

P-06-1488 Establish a 'Care Society' to Tackle the Long COVID Crisis in Wales

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 17 Chwefror 2025
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Reference: SR2510372-1

Petition Number: P-06-1488

Petition title: Establish a 'Care Society' to Tackle the Long COVID Crisis in Wales

Text of petition: Wales is grappling with escalating long-term illnesses from Long COVID in previously healthy children and working people. In Wales, more than 12,000 have died with COVID. As many as 300,000 are battling Long COVID. Families are losing income providers. Hospitals under extreme pressure. School absences more than doubled. By 2030, 1 in 3 could have Long COVID.

We call for a 'Care Society' to safeguard our health and livelihoods.

Additional information - Components of 'The Care Society'

- 1. Health:** Funding for Long COVID clinics and research
- 2. Economic Participation:** Workplace adjustments such as flexible hours, remote work, and discrimination protections. A Universal Basic Income pilot, examining how financial support could empower people to contribute to society, regardless of health status.
- 3. Infrastructure:** Enhance air quality in public buildings, including schools and hospitals. Invest in green infrastructure to spur economic growth, including retraining for those transitioning from current roles due to Long COVID.



Background

The Care Society

The term "**Care Society**" has been discussed in various contexts, particularly in social policy. It is a social and economic model that prioritises care as a fundamental value in society. The petitioner refers to the term to emphasise the importance of person-centred policies and to address structural inequalities exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Its **key components** include healthcare and research, economic empowerment, and investment in infrastructure.

Advocacy groups, including **Long COVID Wales** - the Welsh branch of the patient-led UK group Long COVID Support, **back the petition**, calling for a comprehensive response to the crisis in Wales.

Long Covid

Over 15,000 deaths involving Covid-19 **have been registered in Wales** up to January 2025 (this includes deaths where Covid-19 was mentioned on the death certificate, whether as an underlying cause or not).

As of 5 March 2023, an estimated 108,000 people in Wales were experiencing the **long-term effects** of Covid infections, known as Long Covid (this figure is self-reported). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) **has estimated** that 2.9% of the UK population were experiencing self-reported Long Covid.

The term Long Covid describes symptoms persisting from, or starting after, a Covid infection. Covid is a serious vascular disease that can infect every major organ and system, so there are **over 200 possible symptoms**. These include neurological issues such as memory and concentration problems, autoimmune disorders, extreme fatigue, and cardiovascular problems.

Welsh Government Action

The Welsh Government launched **the Adferiad (Recovery) programme** to support people suffering from the long-term effects of Covid-19, including Long Covid in June 2021. The Adferiad programme includes a patient pathway to diagnose Long Covid and assess the severity of symptoms. It offers treatment plans and rehabilitation services to help manage symptoms such as breathlessness, fatigue, and brain fog, and offers access to a team of healthcare professionals, including

doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and psychologists. The programme provides guidance and resources to help individuals manage their symptoms at home.

The Welsh Government **allocated £5 million** to support the programme in 2021. In March 2023, the then Minister for Health and Social Services announced **an increase in annual funding** for Adferiad services, with £8 million now being allocated to health boards on an ongoing basis. The increased funding was intended to enable health boards to widen access to Adferiad-funded services to people with other post-acute infection illness, including people with conditions such as ME/CFS and fibromyalgia, as well as those with persistent physical symptoms, but no confirmed diagnosis.

The Welsh Government's response to this Committee sets out how it has prioritised supporting Long Covid patients since the pandemic began:

Healthcare and research

- The Welsh Government explains that its approach to supporting people living with Long Covid aligns with NICE guidelines and highlights that £6.93m was allocated to the Health and Care Research Wales Evidence Centre to guide policy and treatment approaches. It outlines its approach as providing local, community-based rehabilitation services with access to specialist care when needed.

Economic empowerment

- The Welsh Government states that employers must provide reasonable adjustments for workers with Long Covid, as required by the Equality Act 2010. It also refers to NHS Wales Guidance issued in July 2023, advising flexible support for NHS staff returning to work, including enhanced sick pay. The government's response notes that disability benefits for Long Covid fall under UK government jurisdiction.

Infrastructure and air quality improvements

- The Welsh Government highlights new ventilation guidelines to ensure effective infection control in hospital buildings, stating that health boards are responsible for overseeing ventilation in hospitals. It adds that local authorities are responsible for ventilation in schools.

Welsh Parliament Action

There have been several debates in the Senedd on Long Covid, most recently, a short debate, '[Long Covid: Developing an all-Wales approach for tackling a growing health crisis](#)' on 11 December 2024.

On 22 October 2024, Adam Price MS tabled a written question [WQ94701]:

How does the Welsh Government propose to ensure that the needs of the most seriously ill patients with ME, including those with long COVID who meet the NICE clinical criteria of severe/very severe ME, are appropriately met?

Answered by Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care on 31/10/2024:

The Adferiad (Recovery) programme, which was initially set up to support people with long-Covid is improving support for people with ME/CFs. £8m of recurrent funding has been allocated to health boards since March 2023 to widen access to Adferiad-funded services to people with other long-term conditions whose rehabilitation and recovery needs are similar to people with Long-Covid, including ME/CFS, and to continue to develop and expand community-focused multi-disciplinary rehabilitation services, supported by referral pathways into secondary care for those who need it.

All health boards are developing services focusing on proactive care and targeting recovery and rehabilitation, promoting self-management and supported self-management through a multidisciplinary team approach. Co-production is an essential factor in service development, and I expect health boards to engage with people with lived experience in this process.

Plans are progressing to include pathways for ME/CFS and long-Covid in the community health pathways programme overseen by the National Clinical Lead for Health and Care Pathways Planned Care Programme. Community health pathways offer clinicians locally agreed information to make the right decisions together with patients, at the point of care. The pathways are designed primarily for general practice teams, but are also available to specialists, allied health professionals, and other health professionals.

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.