



Welsh Royal Colleges
Child Health
Collaborative

Cydweithredfa
Iechyd Plant
Colegau Brenhinol Cymru

First Minister of Wales
Welsh Government
5th Floor
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Cardiff Bay
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Monday 20 May 2024

Dear First Minister

We have come together as 20 organisations today to form the Welsh Royal Colleges Child Health Collaborative (WRCCHC).

Together we're asking how your government will improve health outcomes for babies, children and young people and how you will ensure the sustainability of the workforce that care for them.

Recently both the [Academy of Medical Royal Colleges](#) and [Academy of Medical Sciences](#) published stark reports that highlight the wide-ranging evidence of declining health among children.

We echo the stark warning of these reports as we see every day the impact of poor child health, the disproportionate impact of health inequalities on children and the consequence of this on people's long-term health and wellbeing.

Major health issues like infant mortality, obesity and tooth decay are not only damaging the nation's youngest and their future, but also the nation's economic prosperity. The issues we see today will impact the health of future generations, our economic potential and will cost more to address in the future.

In Wales we have an opportunity to do things differently and improve our children's life chances. We urge you to seize this opportunity and answer the urgent calls to prioritise babies, children and young people's health and the services that provide for them.

The health of children in Wales

[Emergency department attendance](#): 18,924 children (under 18s) attended an NHS Wales emergency department in February 2024, compared to 15,507 in February 2022. An increase of 22%.

[Waiting lists](#): There are 7,310 under 18s waiting longer than a year for treatment, and 1,212 waiting longer than two years (February 2024). Those waiting longer than a year for an outpatient appointment have increased by 18% since September 2022 (3210/3779).

[Mental health](#): 1 in 6 children and young people have a diagnosable mental health problem, and many more struggle with challenges from bullying to bereavement.

[Poverty](#): 29% of children are living in relative income poverty, compared to 21% of working adults and 16% of pensioners in Wales.

[Healthy Child Wales Programme](#): Over 62,000 contacts which should have been offered in 2022 were not recorded as taking place.

[Breastfeeding](#): Whilst over 60% of women intend to breastfeed, the figure falls to 26% reporting any breastfeeding at 6 weeks.

[Physical activity](#): Only 17% of young people (aged 11-16) are active for at least 60 minutes across every day of the week, while nearly a third (32%) of children (aged 8-11) reported watching TV/screens for two hours or more every day.

[Oral Health](#): Nearly a third (32.4%) of year one school aged children had experienced dental caries. This increases to 43.4% of those in the most deprived quintile a rise of 1.2% compared to the previous year.

[Healthy weight](#): The proportion of children overweight or obese ranges from 24.1% in Powys and Cardiff and the Vale, 27.6% in Betsi Cadwaladr, 28.3% in Swansea Bay and 29.2% in Hywel Dda University Health Board.

[Smoking](#): 4% of 11-16 year olds identify as current smokers, rising to 9% of those aged 15-16. Adolescents from less affluent families are twice as likely to be current smokers as those from more affluent families.

[Vaping](#): 1 in 5 (20%) of secondary aged learners (Year 7 to 11) have tried vapes. With 5% reporting using of vapes regularly, rising to 14% for Year 11 pupils.

[Speech, language and communication skills](#): 4.8% of school children in Wales have speech, language & communication needs with nearly a third (32%) living in areas of high social disadvantage.

[Safeguarding](#): The proportion of children on the child protection register has remained stubbornly high at 14% since 2017.

As a collaborative of Royal Colleges and professional bodies we have expertise in pharmacy, nursing, public and oral health with professions in primary, secondary and community care. We'd like to offer expert advice and support and work with you to improve children's health.

The WRCCHC aims to ensure a sharper focus and understanding on the current and necessary support for babies, children and young people and the workforce we represent.

We have established common work areas of health inequalities, workforce, data, safeguarding and accountability. However, this is not an exhaustive list. As individual organisations we all have our own priorities and expertise, but we all feel the need to focus on the common work areas identified above.

We look forward to working with you, your ministers and both the NHS Executive maternity and neonatal network and child health network.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely,



Welsh Royal College Child Health Collaborative (WRCCHC) as designed by Ty Hafan Youth Board.

Endorsed by:

1. Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (*WRCCHC Chair*)
2. Royal College of General Practitioners (*WRCCHC Vice Chair*)
3. British Dental Association
4. British Psychological Society
5. Chartered Society of Physiotherapists
6. College of Paramedics
7. Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine
8. Faculty of Public Health

9. Royal College of Emergency Medicine
10. Royal College of Midwives
11. Royal College of Nursing
12. Royal College of Occupational Therapists
13. Royal College of Pathologists
14. Royal College of Physicians
15. Royal College of Podiatry
16. Royal College of Psychiatrists
17. Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
18. Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh
19. Royal Pharmaceutical Society
20. Society of Radiographers

Cc'ing for information

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Eluned Morgan MS

Minister for Mental Health and Early Years, Jayne Bryant MS

Minister for Social Care, Dawn Bowden MS

Chief Medical Officer, Dr Frank Atherton

Chief Allied Health Professions Adviser, Ruth Crowder

Chief Nursing Officer, Sue Tranka

Chief Pharmaceutical Officer, Andrew Evans