persistently consistent each year. This is despite repeated investment and strategy to improve access to support and encouraging greater openness about experiences. We know this is linked to socio-economic circumstances, as outlined in the Samaritans [Dying From Inequality](#) report.

We often hear that if you are young, struggling with poverty, or belong to a minoritised community, you are more likely to experience poorer mental health,

and are more likely to face significant barriers in getting the support that could make a difference. Despite the efforts to tackle these issues, we are not seeing a dismantling in these systematic barriers and Wales remains far from having a truly rights-based mental health system that is designed for everyone, regardless of age, sex, or ethnicity.

The challenge of mental ill health extends far beyond those directly seeking support. We are increasingly hearing more about a strained workforce, with an increase in staff feeling overworked and stressed. In 2023, around 33% of all staff sickness across the NHS in Wales was related to stress, anxiety, depression or other psychiatric conditions.³ We must prioritise the wellbeing of those who provide the care.

Nevertheless, despite this challenging backdrop, **we firmly believe mental ill health is not inevitable and that suicide is often preventable.** The solutions to improved protection and recovery involves a whole government and community response, built upon a foundation of positive and nurturing relationships, from family to wider society.



³ [Health Boards FOI requests/BBC Wales](#)

Our Recommendations

The Alliance believes there are several key actions for the next Welsh Government to prioritise to ensure we tackle the scale of the ambition within the mental health strategy with urgency.



1 Prioritise improving and supporting the mental health of the Welsh population, including measurable and impactful cross-government action through the Programme for Government

- Commit to re-appointing a Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Review the funding allocated to mental health services in Wales to determine if it is sufficient and appropriately resourced
- Establish a cross-government mental health impact assessment, co-created with people with lived experience and the third sector, to ensure all government actions properly consider and positively influence people's mental wellbeing
- Improve understanding of population level mental health trends through investing in a specific mental health national survey, similar to the [Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey \(APMS\)](#) in England

2 Increase investment in preventative and protective measures in the first and subsequent budgets, to reduce pressure on the mental health system and improve population mental health

- Ensure greater transparency on how mental health funding is being used at a health board level
- Ring-fence an amount of money titled a "Mental Health Prevention and Innovation" fund, to explore approaches that divert from, or reduce pressure on secondary support by creating community-based approaches
- Provide financial support for preventative activity to be developed whilst also ensuring this does not impact on access to and availability of secondary care
- Reintroduce national funding, such as Section 64 grants, to enable innovation, particularly for under-served communities
- Review funding available for suicide prevention to ensure it can meet the need and is comparable to other nations' expenditure levels



3 Set out an ambitious, resourced programme of reform to create an equitable, easily accessible, and fair mental health system that is least restrictive and free from stigma

- Build on activity already undertaken to tackle mental health stigma in all communities
- Create a co-produced anti-racism action plan for the mental health system, which must include approaches that are culturally aware and appropriate
- At least 80% of mental health professionals to receive training in culturally appropriate approaches and anti-racist practices using a targeted programme
- All mental health related training programmes (including nursing, psychiatry, psychology, Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy) must include these elements in their training pathways and as part of their core competency measures
- Commit to improving the environment and experiences of inpatient care including collecting robust data on the use of restrictive practices in inpatient settings and reducing the use of these practices year on year
- Deliver on the commitment to open access, same day mental health care to ensure people receive the right support when they need it

