

2016-17 Priorities of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Consultation Response by Welsh Women's Aid

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These are the views of:	<i>Welsh Women's Aid (Third Sector) - the national charity in Wales working to end domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women.</i>

1. About Welsh Women's Aid

- 1.1 Welsh Women's Aid is the national charity in Wales working to prevent domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women and ensure high-quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender-responsive and holistic.
- 1.2 Established in 1978, we are an umbrella organisation that represents and supports a national federation of 23 local independent charities delivering specialist domestic abuse and violence against women prevention services in Wales, as part of a UK network of provision. These specialist services constitute our core membership, and they provide lifesaving refuges, outreach, and community advocacy and support to survivors of violence and abuse - women, men, children, families - and deliver innovative preventative work in local communities. We also deliver direct services including the Welsh Government funded Live Fear Free Helpline; a National Training Service; refuge and advocacy services in Colwyn Bay and Wrexham; and the national Children Matter project which supports local services to help children and young people affected by abuse and to deliver preventative STAR group-work in every local authority in Wales.
- 1.3 We have been at the forefront of shaping coordinated community responses and practice in Wales, by campaigning for change and providing advice, consultancy, support and training to deliver policy and service improvements for survivors, families and communities. As a national federation, our policy work, consultancy, training and advocacy is all grounded in the experience of local specialist services and service users. Our success is founded on making sure the experiences and needs of survivors are central to all we do.

2. Welsh Women's Aid's Response to the Consultation on Committee Priorities

- 2.1 Violence against women is a truly cross cutting issue and its prevention and the support of survivors should be a priority for public health and social care services. The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 represent key legislation which are shaping changes to preventative agendas for health

and social care services that are having an impact on the prevention of violence against women and the support of survivors. Welsh Women's Aid would also highlight the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, given the legislative duties it introduces for the NHS and other services. The Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 outlines a series of obligations which health and social care services must fulfil to tackle violence against women. These obligations include statutory guidance for professionals to 'Ask and Act', and to train members of staff, at all levels to respond to signs and disclosures of all forms violence against women, including domestic and sexual violence.

- 2.2 A collaborative, cross departmental approach is vital in achieving the aims of the above legislative agendas. Welsh Women's Aid would suggest that the scrutiny of these three areas of legislation and their impact on the role of health and social care services in the prevention of domestic and sexual abuse and provision of support to violence against women survivors should be considered as critical by the committee when setting out their priorities for the next 12-18 months and in the longer term.
- 2.3 Welsh Women's Aid believes that the committee should prioritise scrutiny as to how Welsh Government and Local Health Boards propose to prevent violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and support of survivors accessing these services in light of the legislative changes that these acts introduce within the next 12-18 months to ensure the effective post-legislative implementation.
- 2.4 Further to this, Welsh Women's Aid would suggest that the committee recognise that violence against women is a key agenda to incorporate within its scrutiny programme both in the next 12-18 months and in the longer term regarding health and social care and consider the following areas as possible priorities by which it could include violence against women in its future plans:

3. Violence against Women and public health

3.1 There is a correlation between the prevention of violence against women and the promotion of wellbeing and wider public health. The recent research¹ in to adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) in Wales highlighted that experiencing adversity in childhood, including violence and abuse, can impact on health and wellbeing. This research highlighted that childhood exposure to violence in general will impact negatively on:

- School achievement and economic prospects as an adult
- Mental health and resilience
- Sexual health
- Physical health
- Increased likelihood of negative coping mechanisms

3.2 The Public Health Wales report 'Making a Difference' prioritises the reduction of domestic violence as a way to reduce health inequalities and the associated costs. Domestic violence places considerable burden on public services. A high proportion of women attending A&E, family planning, sexual health and primary care departments are likely to have experienced

¹Public Health Wales, Adverse Childhood Experiences:
[http://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk:8080/PRIDDocs.nsf/7c21215d6d0c613e80256f490030c05a/00c40b58ce773d5e80257f3700390f65/\\$FILE/ACE%20Infograph%20FINAL%20\(E\).pdf](http://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk:8080/PRIDDocs.nsf/7c21215d6d0c613e80256f490030c05a/00c40b58ce773d5e80257f3700390f65/$FILE/ACE%20Infograph%20FINAL%20(E).pdf)

domestic violence. 25-56% of women psychiatric patients report experiencing domestic violence at some point in their lifetime². In Wales, the annual cost of domestic violence is estimated to be £303.5 million a year across public services, and £522.9 million in human and emotional costs³. Value for money solutions to growing health inequalities are crucial as austerity and increasingly limited public funding impacts on health spending and public health.

