

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 69

Ymateb gan: | Response from: NYAS Cymru





Mental Health Inequalities: Consultation Response

NYAS Cymru submission to the Senedd Health and Social Care Committee, February 2022

Your details

1. Name: **Sharon Lovell and Ben Twomey**
2. Email address:
3. Submitting evidence as an individual or on behalf of an organisation: **On behalf of an organisation**
4. Please choose one of the following options below which best represents you or your organisation:
I work at a charity
5. Organisation you are responding on behalf of: **NYAS Cymru**
6. Confirmation of whether you would prefer that your name is not published alongside your evidence: **No, NYAS Cymru would prefer its name to be published alongside its evidence**
7. Confirmation of whether you would like the committee to treat any or all your written evidence as confidential, with reasons for the request: **No, NYAS Cymru does not seek anonymity**



Introduction

NYAS Cymru (National Youth Advocacy Service Wales) is a leading children’s rights charity that supports and empowers care-experienced children and young people across Wales through the provision of services such as advocacy, independent visiting, mentoring, youth participation and mental health support. NYAS Cymru works with children and adults in mental health in-patient settings and runs the Newid project across Wales to give vital support for care-experienced young people’s mental health and wellbeing as they enter adulthood.

Our submission is based on our belief that mental health support must be child-centered and rights-based, recognising that mental health problems are preventable. We welcome this opportunity to respond to Senedd Cymru’s consultation on mental health inequalities.

Question 1: Which groups of people are disproportionately affected by poor mental health in Wales? What factors contribute to worse mental health within these groups?

Mental health matters to care-experienced children and young people and it is consistently raised as one of the key priorities from young people themselves. In 2018, NYAS Cymru hosted the first ever Youth Gender Equality Conference, where access to mental health services was identified as a key concern by the 300 14-21-year-olds attending.

For many children and young people whom we engage with, entering care gave them the support and stability they needed to recover from past traumas. Despite this, being in care rarely guarantees good mental health. As identified by Care Inspectorate Wales, undiagnosed and unsupported mental health issues will only add to the issues already faced by care-experienced children and young people, potentially leading to increased risk of substance abuse, loneliness, and isolation.

59% of children and young people who entered care in Wales did so because of abuse or neglect. The impact this past trauma can have on a young person’s mental health can be extreme.¹ Our ‘Looked After Minds’ campaign calls on Welsh Government to take urgent action to prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of care-experienced children and young people.

Question 2: For the groups identified, what are the barriers to accessing mental health services? How effectively can existing services meet their needs, and how could their experience of using mental health services be improved?

Waiting times and disconnect between services

¹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2021-11/children-looked-after-local-authorities-april-2020-march-2021-experimental-statistics-396.pdf>



For care-experienced young people, like their peers, waiting times are a major barrier to accessing mental health services. The Senedd’s Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry in 2017, proved the lack of progress in service provision for children and young people since their earlier inquiry in 2014.² Lengthy waiting times continue to be a problem.

Welsh government policy aims for 80% of people to access specialist psychological therapies within six months of a referral. Between April 2019 and August 2020, that target was never achieved, according to Mind Cymru.³ Out of the thousands of people left waiting, care-experienced young people in Wales will have been amongst them.

The inconsistent transitions between CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and adult mental health services can also leave care-experienced young people without help or support, which risks impacting their mental health and wellbeing.

Effectiveness of existing services in meeting the needs of care-experienced young people

Although care-experienced young people in Wales are legally entitled to Personal Advisors and a pathway plan from age 16 to 21, we hear of this planning process feeling rushed, not allowing enough time for young people’s mental health and wellbeing needs to be fully considered. This can compound the problems created by the 18 year old ‘cliff edge’ cut off point for CAMHS support, leading to poor forward planning for their mental health.

This is a key reason for NYAS Cymru launching the Newid project which seeks to promote positive mental health and emotional wellbeing for care experienced young people between the ages of 16 and 25. The project has a particular focus on transition, supporting those who are in need of or who have accessed mental health services and need further lower-level support to manage their own health and well-being. We are grateful to Welsh Government for funding and supporting the project.

Medically, there is no reason that a change in service support should happen at precisely the time when a young person is leaving care - there are no clear biological markers that indicate when transition to adulthood begins or is complete.

Question 3: To what extent does Welsh Government policy recognise and address the mental health needs of these groups? Where are the policy gaps?

Question 4: What further action is needed, by whom/where, to improve mental health and outcomes for the groups of people identified and reduce mental health inequalities in Wales?

