



Welsh NHS Confederation
Confederasiwn GIG Cymru

Reshaping the relationship between the public and the NHS

March 2022

About

To deliver on the long-term vision for health and care, developing the relationship between public services and citizens must be a priority. Through working across all sectors in Wales, we can engage the public in a conversation which aims to support people to look after their own health and wellbeing for the benefit of all.

The briefing examines the importance of engaging and communicating with the public to respond to the challenges we face; identifies the factors required for high-performing public engagement and communication; and provides recommendations for national and local leaders around how we can build and improve the approach that we are currently taking.

“Wales must be a listening nation through actively seeking out diverse views and experiences to co-design services with the public if we are to accelerate change and improve quality” Parliamentary Review of Health and Social Care (January 2018)



Introduction

To deliver on the long-term vision for health and care, developing the relationship between public services and citizens must be a priority for the Welsh Government, where public engagement and communication will play a crucial role.

The COVID-19 pandemic has strengthened the relationship between the NHS and the public and we have seen a remarkable level of public understanding and support, from sewing face masks and shopping for our shielding neighbours, to a genuine sense of gratitude for the sacrifices health and care staff make on the frontline.

However, public expectations have shifted as the pandemic has progressed and there is now a growing disconnect between what is expected and what the service is able to deliver. This could undermine the positive developments we have seen during the pandemic, with urgent and meaningful dialogue required to realign expectations. It is crucial the public continue to feel personally invested in our service to help ensure its long-term sustainability. This will only be possible with an effective engagement and communication strategy across all sectors. Through clear and targeted communication and the use of digital technology, we can help the public understand that recovery from COVID-19 will be slow, as well as provide them with information to access services in different ways and support them in feeling empowered in their health choices.

The ways in which the NHS, local government and the voluntary sector work together have also evolved during the pandemic, including through consistent communication over a period of time across all public sector bodies.

The transformation of services across the health and care system, in addition to the networks within the Local Resilience Forums, have enabled the public sector to reach out to communities by providing consistent information and ensuring feedback is sought and addressed.

More than ever, there is a clear sense of ‘common purpose’ as the NHS and its partners work towards delivering the widely supported ambitions within [A Healthier Wales](#), while managing the ongoing demands of coronavirus. We now have an opportunity to develop holistic messaging across the public sector - and wider partners in the third and private sectors - around population health and the need for service change.

An open and honest conversation is also needed with the public about what the NHS can be expected to provide in the future, and the newly established Citizens Voice Body will play an important role in this. Difficult decisions will have to be made between the demands of elective recovery, access to primary care, mental health and the generational task of reducing health inequalities. That is why NHS leaders require the Welsh Government and all politicians to be clear with the public about the scale of the recovery challenge. It is also important to balance the political voice with the clinical voice: we know that clinicians and other health care professionals have credibility with the public. We need clear, consistent, targeted communications, starting with the government, filtered down through all public sector bodies to local organisations and staff on the ground, that will support and help the public to understand that there is a long road ahead for NHS recovery.

Together, we can engage the public in a conversation which aims to support people to look after their own health for the benefit of all. A cross-sector effort is required across health, housing, environmental, transport, economic, education and food policy to contribute to the wider ambition of healthier families living happier lives.

Key recommendations

At a national level, the Welsh Government should:

- introduce a Deal for Health and Wellbeing framework, setting out what the public and staff are entitled to from the NHS and the contributions that patients and the public can make to their own health and wellbeing. The new Citizen Voice Body will have a key role in developing the framework
- implement a government-wide national programme and engagement strategy, supported by significant investment, to support the public to live healthier lives, empower people to take charge of their own health, manage their conditions and use services responsibly
- roll out and promote the ‘Help Us Help You’ campaign across all public sector organisations to raise awareness of the most appropriate NHS service for individuals’ needs.

