

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#)  
ar [anhydraddoldebau iechyd meddwl](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care](#)  
[Committee](#) consultation on [mental health inequalities](#)

**MHI 12**

**Ymateb gan: | Response from: Comisiynydd Cenedlaethau'r Dyfodol**  
**Cymru | Future Generations Commissioner for Wales**

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By email

11<sup>th</sup> February 2022

Dear Russell,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry into mental health inequalities. I apologise that I am unable to attend the Committee's oral evidence session, but I hope these resources are helpful for the inquiry.

In 2020, I published findings, advice and recommendations in the first Future Generations Report. The chapter covering the well-being goal, '[A Healthier Wales](#)', sets out the challenges and recommendations concerning the mental and physical health of our current and future generations in Wales. P.25-28 are particularly relevant, but well-being is a holistic concept, and I would recommend the whole chapter to your attention.

Mental health, much like physical health, is clearly a multi-faceted and complex issue, inter-connected to other factors and determinants of a person's life. **My key recommendation to Welsh Government within this chapter is to develop a National Wellness System and create a system-wide approach to keeping people well and preventing them from getting worse, rather than our current system which focuses mainly on treating illness.**

A National Wellness System would look holistically at social, cultural, economic and environmental well-being. We know, according to the World Health Organisation, that only 10% of health inequality is due to health services. Income, living conditions, social capital and environment have a wider impact on health. Likewise, we know that the gap in income, education, and physical and mental health between the most and the least deprived areas rose with austerity policies, even before the Covid-19 pandemic began.

On the ground, a wellness system would be similar to the [Bromley by Bow](#) model and the emerging practice in Wales of integrated community centres for health, care and cohesion. On a national level, a National Wellness System would mean top-slicing funding across Government to create a preventative fund. Funding should be provided to Public Services Boards, who could work collaboratively, cross-sector to respond locally to opportunities in things like social prescribing, cultural well-being, dementia-friendly communities, mental health support etc. Cross-sector Government investment would reflect how important housing, education, adverse childhood experiences and other determinants of health are in preventing mental illness and inequalities.

My recent report, [Inequality in a Future Wales](#), jointly commissioned by Public Health Wales, includes a case study on mental health in its section on Demographic Change (p.74). The data analysed in this case study refutes predictions that the pandemic and measures implemented to control it, would have the greatest impact on older people's mental health and well-being. On the contrary, data from before and during the first lockdown, analysed by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, suggests that mental well-being had deteriorated more for those aged between 16 and 24 than for any other age group. The concern, therefore, is that the mental health impacts of the

pandemic may represent the potential for future or later onset of mental health problems, which can persist throughout the life course.

The report by the fifth Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee [‘Mind over Matter: two years on’](#) (Oct 2020), echoed my findings, suggesting that:

- 1) Change is not happening quickly enough;
- 2) We need whole-system change to be the focus;
- 3) The impact of coronavirus pandemic makes progress more necessary than ever;
- 4) The new curriculum as a key opportunity.

Similarly, the Welsh Youth Parliament published [‘Let’s talk about mental health’](#) (Oct 2020) which calls for more information to be available to children and young people, a more joined up approach and for the emotional well-being and mental health to be taught to all from a young age.

In addition to recommendations within ‘A Healthier Wales’ chapter, I made other relevant recommendations to Welsh Government within the Future Generations Report 2020, including:

- Lead the way in instilling the values of kindness and compassion at every level of government and in public policy, following the [Scottish Government](#) example.
- Prioritise mental health and well-being education in the delivery of the Curriculum for Wales to help nurture a generation of emotionally resilient children.
- In collaboration with local education authorities, shift their focus towards prevention across schools in Wales to reduce the number of children excluded from school, helping to improve the life trajectory of children who are at an increased risk of inclusion due to inequality; and help break lifelong cycles of disadvantage, loneliness and adversity.

I have also highlighted case studies and good practice in relation to mental health:

- [Arts and Culture in well-being](#) – this is a selection of case studies on how public bodies are applying the Act to improve well-being through culture and creativity, such as the Arts Council working with the NHS Confederation to deliver projects like ‘Head 4 Health;.
- [Museums improving well-being](#) – this is a selection of case studies on how museums and culture can improve well-being, such as the ‘Artefact’ project collaboration delivering sessions for people with a history of mental health problems to see if engagement at the museums of Ynys Mon and Gwynedd would improve their health and prevent future illness.
- Schools that are taking a whole approach to well-being and helping children from a young age to improve their emotional well-being, such as the [Gwent Whole School Approach to Well-being Project](#).
- The [Twilight Sanctuary in Llanelli](#) is a ground-breaking out of hours mental health service for adults, the first of its kind in Wales, open Thursday to Sunday from 6pm to 2am, offering early access to help and a place of sanctuary for adults at risk of deteriorating mental health, when other support-based services are closed.

- North Wales PSBs with Wrexham Glyndwr University have a well-established [social prescribing network](#) and are working with local GPs, the third sector and others to provide preventative services.
- Gwent [Ffrind I Mi Project](#) is a volunteer-based project, working intergenerationally at times, to tackle loneliness, social isolation, mental ill-health, dementia and create community cohesion.

Mental health is key to well-being and my report 'Inequalities in Future Wales' shows inequalities are predicted to rise if we do not act fast. I look forward to the Committee's report and recommendations to help Wales be Healthier and More Equal and improving well-being for all.

Yours sincerely,



Sophie Howe  
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