

Stop the detention of learning disabled and autistic children, young people and adults in hospital

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 2 Rhagfyr 2024
Petitions Committee | 2 December 2024

Reference: SR24/9803/2

Petition Number: P-06-1479

Petition title: Stop the detention of learning disabled and autistic children, young people and adults in hospital

Text of petition: There are people with learning disabilities and/or autism from Wales who are living in hospitals. This is a human rights scandal which has been ignored for too long.

Many people with learning disabilities and/or autism are trapped in hospitals due to a lack of appropriate housing and support in their community. Many are sectioned due to placement breakdown and they have been inappropriately placed.

Welsh Government must recognise that sectioning people under the MHA is not the solution.

Stolen Lives are a campaign group consisting of families who have loved ones with a learning disability and/or autism who are, or have been incarcerated, in hospitals.

They are supported by members of the Wales Learning Disability Consortium: Learning Disability Wales, All Wales Forum of Parents and



Carers, Mencap Cymru, All Wales People First, Down's Syndrome Association and Cymorth Cymru.

Hospitals are not a home. Many hospitals are far from people's families, and cases of abuse and neglect are all too common.

Welsh Government must tell us how they plan to stop sectioning under the Mental Health Act and how they plan to bring children, young people and adults who have been sectioned closer to home and out of hospitals, and tell us exactly how many children, young people and adults with learning disabilities and/or autism are currently away from home in mental health hospitals and so-called assessment and treatment units

1. Background

Some people with a learning disability and/or autism are placed in secure mental health units or hospitals due to a lack of available alternatives, because the services they need cannot be provided in their communities.

As mentioned in the petition, the Stolen Lives campaign group, supported by members of the Wales Learning Disability Consortium, are campaigning for this to end.

Learning Disability Wales explains:

A learning disability is not a mental health issue, which means people are wrongly being placed in hospitals when they should be given support to live their lives at home. [...] today people with a learning disability are still being sectioned and inappropriately placed in hospital settings simply because the right support is not available in their local area.

All Wales People First says:

Too many people with learning disabilities are being kept in hospital settings. Many have been there for several years with no plans for integrating them back into their communities.

In 2020, the Welsh Government published the report of the Chief Nursing Officer's [National Care Review of NHS learning disability hospitals provision](#) and made 70 recommendations for improvement.

In April 2024 [the Welsh Government stated](#) that the last audit showed there were 140 Welsh residents with a learning disability residing in a specialist inpatient service; 118 were receiving care in a learning disability provision and 22 were receiving care in a mental health provision.

The Stolen Lives group organised a [“Homes not hospital” protest](#) outside the Senedd in April 2024 to launch the petition.

2. Welsh Parliament action

Members have asked a number of questions on this topic in Plenary and by written questions, for example [Sioned Williams MS asked](#) about the number of people in these situations in April 2024.

in May 2024 [Hefin David MS asked](#) what action the Welsh Government is taking to ensure that people with learning disabilities receive appropriate care in the community. He also [tabled a motion in September 2024](#) focused on the Stolen Lives campaign calls, which received cross party support.

A number of Members also supported the Homes not hospitals protest.

3. Welsh Government response

The Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing responded to the petition on 12 November 2024. She said the Welsh Government shares the campaign's view that a hospital bed is not a home and wherever possible people with learning disabilities should receive their care at home or as close to home as they can. “This is a key priority for us and a specific commitment within the Learning Disability Strategic Action Plan 2022-2026”.

The Minister goes on to say the Welsh Government is undertaking a significant amount of work in this area, working with stakeholders and partners from the NHS Executive, health boards, local authorities, the third and private sectors under the umbrella of the independent Learning Disability National Implementation and Assurance Group.

The Minister acknowledged in her response that a lot of this work is being carried out beyond the public's view and notes the need to keep people informed and give them the opportunity to contribute in helping to tackle these issues.

The Minister says the Welsh Government is working with the NHS Executive to improve the capture and analysis of data around the number of adults with a learning disability who are receiving care in an inpatient environment. It is exploring how to publish this information and starting work on a similar data collection process for children and young people.

The Minister also states she has tasked the Learning Disability Ministerial Advisory Group (LDMAG) with establishing a task and finish group which will work to address the five key concerns raised by the Stolen Lives campaign. She says members of the Stolen Lives campaign are key contributors to this group, which held its inaugural meeting on 15 October. The Minister finishes by saying she's asked the group to provide recommendations by the summer 2025.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.