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**Future
Generations**
Commissioner
for Wales

The Future Generations Report 2020: Executive Summaries



Let's create the future together

A Healthier Wales



"A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood."

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) (Act 2015)

Good health is one of the main building blocks of wellness and opportunity. Enabling people to live the highest quality of life they can includes supporting them to have a lifestyle that maintains good physical and mental health, through creating places and environments that support healthy lifestyles and ensuring there are effective services to support people when they need care.

The high proportion of our population in ill health has been brought into sharp focus by the COVID-19 pandemic, with older and less healthy people being the most at risk. Future work to improve health outcomes at all ages needs to be prioritised for the benefit of our population, as well as ensuring we are better prepared for global crises, such as pandemics.

We need to shift the system to prioritising keeping people of all ages mentally and physically well, to enable them to live healthy and fulfilled lives. To deliver this, we need to develop a national wellness system which is an approach to keeping people well focused on the wider determinants of health.



Policy Recommendations

Welsh Government should develop a national wellness system to improve the nation's health and wellness and reduce demand on services.

Welsh Government should...

Change performance management arrangements with public bodies to encourage collaboration to keep people well and reduce demand.

Explore new approaches to investment in prevention, including whether funds raised from new taxes (such as the potential social care levy) could be used for investment in prevention.

Appoint a Minister for Prevention, with responsibility for taking a whole-government, coherent and evidence-based approach to investment in prevention. (Also a recommendation in CH2)

Change funding arrangements across sectors and services to encourage collaboration to keep people well and reduce demand - using increased investment in preventative activities as a first step.

Use the wider determinants of health to enable a whole-system approach to improving health and wellness.

Advice on setting well-being objectives for all public bodies and boards covered by the Well-being of Future Generations Act (including Welsh Government)

Please refer to the chapter on Setting Good Well-being Objectives, but in setting their objectives specifically in relation to this goal, all public bodies and boards covered by the Act should:

- Recognise the wider determinants of health.
- Look to collaborate beyond traditional partners to address the wider determinants of health.



In setting their **steps**, public bodies and boards covered by the Well-being of Future Generations Act (including Welsh Government) should focus in the following areas and should:

- Consider their role in a national wellness system - applying the Welsh Government definition of prevention to their activities as a first step, and exploring the most significant opportunities to shift spend to activities that support primary and secondary prevention; particularly opportunities to work in partnership.
- Support people to act with compassion in order to facilitate understanding of mental well-being.
- Play their part in enabling an active nation; increasing the benefits of physical activity for everyone.
- Prioritise placemaking and designing-in community health and well-being – enabling places to support the health and well-being of people and communities.

“I think it is very important to recognise that health is not just something we fix when it is broken, but something to maintain and nurture.”

People's Platform

Where are we now? My assessment of progress in achieving A Healthier Wales:

There is compelling evidence that we are not investing in the best balance of services to keep people well and to enable them to live healthy and fulfilled lives.

High profile publications including the [World Health Organisation Health Equity status report](#) and Michael Marmot's '[Fair Society, Healthy Lives](#)' suggest that greater investment is needed globally (and by extension in Wales) in the wider determinants of health including income security and social protection, living conditions, social and human capital and employment and working conditions.

There is some evidence of public bodies adopting approaches that are more preventative, but the prevention agenda is not progressing at the scale and pace needed and is not often focused on the wider determinants of health.

Feedback from health bodies and other stakeholders suggests that the level of change towards preventative approaches that are set out in strategy and policy documents is not necessarily taking place at the local and operational levels because of significant barriers to change which include the prioritisation of short-term issues and targets, workforce pressures as well as increasing demand for services.



The Transformation Fund is funding some interesting place-based approaches to prevention, but further work is needed to consider the wider determinants of health and move to a system-wide shift to prevention.

Welsh Government published its strategy '[A Healthier Wales: long term plan for health and social care](#)' in June 2018. This strategy is a definite step in the right direction but I am concerned about the degree to which the actions set out in the strategy are taking account of the wider determinants of health, alongside recognising the need for a whole system approach to keeping people well. There are some positive projects being funded by the Transformation Fund, including, for example, Integrated Well-being Networks in Gwent and I CAN Community Hubs in Llandudno, Rhyl and Prestatyn.

We need to scale up the role of digital and technology to encourage a whole system approach and clear leadership with pace.

While there are some signs of change, our public services are far behind the curve of technological change and not well placed to keep pace with the importance of technology for how future generations want to live their lives. Positive examples include BAPS App, which guides patients through exercises following breast or axillary surgery, and Woffington House in Tredegar being the first care home in Wales to sign the Digital Inclusion Charter for Wales. However data and technology solutions need to be scaled up to make a real impact on population health, for example through investing in local public health teams' ability to understand and track changes in the wider determinants of health, through new streams of data on issues such as air pollution or changes in the labour market. The rapid deployment of digital technology within the healthcare system during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates what can be done and should be built upon.

Many well-being objectives and steps acknowledge the needs to shift towards prevention and wellness but they need to go further in how they fund these interventions and transform the way they deliver services.

There are some good examples of objectives and steps focusing on promoting healthy lifestyles or improving mental well-being.

Most health bodies have set well-being objectives focused on the more traditional definition of 'health' and contribution to 'A Healthier Wales' goal only, failing to take into account the wider determinants of health, such as poverty, air pollution and poor housing.

