



Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, Jane Hutt
Welsh Government
5th Floor
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

22nd April 2020

Dear Deputy Minister and Chief Whip,

RE: Welsh Women's Aid responds to Government announcement on 16 April 2020 concerning VAWDASV provision and funding to respond to COVID-19

Services providing violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) support across Wales are in urgent need of ring-fenced emergency funding, despite previous correspondence this has not yet been provided.

This letter is written based on consultation with VAWDASV specialist services across Wales which have expressed confusion, frustration and concern as to what additional funding is being made available as a response to COVID-19 and the lack of acknowledgement of the unprecedented strain the lack of resources is putting on specialist services at present. Similarly, the pressing need for consideration of the ongoing impact it will have on increased demand and services' sustainability post lockdown.

This letter sets out why the VAWDASV specialist sector requires:

- **A ring-fenced pot of funding for VAWDASV specialist services** at least equivalent to funding being invested elsewhere in the UK.
- **A clear plan to replace the funding that has been repurposed** to meet the impact of COVID-19.
- **Funding that can be flexibly utilised for revenue and support costs** – current funding only covers capital costs and not the additional costs to meet the support needs of survivors.
- **Swift access to funding.** In Scotland, money was provided with immediate effect to invest in support needs as and when they developed, recognising that services have to be responsive to changing needs and do not have capacity to fill in endless application forms.

COVID-19 has created yet more challenges, both for people already in the dangerous situation of fleeing VAWDASV and for specialist services in adapting and continuing the provision of support.

Pendragon House, Caxton Place | Pentwyn, Cardiff | CF23 8XE
Tel: 02920 541551 | Fax: 02920 736128 |
Email: info@welshwomensaid.org.uk | Web: www.welshwomensaid.org.uk
Registered Charity Number: 1140962



Welsh Government has made concerted efforts to assure people that if they need support, to reach out and it will be there for them. However, if these services are not properly funded or resourced, this simply cannot be the case. The current situation with COVID-19 has demonstrated even more strongly that we need to ensure a plan for secure and sustainable funding of the VAWDASV sector as its provision of essential services in normal times becomes even more critical during and post a national crises such as this.

In a recent written statement, the Deputy Minister stated: *“Last week, I announced £1.2 million to fund community accommodation for victims of domestic abuse, as well as an additional £200,000 for furnishings, computer equipment and white goods.”* **These announced funds are not in direct response to the unprecedented measures that have been taken due to the circumstances caused by COVID-19** as the Deputy Minister’s wording would suggest.

The funding announced so far are existing funds, pre-allocated based on pre-existing need in the sector.

The £1.2 million was originally announced in December 2019.

The £200,000 is a 2019/20 capital underspend which had already been promised last quarter.

If the Welsh Government has repurposed pre-existing pots to now address the issues caused by COVID-19, then the Government needs to answer how it will ensure funding is provided to address the original needs that still exist and need to be resourced with even greater urgency than before. VAWDASV services have already reported to us that they have had to use organisational reserves to pay for additional expenditure relating to COVID-19, and, with funding being repurposed, will continue to face funding shortfalls after dealing with the immediate challenges this crisis presents. Based on international research and the experience in other countries we also anticipate increasing demand for support once lockdown is over, further adding to financial burden for the specialist sector.

The sustainable funding model for VAWDASV specialist services, promised in the Welsh Government National VAWDASV Strategy 2016-2021 – but yet to be delivered, may have gone some way to alleviate this situation. Due to that lack of sustainability in the way specialist services are funded prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the yearly capital grant and the additional funds announced in December were already planned to meet much needed gaps in provision. Welsh Government correspondence regarding clarity on the current funding available even states that some of this additional funding due to go out to tender in one region *“may now be delayed due to COVID-19”*¹. This means that services already struggling to meet need will have to wait longer to receive the funding referenced in the Welsh Government announcement on 16th April 2020 around responding to COVID-19.

