

Health and Social Care: Priorities for the Sixth Senedd Consultation Response

How to share your views

To share your views, please complete the [response form](#) and send it by **16.00 on Friday 17 September 2021** to SeneddHealth@senedd.wales,

Response:

About Living Streets Cymru

We are Living Streets Cymru, part of the UK charity for everyday walking.

We want to create a nation where walking is the natural choice for everyday, local journeys; free from congested roads and pollution, reducing the risk of preventable illnesses and social isolation. We want to achieve a better walking environment and to inspire people of all generations to enjoy the benefits the simple act of walking brings.

For over 90 years we've been a beacon for walking. In our early days our campaigning led to the UK's first zebra crossings and speed limits. Now our campaigns and local projects deliver real change to overcome barriers to walking and our groundbreaking initiatives such as the world's biggest Walk to School campaign encourage millions of people to walk.

Living Streets Views on the initial priorities for the Sixth Senedd identified by the Committee

Public health and prevention

Physical inactivity as a result of sedentary lifestyles is responsible for one in six deaths in the UK (which is on par with smoking) and is linked to over 20 chronic conditions and diseases. Yet, the average UK adult spends around nine hours a day sittingⁱ. If a person is inactive, walking is a good way to start becoming active. Walking for transport or leisure is not only healthy, but accessible, sociable, free, non-polluting and easily integrated into daily life. Our transport infrastructure impacts on our ability to choose walking, it is imperative that Welsh Government policy supports places to live, work and spend time that offer wellbeing, health and environmental benefit now and for future generations.

In Wales, one third of adults do no physical activity at allⁱⁱ, only one in six 11-16-year-olds meet the Chief Medical Officer's target of 60 minutes of activity every day and childhood obesity is risingⁱⁱⁱ. In 2019, 227 people were killed or seriously injured^{iv} on roads in Wales, up from 208 in 2015. An estimated 1,000 to 1,400 deaths each year are attributable to human-made air pollution^v.

Levels of physical activity among adults and children vary across age, gender, socio-economic status and ethnicity. For example, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less physically active than children from affluent families (e.g. participation in organised sports)^{vi}, and black African and Asian adults and black Caribbean women are less likely to achieve the recommendations than the general population^{vii}.

It is also important to recognise that the pandemic has both highlighted inequalities and made them worse. The social isolation of older people and those living with disabilities has become worse despite the fact that the number of people who reported feeling lonely in Wales was already 84% in 2019-2020^{viii}, before lockdown restrictions even began. Some

people on low incomes of Black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage have been disproportionately affected because they live in areas of high air pollution.

Living Streets launched its thought-provoking [Is Walking a Miracle Cure?](#) report in 2020. It quotes the then Chief Medical Officer for England and Chief Medical Adviser to the UK Government Professor Dame Sally Davies (2017)^x who said: “*If physical activity were a drug, we’d talk about it as a miracle cure*”.

Walking has a significant role to play in public health and prevention. Social prescribing for light physical activity such as walking, even if starting from seated, can bring benefits of its own but more than this, it can play a role in influencing behaviours and encouraging people to take more exercise. One in four people say they would be more active if advised by a healthcare professional (for example, by referring patients to support in the community), offering an important opportunity to manage and improve our mental health as well as our physical health.^x

Living Streets’ report sets out how regular exercise – such as walking – works muscles across the body generating a type of molecule called a ‘skeletal myofiber vascular endothelial growth factor’; once this circulates in the bloodstream, it stimulates the growth of new blood cells which support the growth of new brain cells^{xi}. The more we learn about the benefits of walking to health and for the environment, the better it sounds.

Obesity

The previous Welsh Government published Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales, a long-term strategy to prevent and reduce obesity in Wales. Its plans cover Healthy Environments, Active Settings, Healthy People, and Leadership & Enabling Change. It notes a strong link between lack of access to quality green spaces and childhood obesity. There is a clear message that our education settings and places of work need to encourage opportunities for walking and other physical activity, including active travel.

The strategy recognises that our current environment still supports the use of cars over walking or cycling and that this needs to change to create a healthier environment. It recognises a need to invest in active travel with physical activity routinely built into infrastructure and funding decisions, such as 21st Century Schools, Health and Social Care sites, Housing and Regeneration.

Living Streets calls on the Health and Social Care Committee to scrutinise the implementation of Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales to ensure that basic rights to physical activity as part of everyday life, from an early age, remain a cornerstone of the new Welsh Government’s obesity strategy.

Clean Air

We welcome the recognition in the previous Welsh Government’s draft Clean Air Bill White Paper that “poor air quality can have a disproportionate impact on the health and well-being of children, older people and other vulnerable people and that contributing to the reduction of air pollution will have a direct and significant impact on improving human health”.

A Clean Air Act for Wales is a commitment of the new Welsh Government within the remit of the Ministers for Climate Change. However, it remains that there is no sense of urgency behind the tabling of this Bill. Living Streets calls on the Health and Social Care Committee to challenge this and bring this Bill forward in the Legislative Programme. In Wales, an estimated 1,000 to 1,400 deaths each year are attributable to human-made air pollution^{xii}. Whilst a Clean Air Act for Wales was a commitment of the previous Welsh Government, we

alongside our colleagues in the Healthy Air Cymru coalition, are disappointed that no such Bill was laid during that term. The Clean Air Bill White Paper proposes to do so in the sixth Senedd term, however, given the known health implications of air pollution on all sectors of the community, there is a real urgency to move forward with this.