Objectives should focus more on the wider determinants of health, such as housing, the natural environment and sustainable travel. Hywel Dda Health Board provide a good example following a review of their well-being objectives in 2019/20: their new objectives focused on the wider determinants including "Promote the natural environment and capacity to adapt to climate change" and "Plan and deliver services to enable people to participate in social and green solutions for health."

[Community Care Collaborative](#) in [Wrexham](#) is an innovative social enterprise designed to design and deliver new models of general practice for healthy and happy communities, that meets not only the medical but also the social and pastoral needs of its patients. It focuses on homeless people and rough sleepers who can access advice and support around mental health, physical health, substance misuse, housing, benefits, domestic violence and probation services.



[Down to Earth](#), near Swansea, is a social enterprise that works with disadvantaged young people and adults from Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and the South Wales Valleys, using outdoor settings for therapeutic development work and rehabilitation. The approach has been clinically proven to improve health in three clinical studies, with most recent research showing the approach is as effective as anti-depressants.



Down to Earth Project, Swansea

One of the best examples of such an approach from elsewhere is the [Bromley by Bow Centre in East London](#). Established in 1984, it provides a [new model for healthy, vibrant communities](#) through providing the combination of a neighbourhood hub, medical practice and community research practice which delivers a range of services that address the wider determinants of health.

- It supports people with a wide variety of integrated services based on their individual needs because they “know that health is primarily driven by social factors, not medical ones.”
- It has strategic partnerships with a wide range of organisations and funders, collaborating to design and deliver highly effective programmes that transform peoples’ lives.

Mental health is a pressing concern for future generations, with poor mental health increasing across our society.

In the production of this report, mental health, and concerns about the impact of mental illness, was the issue most raised with me across all population groups. The challenges many people face have become suddenly starker with the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic. The scale and impact of poor mental health need tackling as a matter of urgency. One in four adults in Wales are likely to experience a mental health problem each year, and it is estimated that this costs the economy £7.2 billion due to loss of earnings, treatment and welfare provision. The growing prevalence of mental health problems is putting an unsustainable strain on the NHS as well as other public and voluntary sector services.

Tackling mental health is a priority for Welsh Government and other public bodies, but there is not enough join up or consideration of the wider determinants of health to enable a whole system preventative approach.

It is positive that the latest ‘Together for Mental Health’ delivery plan demonstrates that Government is moving toward more preventative approaches and is starting to consider the wider determinants of health but there are missed opportunities, such as the lack of the use of the definition of prevention in the delivery plan, for Welsh Government to lead the way in developing a whole system preventative approach.

Across public bodies, mental health is identified in well-being objectives and steps which demonstrates it is viewed as a priority.

While it is positive to see this focus on mental health in public bodies, this will be undermined if Welsh Government do not drive cross-sector, collaborative investment that reflects the fundamentally important role of the wider determinants of health in preventing mental illness.



Our lifestyles mean that levels of physical activity are declining, which is having a serious impact on our health.

A quarter of Welsh children starting school each year are overweight or obese, and these levels are worst in our poorest communities. Nearly 60% of Welsh adults are currently overweight or obese, and without action, this is projected to increase to 64% by 2030. Welsh Government published '[Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales: Our long term strategy to prevent and reduce obesity in Wales](#)' in 2019, and it is encouraging to see that it includes the well-being goals and five ways of working, as well as setting actions that span healthy environments, healthy settings, healthy people and leadership and enabling change. Like many Government strategies, the challenge will be addressing the gap between policy aspiration and day-to-day implementation, something which has been highlighted throughout the report as the 'implementation gap'.

The 'Healthy and Active Fund' is a good example of a collaborative approach to improving physical activity at the national level, but further work is needed to integrate all of the opportunities for physical activity into action at the local level.

Although relatively early on in its implementation, the fund has the potential to demonstrate a new way of working and a shift towards prevention. However, with a relatively low level of funding – just £5.4 million over three years, there are questions as to whether this is sufficient to meet the scale of the challenges of increasing physical activity rate and reducing obesity amongst a population with high levels of obesity.

As shown in several sections of Chapter 5 in the report (Planning, Housing and Transport in particular) further action is needed to ensure that the places we live, work and play in support our physical and mental health.

North Carolina, United States – the Department of Health and Human Services authority is delivering five-year 'Healthy Opportunities Pilots'. These pilots enable payers, providers, and community-based organisations to integrate non-medical services directly linked to health outcomes into the delivery of care. Non-medical services include addressing [housing instability, transportation insecurity, food insecurity, interpersonal violence and toxic stress.](#)

A school in Des Moines, Iowa starts the day with a "Be Well" session that blends yoga movements and breathing exercises with discussions about gratitude, interacting peacefully with others, and getting enough sleep. After lunchtime, the classrooms dim the lights and play calming music for a 10-minute meditation and mindfulness practice.

Ciclovía is an intervention that started in Bogotá, Colombia and has spread to 100 cities in South America. It allows runners, walkers, cyclists, and skaters to exercise on streets by closing them off to cars every Sunday morning and every public holiday.



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Below are the areas I recommend that all public bodies, including Welsh Government, should focus on:

- Consider your role in a national wellness system
- Support people to act with compassion
- Play your part in enabling an active nation
- Support place-making and designing-in community health and well-being

For my full evidence, assessment, key findings and advice please see the section on A Healthier Wales in Chapter 3: Progress against the well-being goals of the Future Generations Report.