Welsh Government and political leaders should:

- recognise that change in the way we deliver care is necessary and play a leadership role in ensuring debates about service change focus constructively on quality-based outcomes, prevention, community services, whole-system collaboration and resource allocation and availability
- be honest with the public that waiting times for elective care will take time to return to pre-pandemic levels. Leaders from across public service need to engage with the public on the future of health and care services so they understand what the NHS can deliver in the future as demand increases and people’s needs become more complex.

Key recommendations

At a local level, all sectors need to:

- work together to support people's health and wellbeing and enable patients to 'wait well' by managing their conditions as they wait for treatment. There is an opportunity to further invest in the preventative and wellbeing agenda to help people take charge of their own health and reduce social isolation while they wait for treatment
- have strong engagement and communication strategies to improve population health, focusing on preventative action and supporting healthy behaviours and environments for the next generation
- work together to share good practice on communication and engagement that has achieved success through working with local communities and sectors
- consider how they can effectively coordinate engagement and communication resources and expertise across organisational boundaries to support the public to live healthier lives
- support the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales being updated and reviewed to consider the impact of, and lessons learnt from, the pandemic and to help organisations carry out consistent and effective public engagement.

The challenge

Public expectation has changed throughout the pandemic. People are understandably becoming less tolerant towards long waiting times and expect the NHS to recover at a speed it is currently unable to deliver. When COVID rates were high, it was easier to understand the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of pressures on services. But due to the impressive vaccination rates and the subsequent effect on hospitalisations, it’s hard for the public to understand why the NHS isn’t recovering all services at pace.

Public feedback indicates an expectation and desire for many services to return to “pre-pandemic normal”, especially around face-to-face contact, and to be seen quickly after long-awaited appointments following delays during the pandemic. A combination of factors means the speed of elective recovery isn’t going to be what NHS leaders would like it to be. NHS leaders are committed to having meaningful conversations with the public and key stakeholders, including the health and care workforce, about the challenges facing the NHS in Wales and the wider public sector.

The sustained impact of the pandemic will leave a backlog of care in excess of anything seen over the last decade. Ongoing infection prevention and control (IPC) measures and high levels of staff sickness and absence mean that waiting lists have increased month after month. Greater demand for primary care and community health services, mental health services, emergency services and social care is also being experienced and referrals are above pre-COVID levels.

In addition, there are concerns that existing societal inequalities have been exacerbated by the pandemic, with certain groups being disproportionately affected, for example the inequalities in accessing services and recovery rates that BAME communities face.

Health boards and NHS trusts in Wales continue to respond to the challenges of managing the COVID-19 virus with a growing backlog of planned care and increasing demand for urgent care. In many areas we’re seeing the highest levels of demand ever, combined with restricted capacity, increasing patient needs and high public expectation, culminating in the greatest pressure on the NHS in a generation. Across Wales there has been significant effort to improve access to urgent and emergency care services and primary and community care, however, there remains much work to be done.

While public facing campaigns such as Help Us Help You are raising awareness of the most appropriate NHS service for people's needs, difficult decisions will have to be made. This will require political leadership to help manage public expectations about the recovery task ahead, especially being honest with the public that waiting times for elective care will take time to return to pre-pandemic levels.

When patients have concerns or there is confusion about services, this can materialise in complaints to NHS organisations via politicians. We recognise that the NHS needs to improve its communication around how and why services need to change, however we would welcome a national discussion on the benefits of service change led by Welsh Government and politicians which reinforces the key messages about key principles for why service change is needed.

This will require the government to redirect resources towards long-term investment in public engagement and communication, public health, population health management and reducing the long-standing health inequalities that we know have contributed to the levels of direct and indirect harm from COVID-19 in poorer and ethnic minority communities.

It is also key that public facing engagement campaigns are used across all public sector bodies, so the public are aware of the range of NHS services available and access the appropriate service for their needs. We recommend the Welsh Government's Help Us Help You campaign should be rolled out across all public sector organisations and promoted across other sectors. It is also key that significant continued investment is provided by the Welsh Government to ensure that public bodies can implement the campaign and it has the desired impact.