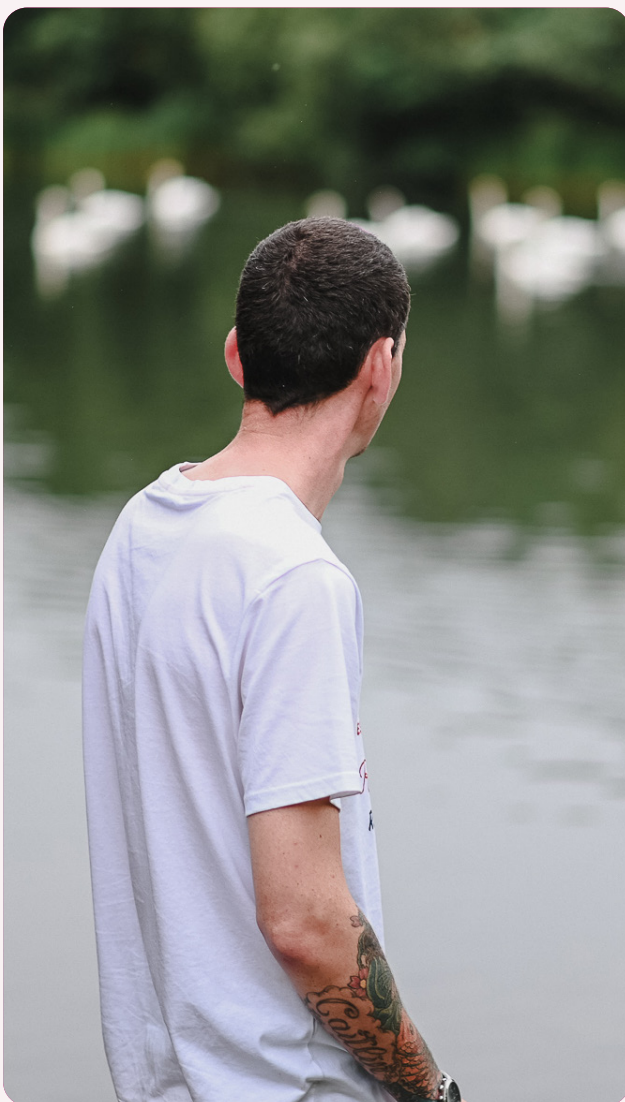


4 Develop a clear strategic response to rising mental health need among babies, children and young people by prioritising their needs

- Create a specific plan to improve babies, children and young people's mental health, identifying the actions needed across settings to inform, listen and support the mental health experiences of all
- Invest in increased community-based collaborative and cross sector approaches
- Commit to improving the transition experience of young people from Specialist CAMHS to adult services, ensuring this is based on need not age, and that models of care are aligned to allow continuity

5 Set out clear, deliverable actions to address the social and structural causes of mental health inequality with goals for tangible improvements by the end of the Senedd term

- Develop a community-focused Eradicating Poverty strategy alongside a trauma informed Community Development Strategy to address the adverse community and societal experiences, and the lasting legacies of distress and inequality faced by people across Wales
- Commit to definitive, measurable outcomes across Welsh Government activity to track impact on the population's mental health and ensure the funding available is making the biggest difference



6 Deliver a robust and transparent data system that focuses on both system, experiences and impact of support within the first year of the new Welsh Government

- Mandate the collection and routine publication of key data relating to the mental health system and people's experiences of it
- Provide Health Boards with appropriate training, support and systems to feel confident and able to record the right data
- Significantly improve expectations and delivery of data collection and publication in relation to mental health and protected characteristics

7 Develop and resource a stronger and united trauma-informed and rights focused workforce

- Continue to fund and implement the Trauma Informed Wales Framework
- At least 80% of mental health professionals to be trained in being trauma informed and to understand the impact of toxic stress, ACEs and the social determinants of mental health
- Implement legislative reform to create the conditions needed for rights-based, least-restrictive support

8 Commit to reviewing and strengthening the legislative framework in the first legislative programme for mental health to ensure it is providing the access, rights and safeguards intended

- Place the [Reducing Restrictive Practices Framework](#) on a statutory footing, as part of a wider mental health reform through extending Senri's Law to ensure the reduction in restrictive practice across all public sectors but especially the mental health system
- Conduct a comprehensive review of Wales' mental health legislative framework and guidance, including the new Mental Health Bill and the Mental Health (Wales) Measure. This review must ensure coherence, clear expectations, and responsiveness to the evolving mental health needs of the population

9 Set a clear direction around embracing and embedding collaboration between statutory and third sectors with enhanced expectations around co-production in the development and delivery of mental health support

- Clear and considered strategy on how Welsh Government plans to value, support and involve third sector with greater partnership and cooperation with the NHS Executive
- Commit to involving the Voluntary and Community (VCS) organisations in all stages of the governance and accountability framework
- Utilise third sector knowledge and expertise in the development of clear and robust infrastructure, creating opportunities for the third sector to share the evidence-based data at all groups where we are represented



As the Wales Alliance for Mental Health, we stand ready to partner with the next Welsh Government. By acting on these urgent priorities, investing in prevention, reforming services, and tackling the root causes of mental ill health, we genuinely believe we can transform lives and build a healthier, more resilient Wales for everyone

Endorsed by:

parkrun





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