

Cafodd yr ymateb hwn ei gyflwyno i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#) ar [Flaenoriaethau'r Chweched Senedd](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) consultation on [Sixth Senedd Priorities](#)

HSC PSS 120

Ymateb gan: | Response from: Cyngor ar Bopeth Cymru | Citizens Advice Cymru



Question 2: Key priorities for the Sixth Senedd

Q2. In your view, what other key priorities should the Committee consider during the Sixth Senedd in relation to:

- a) health services;**
- b) social care and carers;**
- c) COVID recovery?**

You can comment on as many or few of the issues as you want.

In your answers, you might want to think about:

- What impact or outcomes could be achieved through any work by the Committee?
- How the Committee might address the issue?
- When any Committee work should take place?
- Whether there are any specific groups, communities or stakeholders that the Committee should involve or hear from in any work?

a) Health services

N/A

b) Social care and carers

N/A

c) COVID recovery

Citizens Advice Cymru is joining the Welsh NHS Confederation's Health and Wellbeing Alliance in calling for an inquiry across all Senedd Committees on tackling wider health inequalities in Wales in the aftermath of the pandemic.

The people who come to Citizens Advice Cymru for help are disproportionately affected by disability and health inequality. 4 in 10 (38%) of the people coming to us for advice reported having a disability or health condition, a much higher rate than amongst the general population in Wales. Mental health problems are the single most common health issue we see, particularly amongst younger working-age people. In recent years, we have also seen a significant increase in the number of people we help who have multiple health conditions.

Data from our advice services helps to illustrate some of the additional barriers to living secure and healthy lives faced by disabled people and people in poor health in Wales. The issues faced by many of the clients we see who are disabled or living with long-term health conditions indicate that many are struggling to make ends meet, are more exposed to challenges posed by the benefits system, or are experiencing poor living conditions.

Many of the problems our clients face can have a direct impact on their mental and physical health. In a recent survey of people using Citizens Advice services in Wales, 2 in 3 (65%) said that the practical issue they came for advice on had made their mental health worse, and over half (54%) said that

it worsened their physical health.¹ Practical issues such as financial difficulties, benefits problems or housing issues can also get in the way of building healthier lives. For example, someone spending time, energy and resource on trying to make ends meet or deal with multiple agencies to sort out housing or care problems can mean they have fewer opportunities to engage with activities, people or places that could contribute to improving their health or financial situation.

The practical problems people face also create additional pressure for already stretched health services, with GPs in England and Wales estimating that dealing with patient's non-clinical issues take up to a fifth (19%) of their consultation time.²

The effects of Covid-19 have not been felt equally, and the disproportionate impact on many of the people we help has been evident. Some were more exposed to health risks as a result of illegal or unfair treatment at work or financial barriers which made it more difficult to self-isolate.³ Others faced job losses or financial shocks, leaving them at risk of building up debt, being unable to afford a decent standard of living, or being evicted from their home.⁴

Decision-makers in Wales have an opportunity to act in order to avoid deepening inequalities. Our advice services have an important role to play in addressing some of the practical issues that get in the way of people living secure and healthy lives. However, given the complex and compounding issues faced by many of the people who come to us for advice, we believe that in order to address the drivers of health inequalities, Wales needs a committed and focussed approach that aligns health and social policy and prioritises preventative measures.

As the Welsh NHS Confederation has noted, the NHS alone does not have the levers to make the changes needed in order to create the conditions necessary for good health and wellbeing.⁵ It has recommended some initial steps that the Welsh Government should take to respond urgently to health inequalities, including:

- **Welsh Government leadership** - sustained, focused and coordinated action across all Government departments to tackle the root causes of health inequalities.
- **Invest in preventing health inequalities** - rebalance spend away from crisis to long-term prevention over the next Senedd term and provide the necessary transition funds to support the long-term shift to a preventative approach. Investment should be targeted at infrastructure and services that offer sustainable solutions to the underlying causes of health inequalities, such as community-based support, quality homes, and access to education and skills at all ages.
- **Working in partnership** - The Welsh Government should facilitate an enabling, responsive, and innovative operating environment that includes citizens, communities, public bodies, not-for-profit and third sector partners, and the private sector. Priorities should include giving people a greater voice in defining solutions and making partnerships fit for purpose.

Whilst there is widespread recognition of the need for concerted action to tackle this problem, collaboration is still limited and patchy.⁶ We believe that improved scrutiny and oversight of the actions being taken to address health inequalities would help to identify and address the barriers to tackling this cross-portfolio issue.

We are therefore asking the Committee to make health inequalities a priority for the Sixth Senedd. The establishment of a cross-Committee Senedd inquiry would enable all Committees to consider what steps each Welsh Government department is taking to tackle the root causes of health inequalities.

¹ Unpublished research by Citizens Advice

² [Advice in practice](#), Citizens Advice and Royal College of Physicians (2018)

³ Citizens Advice, [An unequal crisis](#), August 2020

⁴ Citizens Advice, [Facing the cliff edge: Protecting people in Wales from the financial consequences of Covid-19](#), May 2020

⁵ Wales NHS Confederation Health and Wellbeing Alliance, [Making the Difference](#), April 2021

⁶ Wales NHS Confederation Health and Wellbeing Alliance, [Making the Difference](#), April 2021