If communicated effectively the campaign could have significant benefits; by reducing the extreme pressures on NHS services and ensuring that patients get timely and appropriate support. However, without cross sector support, the public may not be aware of the Help Us Help You campaign and it may not have the impact that it aims to have.

Help Us Help You

NHS organisations across Wales raise awareness of and promote the Help Us Help You campaign on an ongoing basis. The campaign is designed to save lives by changing the way people access services, reducing pressures on the NHS and enabling them to maintain capacity by driving effective use of the NHS; encouraging people to get help at the right time, and in the right way. It delivers through two strategic objectives:

- **Access at the right time:** Saving lives and improving outcomes by encouraging the public to access NHS services at the right time – supporting earlier presentation and diagnosis and ensuring that clinical prevention (such as screening and immunisation) is accessed at a time when it can have the greatest benefit to both the public and the NHS.
- **Access in the right way:** Reducing pressures on NHS services by encouraging the public to access NHS services in the right way, particularly urgent and emergency care. Focusing on encouraging people to access NHS 111 before attending an A&E/ED; increasing awareness of the need to avoid hospital if suffering norovirus or coronavirus symptoms; using community pharmacy services for minor illnesses; and reducing pressure from patients on healthcare professionals to prescribe antibiotics to reduce antibiotic resistance.

It is also important that we learn from previous campaigns, including ‘Choose Well’. In 2011 the Welsh Government introduced the communications campaign ‘Choose Well’ to encourage the public to think about and make informed decisions on which health care service is appropriate for different illnesses and injuries. In order to monitor campaign effectiveness and awareness, the Welsh Government commissioned an [evaluation](#) in 2018. Even though the campaign had run for seven years, when told the name ‘Choose Well’, only 10 per cent of respondents reported awareness of the campaign. This more than doubled to 24 per cent once the campaign was described, however, among these respondents one third reported not knowing the main message of the campaign.

All sectors need to have strong engagement and communication strategies to improve population health, focusing on preventative action and supporting healthy behaviours and environments for the next generation.

Redesigning services to meet people's needs

Throughout the pandemic, the NHS and social care have been adapting to new ways of working. The sectors have changed how services are delivered to respond quickly to the population's needs and to continue to deliver essential services in a safe environment.

As the [NHS Wales COVID-19 Innovation and Transformation Study](#) (June 2020) highlights, the NHS response to COVID-19 has accelerated the implementation of [A Healthier Wales](#) by introducing new practices and innovations, especially in digital technology, to respond to the pandemic and the demand on the service. Many of these new practices will and must continue in the future.

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the [Parliamentary Review of Health and Social Care](#) (January 2018) described the increasing demands and new challenges facing the NHS and social care – an ageing population, lifestyle changes, public expectations and new and emerging medical technologies. The Parliamentary Review made a strong case that a service based mainly on a medical model of health, and a separate system of social care, is not fit for the future. In response to the review, the Welsh Government published [A Healthier Wales](#).

[A Healthier Wales](#) sets out the need to shift services from large general hospitals to regional and local centres, with people spending less time in hospital with more support to recover quickly in the community. As highlighted within [A Healthier Wales](#), routine diagnostics, outpatient services, day-case treatments, minor surgery and injury services can all be delivered safely and to a high standard in smaller centres, with primary and community care offering a wider range of professionally led services and support. These services, delivered by a mix of healthcare professionals, will support people to make decisions about looking after themselves and staying independent, so that they have access to the best professional or service to meet their particular need.

The role of digital innovations is also key in shifting services into communities and people's homes, ensuring people can access the support they need. The COVID-19 pandemic has again evidenced the case for digitally provided services and digital-first strategies in the future, as social distancing and infection control measures have meant the NHS has seen the benefits of connecting with and supporting patients digitally.

Digital technologies are having a profound effect on how NHS Wales organisations deliver care and treatment for their populations. Opportunities to innovate, upscale and deliver digital healthcare are increasing the support the NHS can provide people to maintain their independence, health and wellbeing, stay up to date with the latest information relating to their care and treatment plan and access a wide range of healthcare services from their homes.

