



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

Wales, United Kingdom



General overview

Wales (Cymru) 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 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, criminal justice, and the welfare state, remain the responsibility of the Government of the United Kingdom.

Covering a total area of 20 737 km² with a population of 3 170 000, Wales embodies seven cities, namely, Cardiff, Newport, Swansea, Bangor, St Davids, St Asaph and Wrexham, the last-mentioned having secured city status most recently (1,2). It has 22 municipalities governed

by local authorities (2). The population is heavily concentrated in the metropolitan areas around Swansea, Cardiff and Newport, the South Wales Valleys and the north-eastern corner of Wales (2).

Being a bilingual country with its own language, Wales aims to have one million people who can speak Welsh by 2050. It has national football and rugby teams competing at the highest level, and boasts a distinct and vibrant culture, hosting the largest festival of competitive music and poetry (Eisteddfod) in Europe (2). There are three national parks, four United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage sites, and five areas of outstanding natural beauty (3).

Life expectancy at birth for males and females is 78.3 years and 82.1 years, respectively (4). The

difference in life expectancy at birth between the least and most deprived areas in Wales, as measured by the Slope Index of Inequality, was

9.1 years for males and 7.7 years for females in 2018–2020 (5). The gross national product per capita is £23 882 (€20 347) (6).

Regional activities linked to the WHO European Programme of Work

The following activities are linked to the three core priorities of the European Programme of Work (EPW): (i) moving towards Universal

Health Coverage (UHC); (ii) promoting health and well-being; and (iii) protecting against health emergencies.



Moving towards UHC

The National Health Service in Wales (NHS Wales) is publicly funded, providing health care to the approximately 3 million people who live in the country. Founded in 1948 by the Welshman, Aneurin Bevan, NHS Wales has a key principle that good health care should be available to all, regardless of status (7). Wales has twin goals: to increase economic growth and to reduce inequality through a holistic approach to health promotion. This includes putting a special focus on mental health, skills development, learning at the workplace, fair working conditions, and sustainable growth (8).

NHS Wales provides services ranging from those related to smoking cessation, antenatal screening and routine treatments for coughs and colds to open heart surgery, accident and emergency treatment and end-of-life care. Setting health policy for NHS Wales and funding for health services is the responsibility of the Welsh Government (7).

NHS Wales is funded mainly from general taxation, a small proportion being raised through national-insurance contributions. Patient prescriptions are provided free of charge.

NHS Wales delivers services through seven local health boards and three NHS trusts. The local health boards are responsible for planning and delivering NHS services in their areas while the NHS trusts look after public health, ambulance services, and cancer and blood services. A number of related organizations support NHS Wales in delivering digital services, customer-focused support functions, and health-care workforce training (9).



Promoting health and well-being

The aim of the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015)* is to improve social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being in Wales (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Elements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015)



Source: Reproduced by permission of the Welsh Government (10).

The Act requires public bodies to think more long term and work better with people and communities, as well as with each other, to prevent problems and ensure a more joint approach. Its goal is to create a Wales in which everyone would like to live, now and in the future (10).

A Healthier Wales: our Plan for Health and Social Care highlights the vision of a whole-system approach to health and social care. According to this approach, services constitute only one of the elements required to support people towards better health and well-being throughout their lives. A whole-system (wellness) approach would aim to anticipate health needs, prevent illness, and reduce the impact of poor health in an equitable way. The care and support services delivered would be of the same high quality for everyone in Wales and the health outcomes achieved would be more equal. Such an approach would make it possible to improve the physical and mental well-being of all, throughout their lives. People in need of support, care or treatment would be able, seamlessly, to access a range of services delivered as close to home as possible. These would be designed around both the individual and different population groups, based on unique needs and the quality and safety outcomes desired (11).



Protecting against health emergencies

As has been the case in most of the world, Wales has been operating on an emergency footing for over two years in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Emergency legislation was developed to protect the population at a time when an understanding of the virus and its rapid evolution was being sought. Unprecedented resources were mobilized across Wales with a focus on identifying and managing the specific risk of COVID-19. The Welsh Government has developed a long-term COVID-19 response plan, establishing how a prospective new period of transition from a pandemic to an endemic state should be managed in Wales (12). In addition, the Welsh Government's programme commits to developing a HIV action plan for Wales, and to introducing a clean-air act for Wales, consistent with WHO guidance.