In 2020, in a world-first ruling, a coroner confirmed that excessive air pollution made a material contribution to the death of 9-year-old Ella Kissi-Debrah. This young girl died in February 2013 after suffering a fatal asthma attack. She had previously suffered seizures and made almost 30 hospital visits. Air pollution will now be listed as Ella's cause of death, the first time this has happened in the world. Young children, such as Ella, do not have the luxury of waiting several more years, potentially into the seventh Senedd term, before we see policy making an impact on the ground.

Loneliness and Social Isolation

Many older people in Wales are physically inactive, or at risk of becoming so. Physical inactivity increases social isolation, reduces independence and erodes social connections. Our experience of working with older people has helped us to develop an understanding of how walking plays a central role in boosting wellbeing, by encouraging more social and physical activity. The benefits of walking for older people are well understood and evidenced. Walking, either for leisure or short utility journeys – or even a few extra steps a day for very sedentary older people – can deliver a range of physical and mental health benefits, in addition to increased feelings of confidence and independence. The Centre for Innovative Ageing, Swansea University offer the following reviews which shows for social functioning how specific interventions in physical activity can influence social health:

- Pels, F. and Kleinert, J., 2016. Loneliness and physical activity: A systematic review. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 9(1), pp.231-260. The findings of the intervention studies clearly indicate that physical activity programs can contribute to a reduction in loneliness.
- Shvedko, A., Whittaker, A.C., Thompson, J.L. and Greig, C.A., 2017. Physical activity interventions for treatment of social isolation, loneliness or low social support in older adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*.

The quality of the outdoor environment can be an important factor in wellbeing for many older people. Getting out and about in their neighbourhood is an important way of maintaining independence and being socially connected, whether this is through accessing local amenities or by being able to attend social activities. This understanding is borne out by recent research^{xiii}, which identifies issues such as inaccessibility and difficulties presented by many outdoor environments including:

- Poorly maintained pavements and paths
- Perceptions of personal safety
- A lack of facilities such as places to sit and access to toilets
- Concerns about traffic and inadequate crossings.

These issues can discourage, or even prevent, some older people from being able to make short journeys or go out independently. Living Streets Cymru carried out survey research with Ageing Well in Wales in partnership with the Older People's Commissioner's Office for Wales which highlighted that among older people in Wales 55.9% would like to walk more; only 28% felt very involved in the community, with 27% wanting to be more involved.

CASE STUDY: [Cyfeillion Cerdded Cymru – Walking Friends Wales](#)

Living Streets Cymru, alongside partners The Older People's Commissioner's Office, Independent Age, Cardiff and Vale Public Health Board and Swansea University's Centre for Innovative Ageing have been awarded an investment of £224,658 over three years from the Healthy and Active Fund.

One of our key target areas is Cardiff who found that: "More than 75% of women and a third of men over the age of 65 live alone. Without the means to leave their homes, or with fewer visits from community workers and service providers, an increasing number of older people will feel lonely and isolated resulting in damaging effects to their mental health." Ageing Well, Cardiff Council Local Delivery Plan 2014.

The project will enable older people of 50+ to increase activity through walking and taking part in led group walks. The project focuses on the following outcomes:

- Older people walk more in their community or care setting
- Older people have an improved sense of physical and mental wellbeing
- Older people are more socially connected to the local community
- Beneficiaries feel more confident taking action to address barriers that prevent them walking, including voicing the changes needed to improve their local environment.

Accessing Health Services

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales has recently published the findings of her study [Accessing Health Services Wales - Transport Issues and Barriers](#). The research identified that older people find travelling to primary health care services difficult. The most common reasons given were services not being within walking distance, not having access to their own car and a lack of public transport. Over a quarter of the respondents to the survey gave these types of difficulties as common reasons why they had missed or arrived late to their appointments. Some two-thirds of respondents reported visiting primary health services every 8-12 weeks, with half of 80-89-year-olds attending monthly.

Locating services within walking distance with accessible routes could benefit a significant number of patients, enabling them to make healthy transport choices, being more likely to be able to attend their appointments, and reducing pressure on the health service from missed appointments.

ⁱ NHS (29 November 2019) Why we should sit less <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/why-sitting-too-much-is-bad-for-us/> Accessed on 05/02/2020

ⁱⁱ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2019-12/consultation-a-clean-air-plan-for-wales.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ [North Wales Regional Partnership Board Annual Report \(gov.wales\)](#)

^{iv} [Casualties by Local Authority, vehicle type, severity \(gov.wales\)](#)

^v [consultation-a-clean-air-plan-for-wales.pdf \(gov.wales\)](#)

^{vi} Sport England (December 2019) *ibid*.

^{vii} NICE (November 2012) Physical activity: walking and cycling. Public Health guideline [PH41] <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph41/chapter/2-Public-health-need-and-practice> citing Sproston K, Mindell J (Editors) (2006) Health survey for England 2004. The health of ethnic minorities. London: The Information Centre for Health and Social Care.

^{viii} [consultation-document_0.pdf \(gov.wales\)](#)

^{ix} Davies, C. (2017) Twitter.com (viewed: 14/01/2020)

^x Public Health England (16 October 2019). Physical activity: applying All Our Health <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-applying-all-our-health/physicalactivity-applying-all-our-health> Accessed on 05/02/2020

^{xi} O'Mara S (2019) In Praise of Walking, Penguin Random House

^{xii} <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2019-12/consultation-a-clean-air-plan-for-wales.pdf>

^{xiii} Living Streets. 2011. Breaking Down the Barriers