Effective use of digital technology is easing demand on NHS services, reducing costs in some areas and supporting professionals to treat patients with the greatest and most urgent needs first. As the [BMA Cymru](#) has recently stated; “with demand to see a GP now vastly outstripping capacity, it is unlikely that GPs will be able to offer a timely face-to-face appointment for everyone who asks for one... Technology has meant GPs have been able to see higher numbers of patients than we would otherwise have been able to during this period”.

However, digital inclusion will be key to ensure everyone has the capability and skills to navigate and engage in accessing services digitally. While rapid, nationwide adoption of technology has highlighted the many benefits of digital, and it has also revealed areas of operational and clinical processes that can contribute to individuals being excluded from accessing digital services. Individuals will have different access needs and requirements for a variety of reasons. However, we know that some individuals may face increased digital exclusion due to existing inequalities in society. The needs of these individuals and groups must be identified and prioritised.

The benefits of bringing a shift of care from hospital to home are enormous, and we need to show the public the advantages of health and care being delivered in different ways and within different settings. Whilst there is a clear vision for the future of health and social care services, it is key that health and social care leaders and staff, politicians and other public sector leaders recognise that a major change in approach is required to get the public to embrace the different ways of working. There is now an opportunity to redesign services to ensure that they better meet people's changing needs, so that services remain sustainable in the future. This will mean empowering people, developing a strategic approach to prevention and early intervention, improving mental health and providing care closer to home.

In response to COVID-19, organisations have worked at pace to transform services and deliver care innovatively, often enabled by effective partnership working and with a different risk appetite to provide the best care for citizens. Now is the right time to empower health and care systems to drive change, with greater clarity about how we can deliver 'system by default' in ways that support partnerships and integrated services. As the health and care system moves forward and thinks in a more systematic way about population health, we must learn from emerging practice and how we should reshape governance and regulatory models to align with service transformation. We must ensure we continue to have the more agile, clinically led, and patient-focused culture that emerged in response to COVID-19 through redesigning services at pace.

While we must recognise that it is human nature to be emotionally resistant to change – attached to old practices, local institutions and cultures that have been passed down over the years – we now have the opportunity for an open and honest conversation with the public about health and care services in the future and can support people to become active participants in their care. Managing patients' expectations is critical, and it is key that the public have a full understanding and are reassured that they will get the service they need, otherwise patients and their families will rightly become nervous and concerned. There is an opportunity for effective communication and engagement across the whole public service by developing meaningful and realistic messaging that encourages public acceptance of the need for change.

In addition, the language relating to engagement should be framed around the wellbeing benefits they strive to achieve, particularly patient outcomes. For transformation to happen, we need to increase public understanding and acceptance of service redesign, improve people's knowledge of the services they receive and increase public awareness of the impact their choices have on their wellbeing. This will mean that citizens are equal partners in their health, co-designing services with health and care providers.

Health boards already have strong mechanisms in place for involving the citizen's voice in the design and delivery of health and care services, including patients' fora, community engagement and public consultations on service change. However, with the introduction of the Citizens Voice Body in April 2023, there are further opportunities to actively communicate and engage with the public around health and social care services and strengthen the voice of citizens. The Citizens Voice Body will support the public to share their views about health and social care and for NHS organisations to listen, consider and respond to people's views. As a health and social care sector, we recognise and value the patient voice to support, plan and deliver high quality health and social care services.

As the Parliamentary Review highlighted, "Wales must be a listening nation through actively seeking out diverse views and experiences to co-design services with the public if we are to accelerate change and improve quality."

A deal for health and wellbeing

The NHS belongs to us all. It is there to improve our health and wellbeing, supporting us to keep mentally and physically well, to get better when we are ill and, when we cannot fully recover, to stay as well as we can to the end of our lives. The NHS was founded on a common set of principles and values that bind together the communities and people it serves – patients, the public and all its staff.