One of the core functions of the Public Health Wales NHS Trust is to apply its expertise and resources to protect the population from serious infection and the health effects of environmental problems, such

as air pollution and climate change. This involves early detection, good planning and the optimal use of available resources, in collaboration with others, to provide an effective response. Among the aims of Public Health Wales is to help significantly reduce ill health and death resulting from poor air quality, and eliminate the serious threat of Hepatitis B and C to public health in Wales (13).

Actions linked to the EPW flagship initiatives

(The Mental Health Coalition; Empowerment through digital health; The European Immunization Agenda 2030; Healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insights.)

Initiatives relative to the Mental Health Coalition

The Welsh Government is prioritizing investment in mental health and service redesign to improve prevention, tackle stigma and promote a no-wrong-

door approach to mental-health support (14). It intends to introduce a national framework for social prescribing to support people's well-being.

Initiatives relative to empowerment through digital health

In 2021, the Welsh Government published a digital strategy for Wales, which includes action on digital services and digital inclusion (15).

Within the health sector, COVID-19 has accelerated changes already in progress, such as, technologies to support working remotely and the central development of national systems (16).

Initiatives relative to the European Immunization Agenda 2030

NHS Wales offers routine vaccinations for all babies, children and adults. The Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme (VPDP) supports a national approach (17). NHS Wales is committed

to delivering a regular COVID-19 vaccination programme and continues to be guided by the latest clinical and scientific evidence (18), taking targeted action to reach vulnerable groups.

Initiative relative to healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insight

Behavioural science strongly influenced Public Health Wales' messages to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to play a role in reducing damaging health behaviours,

such as smoking. This will be enhanced through Public Health Wales' BeSci Unit, which provides specialist expertise on behavioural science (19).

Initiatives specific to Wales

In March 2018, the Policy and International Health Directorate of Public Health Wales was designated a WHO Collaborating Centre on Investment for Health and Well-being (WHO CC). After a successful first term, the WHO CC was

redesignated this year (2022) for a further four years.

The WHO CC has been utilizing and sharing expertise in, information on, practical approaches

to, and innovative tools for improving health and well-being. It aims to reduce health inequities and build stronger communities and resilient systems within and beyond the Welsh borders. The Centre promotes sustainable, evidence- and people-informed policies that address the health and well-being needs of current and future generations, leaving no one behind.

The work of the WHO CC strengthens Wales' global partnerships and enables more effective cross-sector and multidisciplinary work. It opens opportunities for knowledge exchange and research, learning from experience and good practice, and developing the people and organizations in Wales and beyond. In doing so, it delivers to Public Health Wales' Long-Term Strategy (20) and International Health Strategy (21), and acts on Wales' legislation, goals and priorities. The work of the WHO CC also contributes to implementing the United Nations 2030 Agenda

for Sustainable Development (22) and the WHO European Programme of Work: United Action for Better Health (23).

The WHO CC's new programme of work (24) focuses on providing scientific and policy evidence, practical tools, and expertise to facilitate progress of the Economy of Well-being in Wales and across the WHO European Region. This includes building capacity, developing solutions, and implementing intersectoral policies for achieving well-being and health equity across the life course. This work adheres to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) (25) between the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the Welsh Government. The MoU sets out an agreement for technical collaboration on strengthening sustainable investment for health and well-being and progressing towards achievement of the highest possible level of health and prosperity for all, leaving no one behind.

The three most important topics for collaboration within the Regions for Health Network

These are:

1. equity in health and well-being across the life course;
2. mental health and well-being;
3. crisis response and recovery (including COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis) towards building an economy of well-being.

Main partners and collaborators

These are:

- the WHO Regional Office for Europe;
- the International Association of National Public Health Institutes (IANPHI);
- the WHO European Office for Investment for Health and Development, Venice, Italy;
- the European Regional and Local Health Authorities (EUREGHA);

- EuroHealthNet;
- the Welsh Local Government Association;
- the Welsh Government;
- third-sector organizations.

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¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all URLs accessed 23 August 2023.

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