

Health policy

Introduction

Wales has developed a distinctive health policy that has aimed to reflect national aspirations, issues and resources.

Wales has some of the highest levels of ill health in the UK which tends to occur in localised areas scattered throughout the country. Rural Wales with low population density, and poor transport and communications, has specific problems in relation to accessing health services.

In May 2005, the Assembly Government published *Designed for Life*,ⁱ its strategy for health policy for the next ten years. Its vision statement, 'Vision 2015' (p.11), has eight aims, to:

- ◆ improve health and reduce, and where possible eliminate, inequalities in health;
- ◆ support the role of citizens in promoting their individual and collective health;
- ◆ develop the role of local communities in creating and sustaining health;
- ◆ promote independence, service user involvement and clinical and professional leadership;
- ◆ re-cast the role of all elements of health and social care so that the citizen will be seen and treated by high quality staff at home or locally - or passed quickly to excellent specialist care, where this is needed;
- ◆ provide evidence based and quality assured clinical treatment and care appropriate to need,
- ◆ strengthen accountability and develop a more corporate approach in NHS Wales so that organisations work together;
- ◆ Ensure full public health engagement at local and national levels.

The delivery mechanism for this 'Vision' is a series of three year strategic frameworks with different level targets that are included in the annual Service and Financial Framework (the SaFF).ⁱⁱ *Designed for Life* is based on an earlier policy document, *Improving Health for Wales: a Plan for the NHS with its Partners*,ⁱⁱⁱ 2001, with its commitment to 'rebuild, renew and improve' the Welsh NHS through a more healthy population. It was further shaped by the Wanless Review in 2003 which recommended in the report *Review of Health and Social Care, 2003*^{iv}:

- ◆ Continuation of the "twin-track" approach of improving health and providing better services;
- ◆ Reconfiguring the unsustainable pattern of health services;
- ◆ Strategic adjustment of services to focus them on prevention and early intervention.

While the strategic adjustment of services is being taken forward through local action plans and regional reconfiguration, *Health Challenge Wales*^v provides a national focus to improve health and well-being.

Health Challenge Wales is a call to people and organisations to do as much as they can to improve their own health, and to work collectively for a healthier nation. *Health Challenge Wales* recognises the wide range of factors - economic, social and environmental – that have an impact on health and has two strands:

- ◆ Action to help people take steps to improve their lifestyles;
- ◆ Wider action across all policy areas to tackle social, economic and environmental factors which can impact on people's health.

There are currently six key themes: smoking, food and fitness, accidents and injuries, alcohol and other substance misuse, infections and mental health and well-being. *Health Challenge Wales* is based on the premise of shared responsibility and a governmental role of creating the conditions to help people to improve their health.

Overview of current statutory powers of the Assembly

ⁱ Welsh Assembly Government, *Designed for Life*, May 2005, <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/documents/designed-for-life-e.pdf>

ⁱⁱ The Service and Financial Framework (SaFF) was introduced in Wales in 2002/03 as a means of setting national priorities for the NHS each year.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Assembly for Wales, *Improving Health for Wales: a Plan for the NHS with its Partners*, January 2001, <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/Publications/NHSStrategydoc.pdf>

^{iv} Welsh Assembly Government et al, *Review of Health and Social Care*, July 2003 <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/documents/wanless-summary-e.pdf>

^v Health Challenge Wales website <http://new.wales.gov.uk/subsite/healthchallenge/?lang=en>

As a devolved area of policy, Health and Health Services come under field 9 in Schedule 5 of the *Government of Wales Act 2006*. This means that the National Assembly for Wales can seek Measure-making powers over health matters through Legislative Competence Orders.

One of the first Measures likely to come forward concerns the *NHS Redress Act 2006*. Following that Act, *National Assembly for Wales (Legislative Competence) (Conversion of Framework Powers) Order 2007*,⁶ inserts in Field 9 (health and health services) provision for redress in connection with personal injury or loss arising out of, or in connection with, breach of a duty of care owed to any person in connection with the diagnosis of illness, or the care or treatment of any patient in the NHS.

EU policy

The European Commission has no competence for health services other than public health. The following items are contained in the Health and Social Services Committee legacy paper as those which a future committee may wish to monitor:

- ◆ European Strategy for Social Services of General Interest (non-legislative)
- ◆ White Paper on health strategy: Health in Europe (non-legislative) – July 2007
- ◆ White Paper on a strategy on Nutrition and physical activity (non-legislative)
- ◆ The Commission is also due to propose legislation to improve the efficiency of EU health services and to clarify the legal situation for patients going to other Member States for health care in November 2007.

Legacy issues from the Second Assembly

The legacy paper highlighted the following high level strategic issues for the attention of the Third Assembly:⁷

- ◆ The capacity of the NHS and its partners to meet the physical and mental health needs of the population, particularly: reducing waiting times and delayed transfers of care; emergency care services and the modernisation of the Ambulance Service;
- ◆ Monitoring Committee reviews, e.g. Review of Cancer Services for the People of Wales⁸ - appraisal of new drugs and therapies and the relationship between, and roles of, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and the All Wales Medicines Strategy Group;
- ◆ Improving health in Wales and protecting the most vulnerable.

Useful links

- ◆ NHS Wales, <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/>
- ◆ Office of the Chief Medical Officer for Wales, <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/health/ocmo/?lang=en>
- ◆ National Public Health Service (Wales), <http://www.nphs.wales.nhs.uk/>
- ◆ Welsh Centre for Health, <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/home.cfm?OrgID=568>
- ◆ Welsh Health Survey, <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/health-survey2004-05/?lang=en>
- ◆ NHS Direct, <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/>
- ◆ Health-EU portal, http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/index_en.htm

Further information

For further information on health policy, please contact:

Carolyn Eason, Members' Research Service on ext. 8917

Carolyn.eason@wales.gsi.gov.uk

⁶HMSO, *National Assembly for Wales (Legislative Competence) (Conversion of Framework Powers) Order 2007*, Statutory Instrument 2007 No. 910, 21 March 2007, http://www.opsi.gov.uk/SI/em2007/ukSIem_20070910_en.pdf

⁷National Assembly for Wales, Health and Social Services Committee, Annex 2: Legacy Report, 2003-07, <http://www.wales.gov.uk/cms/2/HealthAndSocialServicesCommittee/37D6A89F00087B550000121400000000/90f08b54104fa9c9857e2e14265e98ec.htm>

⁸National Assembly for Wales, Health and Social Services Committee, *Review of Cancer Services for the People of Wales*, February 2007, <http://www.wales.gov.uk/keypubassemhealsocsvs/content/cancer-services/final-report.pdf>