Ahead of the NHS' 70th birthday in 2017, the [King's Fund](#) commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct a survey on the public's attitude to the NHS, including what they see as their responsibility when it comes to their own health. Following the survey, 65 per cent believed that keeping healthy is primarily down to the individual, with just 7 per cent placing this responsibility with the NHS. While this only skims the surface of very a complex issue, it suggests there is a debate to be had about what people can expect from the NHS and what can be expected of the public in return.

In the wake of COVID-19, there is an opportunity to truly reshape the relationship between public services, including the NHS, and the communities they serve. Changing how health and care services collaborate with people and communities will be one part of this process. It is a different way of working that recognises the role people can play in improving their own health and supporting them to do so.

While [legislation](#), [core principles](#), [guidance](#) and [programmes](#) have been developed in Wales, there is no clear framework relating to what patients, the public and staff are entitled to from the NHS. There is also nothing which clearly states the contributions they can make to their own, and their family's, health and wellbeing.

This is relevant to some of the key priorities of the NHS - prevention and self-care - and we therefore recommend the Welsh Government develops a deal for health and wellbeing framework, similar to an NHS Wales constitution. The framework would provide some guiding principles in relation to patients' rights, what the NHS is committed to achieving and how the public and patients can support their own health and wellbeing to ensure the NHS can operate more effectively in the future as part of the COVID-19 recovery.

While the framework provides some national principles, it is important that leaders work with their local populations to co-produce a deal for health and wellbeing for their area. When developing the deal for health and wellbeing framework, it would be beneficial for Welsh Government to consider the NHS Constitution for [England](#), The Charter of Patient Rights and Responsibilities in [Scotland](#) and the Deal for Health & Wellness in [Wigan](#).

NHS Constitution for England

The current NHS Constitution in England was updated in January 2021 and establishes the principles and values of the NHS in England. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, all NHS bodies and private and voluntary sector providers supplying NHS services are required by law to take account of this Constitution in their decisions and actions. The Constitution, which includes seven key principles underpinned by core NHS values, helps guide the NHS in all it does and contains pledges to patients and the public around what the NHS is committed to achieve. While the Constitution sets out what the NHS is committed to achieve, it also states the responsibilities of patients and the public.

The Constitution provides practical examples of how patients and the public can recognise the significant contribution they make to their own health and wellbeing and the personal responsibility they can take by:

- registering with a GP practice
- treating NHS staff and other patients with respect, recognising that abusive and violent behaviour may result in prosecution or refusal to access NHS services
- providing accurate information about health, condition and status
- keeping appointments, or cancelling within reasonable time
- follow the course of treatment which has been agreed
- participate in important public health programmes, such as vaccination
- inform people of your wishes around organ donation
- giving feedback, both positive and negative, about healthcare experiences and treatment to improve NHS services for all.

Scotland's Charter of Patient Rights and Responsibilities

The Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 received royal assent on 31 March 2011. Under the act, Scottish Ministers must publish a Charter of Patient Rights and Responsibilities which summarises the existing rights and responsibilities of people who use NHS services and receive NHS care in Scotland.

Some of the responsibilities of patients are set out in law, while others are what everyone is expected to do to help the NHS work effectively and help make sure the NHS uses its resources responsibly. The responsibilities on patients within the charter include:

- to register with a GP
- making every effort to go to appointments, as missed appointments can have a negative effect on patients' care
- keeping contact information up to date and to correct any personal information that is inaccurate
- using health services responsibly
- ordering repeat prescriptions in plenty of time, and only order the items that they continue to need
- following the treatment plan agreed with healthcare professionals taking responsibility for their own health and ask NHS staff involved in their care for support to help manage their condition and lead a healthy lifestyle.

Wigan Deal for Health and Wellness

In Wigan they have listened to thousands of their residents and developed The Deal 2030, a strategy for Wigan Borough. The deal aims to make Wigan Borough the best place it can be over the coming decade, from improving the borough's town centres and making sure people are healthy, to getting children the best start in life and ensuring a litter-free environment, the strategy sets out ten ambitious goals.

Central to the deal is the idea of a new relationship between public services and citizens and the recognition that councils and other public services cannot continue to do all they once did. To deliver the highest quality public services, all organisations have adopted and been trained in a set of principles which underpin the deal.