- 3.3 The committee therefore should have a role in scrutinising health and social care policy to ensure that it effectively reduces health inequalities and provides value for money provision including reducing future health costs. Effective interventions that address inequality and the social determinants of health, rather than focus primarily in practice in the individual lifestyle factors, will be more sustainable and cost effective in the long run.
- 3.4 Welsh Women's Aid would encourage the committee to include the scrutiny of health inequalities and the promotion of wellbeing with reference to violence against women in its forthcoming scrutiny programme. This would include examining the current funding and commissioning of health interventions for violence against women, particularly mental health support to ensure that survivors and their families are able to access specialist trauma-informed support that enables them to gain long-term recovery.

4. Promoting early intervention and primary prevention

- 4.1 Health is a critical entry point for tackling violence against women. Health professionals are ideally placed to make early identifications that could potentially transform the lives of those experiencing all forms of violence against women including domestic and sexual violence. This is being demonstrated through the early adopter sites of the Ask and Act Framework in Gwent and Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board, as well as within the IRIS project areas of Cardiff and the Vale and Cwm Taf.
- 4.2 The Ask and Act framework locates health within the context of social determinants and around multiple needs. Healthcare needs to be delivered in a way that understands the totality of the individual experience and understand how health is affected by a myriad of experiences in one person's life.
- 4.3 Welsh Women's Aid would recommend that the committee consider how the healthcare sector can be transformed with an understanding of violence against women to maximise the health and wellbeing implications for survivors and their families. In particular examining its role in early identification of abuse and ensuring survivors are able to access needs-led, gender responsive and holistic support.

5. Implementation of NICE guidance

- 5.1 The link between violence against women and the NHS best practice response to this area, needs to be embedded and acted on throughout NHS Wales and wider health care service structure. Accident and emergency staff, GPs, midwives, social carers, health visitors, sexual health, mental health and substance misuse services all provide services to those affected by

² Public Health Wales, Making a Difference: Investing in Sustainable Health and Well-being for the People of Wales 2016

³ Robinson A et al. (2012). The Welsh Government's proposed Ending Violence Against Women and Domestic Abuse (Wales) Bill: Recommendations from the Task and Finish Group. Final report. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

all forms of violence against women and have key roles in the identification and response to disclosures of abuse as well as instigating effective interventions to prevent, protect and support violence against women survivors.

- 5.2 Public Health Wales advocates the implementation NICE guidance PH50: *Domestic violence and abuse: multi-agency working* to reduce domestic violence. Doing so could help save the (NICE) estimated £4,700 a month in health and social care costs associated with “treating and supporting” someone who is experiencing domestic violence related post-traumatic stress disorder.⁴
- 5.3 Welsh Women’s Aid would encourage the committee to utilise its scrutiny role to ensure a strategic and holistic approach is adopted by NHS Wales and any duplication of efforts is prevented, whilst at the same time, not treating tackling violence against women as an ‘add on’ to other duties.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Welsh Women’s Aid is keen to support the priorities where there is relevance to violence against women. In particular, we would recommend that the above areas are considered when the committee considers the terms of reference for the inquiries and their calls for evidence. Welsh Women’s Aid would welcome the opportunity to provide evidence to the committee on these areas outlined above. We would be able to consult with survivors and specialist service providers to provide quantitative and qualitative evidence to the impact of the policies being scrutinised. We look forward to supporting the committee in these inquiries.

Welsh Women’s Aid would like to thank the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for the opportunity to comment on this important consultation and we look forward to working together in the future.

Any comments or questions regarding our response can be directed to:

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⁴ National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. (2014a). Domestic violence and abuse costing statement. PH50. London: NICE. Quoted in Public Health Wales, Making a Difference: Investing in Sustainable Health and Well-being for the People of Wales 2016