Wales, United Kingdom

Tryfan dominating the skyline of the Ogwen Valley in Snowdonia, North Wales

General overview

Wales is one of the four countries that make up the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the United Kingdom); it has its own government (the Welsh Government and democratically elected Parliament, the Senedd (the National Assembly for Wales). The Senedd can pass laws for Wales in areas, such as health, education, economic development, transport, agriculture, housing, planning, and environment. Other sectors, such as those for defence and criminal justice, remain the responsibility of the Government of the United Kingdom. Wales covers an area of approximately 20 782 km², has an estimated population of 3 113 150 *(1)* and an average life expectancy of 65 years.

The health of the Welsh population is improving but there are still major challenges, including persistent health inequity *(2)*. While life expectancy continues to increase, there is still a gap of as much as ten years between the most and least deprived areas in Wales. Health-care demand continues to increase as Wales' population grows, particularly among those in the over-65 and over-85 age groups *(3)*. The National Health Service (NHS) is the largest of Wales' public services and the largest area of Welsh Government expenditure *(4)*. It is responsible for health improvement,

promotion and protection and health care on an industrial scale for a population of just over 3 million *(2)*. Every year, there are 18 million primary-care contacts, 400 000 emergency admissions, and around 500 000 ambulance calls; in addition, on average, 26 prescriptions per person are issued in Wales *(5)*. The planning, organization and provision of preventive and treatment services are the responsibility of seven integrated health boards and three NHS trusts, which support the development of local solutions and encourage collaboration across services to meet shared objectives.

It is recognized that a wider set of social determinants, particularly poverty, poor education, and unemployment, have a bigger influence on the well-being of a population than the direct provision of health or social care. New sustainable-development legislation in Wales now requires the health system to work effectively with other sectors to address the root causes of ill health. *The Well-being of the Future Generation (Wales) Act 2015* focuses on improving social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being *(6)*. It requires public bodies to work towards seven well-being goals by applying "five ways of working": prevention, integration, long-

term action, involvement and collaboration. In addition, NHS bodies work according to the principles of Prudent Healthcare, a philosophy that encompasses health services' improvement to benefit the population, actively avoids wasteful care that does not benefit patients, and aims to create a truly person-centred system by remodelling the service user–service provider relationship, based on coproduction. Wales is currently identifying the most promising models of integrated health- and social-care services with the aim of developing a new set of care models, combining primary care, hospital care, community-health care and social care.

The national strategy, "Prosperity for All", is intended to unite all public-sector organizations and drive coordinated action to address its key themes: "prosperous and secure"; "healthy and active"; "ambitious and learning"; and "united and connected", along five priority areas: early years; housing; social care; mental health; and skills and employability *(7)*.

In aiming to protect and improve health and well-being and reduce health inequity, the national public health agency (Public Health Wales), undertakes a range of action to drive system change and build capacity. This includes: setting up a primary and community care development and innovation hub; establishing a NHS Wales patient-safety quality-improvement programme; developing an integrated all-Wales health-protection system; making the case for investing in public health *(8)*; focusing research on adverse childhood experiences and breaking the intergenerational cycle of adversity *(9)*; and developing health impact assessment (HIA) tools. The Public Health Wales Observatory provides health intelligence and has developed the Public Health Outcomes Framework *(10)* to inspire, inform and monitor action to improve and protect health and well-being.

Strengths

Wales' strengths include:

✓ a devolved health policy agenda, enabling the planning and provision of all health and social services in Wales, and a highly integrated health-care system;

✓ forefront legislation, such as:

- the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (6)*, an enabling framework to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development *(11)*;
- the *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014*, enabling people to have more of a say in the care and support they receive *(12)*;
- the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014 (13)*, aiming to improve housing in Wales;
- the *Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 (14)*, aiming to increase walking and cycling in Wales;
- the *Environment (Wales) Act 2016 (15)* to manage Wales' natural resources in a sustainable way; and
- the *Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 (16)* introducing a statutory requirement for HIA;

✓ a history of, and continued commitment to, involving citizens in decision-making, for example, through the national conversation, "the Wales we want" *(17)*;

✓ established national cross-sector partnerships for health, such as:

- Cymru Well Wales *(18)*;
- Healthy Working Wales*(19)*; and
- the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes *(20)*;

✓ the designation of the Policy, Research and International Development Directorate of Public Health Wales as WHO Collaborating Centre on Investment for Health and Well-being *(21)*.

Aspirations

Wales' aims are to:

- integrate health and social care, and achieve prudent health care;
- progress HIA and cross-sector governance for health;
- enhance skills and employability;
- ensure sustainable housing and protected environment;
- enhance mental health, well-being and resilience across the life course;
- achieve early-years well-being and break the intergenerational cycle of adversity;
- achieve sustainable investment for health and well-being;
- introduce innovation and new technologies; such as genomics and genetic sequencing.

Challenges

These are to:

- tackle health inequalities and the social determinants of health;
- manage the growing demand in health;
- create a sustainable workforce.

Potential areas of collaboration

Wales in interested in collaboration with other regions on:

- sustainable development and prosperity for all;
- investment for health and well-being, and innovation for health;
- reducing health inequalities and building resilience across the life course;
- cross-sector partnership and HIA

Working groups

Wales is interested in participating in working groups on:

- the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) *(22)*/ equity;
- resilience/participatory approaches;
- the all-of-government approach/intersectoral action.

People active in the Regions for Health Network (RHN)

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