The deal focuses on keeping people well and how the borough can work with organisations and individuals to take charge of the health and wellbeing needs of the borough. The deal sets out what the borough will do and what residents need to do to take control and take responsibility for their own health and wellness.

As part of the deal, the borough will:

- ensure there are a wide range of facilities within local communities including parks, open spaces, leisure, safe cycling routes, good quality housing
- ensure easy, timely access to good quality GP services seven days a week, support families to ensure their children have the best start in life
- support people to live well, helping those who are unemployed into work or training and helping them benefit from the fastest growing economy in the UK
- assist people to age well by keeping them healthy and connected to their communities for as long as possible in their own home.

For individuals:

- keep active at whatever stage of life.
- register with a GP and go for regular check-ups – taking charge of your own health and wellbeing.
- quit smoking, drink and eat sensibly and encourage your children to do the same
- take time to be supportive parents or guardians, encouraging children to be the best they can be
- take advantage of training and job opportunities, setting high aspirations for yourself and your family
- support older relatives, friends and neighbours to be independent for as long as possible
- get involved in your local communities

A deal for health and wellbeing for Wales

A Deal for Health and Wellbeing for Wales framework will enable local leaders, within the Regional Partnership Board footprint, to work with their local populations to co-produce and develop a Health and Wellbeing Deal for their area. The deals will outline the respective rights and expectations of the public. Since the NHS was formed, the population has a set of rights – such as the right to care that is free at the point of need – but there’s an expectation that the population contributes in return, for example by paying taxes.

These principles have underpinned the relationship between the NHS and the public since the NHS was first established in 1947, but the precise nature of that relationship has changed. Over time there has been an increasing emphasis on people managing their own health and wellbeing, and growing recognition of the important role that patients, communities and the public have in shaping health and care services. Many public surveys conducted by NHS organisations have shown significant agreement that a key role of the NHS is to promote lifestyles that prevent disease, but more importantly they reveal a sense that everyone has a responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.

It is important to have strong engagement and communication strategies to engage and empower people to make positive choices about their health and wellbeing, but the approach needs to recognise the barriers people face in making such choices. For example, people living in economically deprived areas may not have the financial resources to access facilities such as local swimming pools, leisure centres or buy fresh fruit and vegetables; or people living in rural communities who experience isolation and limited services. It is therefore important to have a two-way conversation with communities about how these challenges and barriers can be managed. This emphasises the importance of partnership working and how local authorities, health boards, the third sector and communities can co-design solutions.

Much of the public have embraced self-care during the pandemic and should now be supported to learn more about what they can do to manage their health. A clear and well-communicated set of expectations would be a step towards achieving this and towards cultivating a modern relationship between the NHS in Wales and the public it serves.

Requirements for high-performing engagement and communications

It is important that all sectors have strong engagement and communications strategies to support this agenda. This will enable them to support and improve population health and consider how they can effectively coordinate engagement and communication resources and expertise across organisational boundaries to support the public to live healthier lives.

Over the course of the pandemic, we have seen the importance of engagement and communications with the public and how it is a key enabler for partnership working and supporting better public health outcomes. The pandemic has helped remove barriers to communication and working across different organisations especially through the use of digital technology, when raising awareness of the COVID-19 regulations, supporting uptake of the vaccine or supporting the Keep Wales Safe campaign. There is now an opportunity to build on this and consider the factors required for high-performing cross sector engagement and communication.

Over the years in Wales there have been briefings and principles developed around good quality engagement activity with service users and the wider public. In March 2011, the [National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales](#) were created to help organisations carry out consistent and effective public engagement, endorsed by a range of organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors. There are ten principles, including:

- encourage and enable everyone affected to be involved, if they so choose
- work with relevant partner organisations
- enable people to take part effectively
- people are told the impact of their contribution and
- learn and share lessons to improve the process of engagement.

