



How is your government department working to reduce the impact of poverty and inequalities?

24 April 2023

We have come together as 33 organisations today to ask you how your government department is working to reduce the impact of inequalities.

Wales has the [highest poverty rate among the four UK nations](#), with almost one in four (23%) people in poverty. This is driven by the relatively high proportions of working-age adults out of work (25%) or working typically lower-paid 'routine' jobs (32% of in-work adults).

The [cost-of-living crisis is exacerbating poverty](#) and inequalities in Wales, according to the Bevan Foundation, which says that 'large numbers of people are going without essentials including four in ten going without heating in their home and one in four eating smaller meals or skipping meals in their entirety'. Audit Wales recently called poverty the [single major challenge](#) facing all tiers of government.

A national delivery plan to tackle poverty and inequality is desperately needed.

Our organisations are calling for a national joined-up delivery plan that sets out milestones, timelines and clear targets detailing what every Welsh government department is doing to tackle inequalities within their remit, and how ministers are working together to reduce the impact of poverty and deprivation on the people of Wales. Led by the first minister and jointly written with external stakeholders, this plan should be shaped by lived experience.

'Councils and partners are prioritising work on poverty, but the mix of approaches and a complicated partnership landscape mean that ambitions, focus, actions and prioritisation vary widely.

'The Welsh government makes significant revenue funding available but, due to the complexity and nature of the issues, the total level of spend is unknown, and no council knows the full extent of its spending on alleviating and tackling poverty.

'The short-term nature of grant programmes, overly complex administration, weaknesses in guidance and grant restrictions, and difficulties spending monies means that funding is not making the impact it could. Councils find it hard to deliver preventative work because of the sheer scale of demand from people in crisis.' ([Audit Wales](#))



As you will know, the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) requires public bodies – including the Welsh government – to think about the long-term impact of their decisions and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. In 2021, the Welsh government also enacted the [socio-economic duty](#), which aims to improve inequality of outcome for people who suffer socio-economic disadvantage. Because of this, we have been told that a cross-government plan is not needed; that we already have the tools in place to tackle inequalities, reduce poverty and improve wellbeing.

The tools may be in place, but are they being used effectively?

‘Concurrent action is needed at multiple levels [of government]: an enduring national mission to tackle inequality; a new local and national partnership to create the conditions for system success; and local leadership to nurture the disruption needed to sustain success.’ ([The King’s Fund](#))

In July 2022, many of our organisations [came together to call on](#) the Welsh government to consolidate commitments on reducing inequalities and map out existing activity on poverty reduction to improve cross-government accountability, provide more detailed national implementation guidance to local delivery bodies, and introduce health impact assessment regulations as a priority.

‘People need to feel hopeful ... we need policies which make it possible for people not only to survive, but to flourish.’ – [The Most Reverend Andrew John](#), Anglican Archbishop of Wales

In December 2021, the Welsh government and Plaid Cymru launched the [updated Programme for Government 2021–2026](#), which includes a commitment to ‘move to eliminate inequality in all of its forms’. Inequality is also referenced in the [narrative document](#) for the Welsh government’s 2023–24 draft budget: although there are only 16 mentions of ‘equal’ (including the words equality, inequality or inequalities), down from 43 in the [2022–23 narrative document](#) when the minister for finance argued that ‘we cannot, and will not, ignore the devastating impacts the pandemic continues to have on the people of Wales [which] have not fallen equally or fairly.’

We know – for example – that poor housing, food quality, community safety, low incomes, fuel poverty, racism and discrimination, poor transport links and air pollution all have a major effect on people’s wellbeing and outcomes.

In the [2023–24 budget narrative document](#), the Welsh government acknowledges that ‘the pandemic, rising inflation and cost-of-living crisis have all had an adverse impact on inequality within Wales.’ However, there is no overarching explanation in any of these documents about how work to tackle inequality will be joined up, how outcomes will be measured and how ministers will be held accountable for delivering change.



'[Evidence shows](#) that a comprehensive approach to tackling [inequalities] can make a difference. Concerted, systematic action is needed across multiple fronts.' ([The King's Fund](#))

This is not an unprecedented approach. It has been done before.

In March 2022, for example, the Welsh government published the [children and young people's plan](#), which consolidates government priorities and fosters cross-ministerial working. Earlier this year, the [LGBTQ+ action plan for Wales](#) gathered [over 50 actions across several departments](#) and policy areas of Welsh government.

'Creating a nation that values and protects people's health, enabling longer healthier lives, will not come about through any single policy. It needs a radical shift in focus, effort and accountability.' ([The Health Foundation](#))

Now we are asking you to write to us with more detailed information about how you and your officials are working to reduce the impact of inequalities and poverty across your ministerial portfolio responsibilities.

We would like to know:

1. How are you and your officials delivering on the [Programme for Government 2021–2026](#) commitment to 'move to eliminate inequality'?
2. How are you and your officials working with other government departments to maximise the impact of your work?
3. How are you and your officials using the [socio-economic duty](#) to ensure that strategic decisions made by your department are tackling inequality of outcome?

We look forward to hearing from you.

We would also be very happy to meet with you to discuss this work.

In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.



Welsh NHS Confederation
Health and Wellbeing Alliance

In partnership with:



**Royal College
of Physicians**

Coleg Brenhinol
y Meddygon (Cymru)

This letter is signed by:

Asthma + Lung UK Cymru
BMA Cymru Wales
British Association of Social Workers
British Geriatrics Society
British Society for Heart Failure
Care & Repair Cymru
College of Paramedics
Community Housing Cymru
Community Leisure UK
Fair Treatment for the Women of Wales
Learning Disability Wales
Leonard Cheshire
Marie Curie
MS Society Cymru
National Autistic Society Cymru
Parkinson's UK Cymru
RNIB Cymru
Royal College of Anaesthetists

Royal College of General Practitioners
Royal College of Nursing
Royal College of Physicians
Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons
of Glasgow
Royal College of Speech and Language
Therapists
Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh
Royal College of Surgeons of England
Royal Pharmaceutical Society
Samaritans Cymru
Shine Cymru
Stroke Association Cymru
Tenovus Cancer Care
Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Wales Neurological Alliance
Welsh NHS Confederation

About our work: The Welsh NHS Confederation Health and Wellbeing Alliance sub-group on health inequalities is convened by the [Royal College of Physicians](#) and has published [Mind the gap: what's stopping change?](#), which was endorsed by 50 organisations in July 2022. Later the same year we published [Everything affects health](#), which describes how organisations from across Wales are working collaboratively across health, social services, housing, the arts, benefits and welfare advice, transport, loneliness and isolation, climate change, air pollution and much more.

[@WelshConfed](#)

www.nhsconfed.org/wales/health-and-wellbeing-alliance

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www.rcp.ac.uk/wales

[#EverythingAffectsHealth](#)