² <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11522/cr-ld11522-e.pdf>

³ <https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/mind-cymru-campaigns/too-long-to-wait/>



NYAS Cymru welcomes Welsh Government plans for young people who are looked after or on the edge of care to be helped and supported to enjoy the same life chances as other children.⁴

Active (opt-out) offer of independent mental health advocacy services (IMHA)

Recognise: Welsh Government's ten year Together for Mental Health strategy includes all age groups – children, adults of working age, and older people.⁵ It was promised that the strategy would seek to improve transitions for people who move between these services. Welsh Government's All Wales Heads of Children's Services also recognised in 2018 that "the "crisis" experienced within the provisions for children who are looked after is exacerbated by "the disconnect across services areas".⁶

It is also statutory under Part 4 of the Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010 to offer every in-patient access to the help of an independent mental health advocate.⁷ Welsh Government already recognised the need to extend the right to IMHAs (Independent Mental Health Advocacy) to all people admitted to psychiatric hospitals, patients on the shorter-term, emergency sections of the Act, and patients in hospital voluntarily or "informally" (e.g., not subject to the Mental Health Act 1983).

As society's collective understanding of what constitutes poor mental health develops, more should be done to increase support for care-experienced young people and care leavers at risk of developing mental health problems.

Address: NYAS Cymru urges the government to implement an active offer of independent advocacy services for all children and young people receiving any tier of mental health support services.

Apart from helping care-experienced young people understand and navigate mental health services in a key transition period, this provision would also help Welsh Government to fulfill their promise of ensuring equality; "so that, whether in mental health services or services more generally, the human rights of people with mental ill-health are better protected and the diversity of need better recognised."

The active offer was supported by the Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee in their 2018 'Mind over matter' report:

"We believe that, in the case of all children and young people accessing mental health services – not just those in in-patient settings – advocacy should be available. Given the age and vulnerabilities of the children and young people involved, we believe that consideration of a more active offer is needed. Furthermore, we agree with the National Youth Advocacy Service that the integrity of any such offer relies

⁴ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-10/a-healthier-wales-action-plan.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.mentalhealthwales.net/the-new-strategy-for-wales/#:~:text=%20OVERVIEW%20OF%20THE%20STRATEGY%20%E2%80%9C%20TOGETHER%20FOR%20MENTAL,level%20outcomes%20and%2018%20lower%20level...%20More%20>

⁶ <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11522/cr-ld11522-e.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.mentalhealthwales.net/mental-health-measure/>



on it being made more than once, especially when the first offer may be made at a time of confusion and distress.”

Mental health and wellbeing as a key performance indicator for Personal Advisors

Recognise: The government’s All Wales Heads of Children’s Services referred to the fact that the provision of a range of support for looked after children’s psychological and emotional health, including during transition to adulthood, needs to be “urgently addressed on an all-Wales basis.”⁸

It is statutory under section 106 of Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 that corporate parents must arrange for looked-after children to have a personal advisor, who will support them up until the age of 21 or to 25 under certain circumstances. As Wales became the first UK nation to make sure that the mental health of children and young people is always assessed upon entry into care, there is also an opportunity in being first to make sure that the mental health of children and young people is assessed upon leaving care.

Address: NYAS Cymru believes every care-experienced young person’s Personal Advisor should prioritise support for the young person’s mental health and wellbeing as a key performance indicator. This would mean Personal Adviser’s being more assertive with other services when young people they support are waiting for or denied access to mental health support.

Guidance on positive childhood experiences

Recognise: In January 2022, the government committed to developing an adverse childhood experiences plan to help improve services’ understanding of childhood adversity and trauma and their response.⁹ NYAS Cymru welcome the £500,000 made available to help tackle ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and believe that positive childhood experiences should also be part of this plan.

Address: Welsh Government must create statutory guidance for professionals and carers on Positive Childhood Experiences. Recent research in the USA showed that seven ‘positive childhood experiences’ focused on safe, stable and nurturing relationships for children, can reduce the risk of poor mental health in adulthood. These are for the child to:

- Talk with family members about their feelings
- Feel that their families stood by them during difficult times
- Enjoy participating in community traditions
- Feel a sense of belonging in high school
- Feel supported by friends
- Have at least two non-parent adults who take genuine interest in them
- Feel safe and protected by an adult in their home

⁸ <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11522/cr-ld11522-e.pdf>

⁹ <https://gov.wales/written-statement-welsh-governments-plan-preventing-adverse-childhood-experiences>



As part of any new guidance, we support a ‘do no harm’ principle for services working with care-experienced children and young people, that recognises that professional decisions can harm mental health and advises on how to mitigate that likelihood. This guidance should have an explicit focus on supporting care-experienced children and young people to lead fulfilling lives and reach their potential.¹⁰

¹⁰ <https://www.nyas.net/wp-content/uploads/NYAS-looked-after-mind-report.pdf>