



Inquiry into the future of general practice in Wales

Inquiry response

March 2025

Age Cymru is the leading national charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We are seeing reductions in health and wellbeing through our engagement with older people across Wales. In our 2024 What Matters to You? survey¹ with over 1300 older people across Wales, we saw an increase in the proportion of older people that needed primary care appointments. We also heard of increased challenges around physical and mental health. 51% of older people told us their physical health had been a challenge in the previous 12 months, which had increased over responses in 2023.

Without improvements in access to GP services immediately that allow help early, we are concerned that the health population projection changes already predicted may understate health reductions by that time.

The patient experience of general practice

Our engagement shows Wales-wide issues with access to GP services and changes in service availability. We are deeply concerned that the current limits in access to general practice care that plays such a vital role in preventing conditions from worsening are already affecting older people's ability to get the care they need early enough to make a good recovery.

The 'calling at 8am' system failures in access are well known and we continue to hear from older people across Wales of their frustrations that they cannot either make routine or urgent appointments. The time needed to spend on the phone and the stress this causes can be off-putting until matters become urgent. For unpaid carers this can be particularly challenging with their limited time.

Our recent engagement shows that in some areas, GP receptionists are now telling primary care patients to attend A&E for urgent needs when no appointments

¹ www.agecymru.org.uk/annualsurvey

available. This has resulted in older patients attending A&E services, only to be turned away as their needs are not seen as an emergency, leaving them nowhere to turn to with their concerns.

Older people feel forced to seek private treatment when they simply cannot wait, though this is not an option for many. We are concerned the lack of access to primary care is creating a two-tier system, and so widening health inequalities.

Issues with GP access from our feedback are evident in more rural and isolated areas of Wales where GP surgeries have closed or amalgamated to larger sites further to travel to. Older people are less likely to drive and with reductions in the availability of public transport routes, getting to a GP independently is increasingly problematic.

For those that cannot easily get to their GP surgery it is vital that repeat prescription ordering services do not need someone to physically travel to the surgery and this can be financially draining and takes up a lot of time.

Many older people are digitally excluded. For more rural areas there can be 'not spots' where there is no mobile signal, and digital access is an expense some older people cannot afford. It is important that consideration is given to how non-digital solutions will continue for those that need them with any changes in GP service models.

Opportunities to improve general practice to make it fit for the future and take a more preventative approach to care

The future model of primary care must have at its core consideration of how it can meet the projected increasing health needs and more complex health needs of the older population in Wales.

For many older people with multiple health conditions, continuity of care from trusted professionals who understand their medical history is vital.

Through in our engagement with older people, we have heard some good examples where gaps in GP service availability have been partially filled with innovative practices. In a rural area of North Wales one GP practice has made arrangements for hospital consultants to attend their surgery for patients with no viable transport options to attend a hospital appointment.

We have detailed above additional issues for older carers in accessing care from GP surgeries. Unpaid carers are worth around £10.6 billion to the Welsh economy each year and it is estimated that carers provide 96% of care and support at home. Carer identification needs increasing. As such it is vital that future models of GP practices have routine systems in place to identify unpaid carers and ensure they have access to information and advice that can support them to continue their caring role.

A good practice example of this is having a dedicated surgery for unpaid carers at regular times that is advertised to unpaid carers. This allows them to book appointments in advance and so allow them to make arrangements for care for the

cared for whilst they are away. Having dedicated times allows easier inclusion of other agency support for additional information, advice and support. Such initiatives allow carers the help they need to stay well and continue to care as opposed to a lack of access that can result in emergency admissions.

Age Cymru is a registered charity 1128436. Company limited by guarantee and registered in Wales and England 6837284. Registered office address Ground Floor, Mariners House, Trident Court, East Moors Road, Cardiff CF24 5TD. © Age Cymru 2025.