¹ Email received from Welsh Government on 16th April 2020 13:48pm by Welsh Women’s Aid



£10 million to support people experiencing homelessness in Wales during the COVID-19 pandemic was announced by Welsh Government mid-March, with reference to provision for people experiencing VAWDASV. Although welcomed, these funds being administered by local authorities have focused on rough sleeping. Women's homelessness is often hidden and linked to or resulting in abuse and exploitation. As such, the fund has done little to better equip VAWDASV services to deal with their increasing struggles, and for survivors to be able to access specialist support when they need it. Members have also reported difficulties in accessing or applying for other funds made available for different elements of 'front line charities' as they are having to spend considerable time filling out multiple applications and bids from generic pots, at a time when they need to focus on the immediate needs of survivors accessing their services.

While the Welsh Government continues to allude to funds in its announcements, there appears to be a clear disconnect between this and the process of money being allocated to front line VAWDASV services. This gives false hope to survivors that services will continue to have the capacity to meet their needs, when in reality, we know that even before this crisis 512 survivors were unable to be supported in refuges because of a lack of service space, capacity or resources.²

While the third sector resilience fund for Wales and Voluntary Services Emergency Fund are accessible to some, but not all VAWDASV services, in other areas of the UK funds have been ring-fenced for the VAWDASV specialist sector in recognition that the provision is an essential service during and post the COVID-19 pandemic. This is occurring as other parts of the UK see dedicated sums of new money being invested to bolster the VAWDASV sector during this time - with Scotland ringfencing a specific pot from the announced £350 million Communities Fund to be administered by Scottish Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland to the sector, and England announcing £2m in funding to boost online services and helplines for domestic abuse. Welsh Women's Aid are calling for equal and equivalent ring-fenced support for organisations in Wales for VAWDASV, which is just as prevalent in Wales as anywhere else.

What is needed right now

The Chancellor of the Exchequer recently announced £750 million for frontline charities providing support during COVID-19, with £60 million of this coming to devolved nations. Wales needs to back its verbal commitment of supporting survivors of VAWDASV by ensuring a portion of this money is ring-fenced for the specialist services providing this lifesaving support.

A survey of specialist services in Wales has confirmed that at least 90% of services are incurring additional costs due the circumstances caused by COVID-19.

Additional flexible funding must now be provided directly to the VAWDASV specialist sector to cover:

- Loss of housing benefit revenue for refuges – one small service reports losing approximately £1,500 a week which is currently coming out of reserves. Another, reports that despite

² <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Annual-Membership-Report-2018-19-FINAL.pdf>



requests they have had no assistance from the local authority to meet costs that run into the levels of £15,000. For small services these costs ongoing will impact on the sustainability of provision.

- Need for new technology and digital capabilities, recognising the increased cost of equipment and digital tools at present.
- To provide survivors with access to technology in order to receive remote support where appropriate.
- The increasing costs and logistics of accessing PPE.
- Training of staff on new technology or differing support methods.
- Additional costs of sourcing alternative accommodation, including the use of dispersed units/B&B if refuge becomes full due to longer stays self-isolating/infection containment if required.
- Increased staffing costs such as to cover additional on-call as staff may have to double or treble their on-call commitments to cover staff who are off sick or self-isolating. A number of services have had to utilise agency staff, which is significantly costly for small, under-resourced services.
- Increased expenditure as services are having to cover costs of staff working from home such as heating, phone bills and additional equipment.
- Increase funding for children’s workers as there are likely to be more children in refuge and other settings for longer due to school closures.
- Anticipated increase in demand following lockdown when survivors will have the space for action. Services are anticipating a significant increase in support needs across all forms of VAWDASV, as see in the evidence from past pandemics and around the world. Sexual violence services anticipate this could come 6 months or more post lockdown as it can take a significant time for some survivors to access support.
- For BME specialist services who are faced with additional costs associated with maintaining social distancing and minimising the spread of infection by replicating provision to meet religious and cultural practices.
- Meeting increased complexity of needs. Cases presenting to the Live Fear Free helpline are already demonstrating increased complexity of need, this is likely to continue post lockdown and increase capacity and resource needs. As the £1.2million pot announced in December was to go some way in addressing the level of provision for complex needs, if this fund is now covering COVID-19 related costs, there needs to be further investment including funding to cover support costs for the anticipated level and complexity of demand. Services working with survivors of sexual exploitation, who present with the most complex needs, report an absolute dearth of housing provision and appropriate housing responses to meet women’s needs.

The current funding situation, where services are going through local authorities, bidding for small pots of money for specific activities, or using re-allocated funds which were depended on for base running costs, is stunting support provision. Survivors and specialist services are the experts in conditions on the ground. Every day is throwing up new challenges, complexities in demand and



increased strain on maintaining provision. Flexibility and swift action are needed to react effectively to the rapidly changing situation caused by COVID-19 and the unique circumstances of each survivor seeking help in these unprecedented times.

We have offered to work with the Welsh Government to enable swift and effective investment in frontline specialist VAWDASV provision. Working in partnership with us would give both clarity to specialist services and confidence to survivors. Instead we have had announcements about funding that was originally announced three months ago. This suggests the Government has no intention to fund the additional costs outlined above. It also gives the impression that the Government is investing to meet the needs of survivors at this time, possibly blocking VAWDASV specialist services from other funding streams as they are seen to be covered. This is not only inaccurate but could also be dangerous:

1. It is a risk to promote a helpline without ensuring the network of specialist provision on which it relies is sustainable to provide support.
2. It is a risk to keep referencing funding for VAWDASV services, increasing the public's confidence in provision, if that money is not actually reaching the frontline services in which they will rely.

Specialist services are working incredibly hard to maintain provision. They are adapting provision to meet with government COVID-19 guidance while continuing to provide lifesaving support for survivors. Outreach and refuge workers are still going out and providing support. Therapeutic and support workers are providing online and telephone support, which requires additional technology for staff and survivors alike. We want survivors to know that specialist services are open and available to support them, but we need the government to help us ensure this continues.

We ask the Deputy Minister, on behalf of Welsh Government, to please respond to the following queries:

- **If the Welsh Government will be providing a ring-fenced pot of funding for VAWDASV specialist services** equivalent to funding being invested elsewhere in the UK? And if so, how will this be administered?
- **How the Welsh Government plans to replace the funding that has been repurposed** to meet the impact of COVID-19?
- **If the Welsh Government will ensure funding provided is flexible to meet the support needs of survivors** including **revenue and support** as well as capital costs?
- **Given a month of lockdown has already passed, how the Welsh Government will ensure swift access to funding** as services have already incurred thousands of pounds worth of additional expenditure?



Welsh Women's Aid would again like to extend our offer to work with the Welsh Government to ensure specialist services can support survivors now and post COVID-19, but we also ask for a demonstration that there is a willingness to invest in the lifesaving support of VAWDASV specialist services.

Yours Sincerely

Sara Kirkpatrick

Chief Executive Officer
Welsh Women's Aid

This letter is supported by Welsh Women's Aid Membership (made up of 20 third sector VAWDASV specialist services in Wales: *Aberconwy DAS, Atal y Fro, Clwyd Alyn Housing Association (CAHA) Women's Aid, Carmarthen Domestic Abuse Service, Calan DVS, Cardiff Women's Aid, Cyfannol Women's Aid, Domestic Abuse Safety Unit (DASU), Gorwel (Grwp Cynefin), Montgomeryshire Family Crisis Centre, North Denbighshire Domestic Abuse Service, RCT Women's Aid, Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (North Wales), Safer Merthyr Tydfil, Safer Wales (including Dyn Project), Stepping Stones, Swansea Women's Aid, Threshold (formerly Llanelli Women's Aid), Thrive Women's Aid (formally Port Talbot & Afan WA), West Wales Domestic Abuse Service.*)

As well as the specialist services New Pathways and BAWSO.