While these principles are still relevant, there is now the opportunity to review them and consider the impact and lessons learnt during to the pandemic, as well as other developments such as digital engagement, the use of social media platforms and co-production approaches.

We also need to consider best practice and engagement from other systems across the UK. In 2020, the NHS Confederation published the briefing, [Building common purpose: Learning on engagement and communications in integrated care systems](#). The briefing was led by a working group of integrated care systems in England and other NHS and local authority communications leaders to draw on the insights of leaders and senior communicators working within the health and care system.

The briefing identified five success factors required for high-performing public engagement and communications that should be considered by the Welsh Government and wider public, private and voluntary sector partners.

The success factors for high-performing public engagement and communications:

1. Embed a strategic approach to engagement and communications

Organisations that have achieved notable success in partnership working have embedded strong engagement and communications at the heart of decision-making and system transformation work. They recognise that it is a key enabler of change and building common ambition across partner organisations, professions and geographies, as well as to demonstrate momentum. Both are fundamental to ensuring the voices of patients, service users, communities and staff are involved and that their insights are used to inform planning and decision-making. A strategic approach to engagement and communications is fundamental to achieving better outcomes, such as stronger partnerships and relationships, increased trust and improved participation.

2. Adopt systematic approaches to continuous relationship building

To make these partnerships work, it is critical to recognise the strategic importance of relationship building among the partners and the influencing skills required of leaders at all levels. Systems that have had success in building strong relationships do so on a planned, systematic and continuous basis. Part of the answer here is getting governance and co-production processes right so that all can see clearly how decisions are made – transparency breeds trust. This also requires all leaders to invest time in building relationships systematically and to make the space for others to do so, reaching across institutional, professional and hierarchical boundaries to find common purpose.

3. Develop a shared vision and narrative and make it real

A compelling narrative that all system partners buy into, which is well understood and supported by the public and staff, is among the hallmarks of successful communications and engagement. Getting all partners to agree on their shared ambition takes time and planned effort. Done successfully, this will be something that all those involved feel part of and own. Ultimately, clarity of vision and purpose at system level, with coordination of engagement and communications activity across a system, will support the delivery of effective communication at local place and neighbourhood level. The endeavour must be shared ‘with’ people, not done for or to them.

4. Embed open, transparent and two-way engagement approaches

Health and care systems belong to the communities and people they serve. Many local systems have developed effective approaches to engaging with patients, staff and the public. A broad and strategic engagement strategy is important to build confidence and trust. This should encompass a focus on transparency and the provision of clear public information about vision, plans and progress. It should also involve working in partnership with the local voluntary and community sector; politicians and local councillors; designing services in partnership with users, carers and staff; reaching out to the unengaged, particularly those affected by inequalities; and a focus on community empowerment.

5. Develop engagement and communications leadership, capacity and expertise

Partnership engagement and communications is complex and requires strong leadership at all levels – across systems, within places and in neighbourhoods. It is important to develop engagement and communication functions and networks, ensuring roles are clear and that they have the right leadership, capacity and expertise. This should include strategic thinkers, strong relationship builders and expert storytellers that understand the nuances and commitments required to contribute to and sustain effective partnership working. Effective pooling and coordination of resources and expertise across organisational boundaries is key and stands out as a critical enabler in systems furthest ahead in their integration journey.

To have high-performing engagement and communications, digital inclusion must be a key consideration. Not everyone has the ability to connect to the internet to effectively participate in digital health services. This might be due to not being able to access the equipment, software, data or broadband. Providing a range of free, easily accessible training resources to meet different needs and communication styles will help build an individual's digital skills.

People prefer to learn in different ways, so consider including a range of options such as training videos, drop-in sessions, a personalised training budget, recovery college courses and how-to guides. All resources should be appropriate for a range of ages, those with autism or learning disabilities, or whose primary language is not English. Through a phased approach, and by helping people build on what they already know, individuals are likely to build their confidence as well as skills. The role of behavioural science techniques is key to this.

When engaging and communicating with the public, behavioural science techniques are used, as highlighted by Public Health Wales' communications to prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

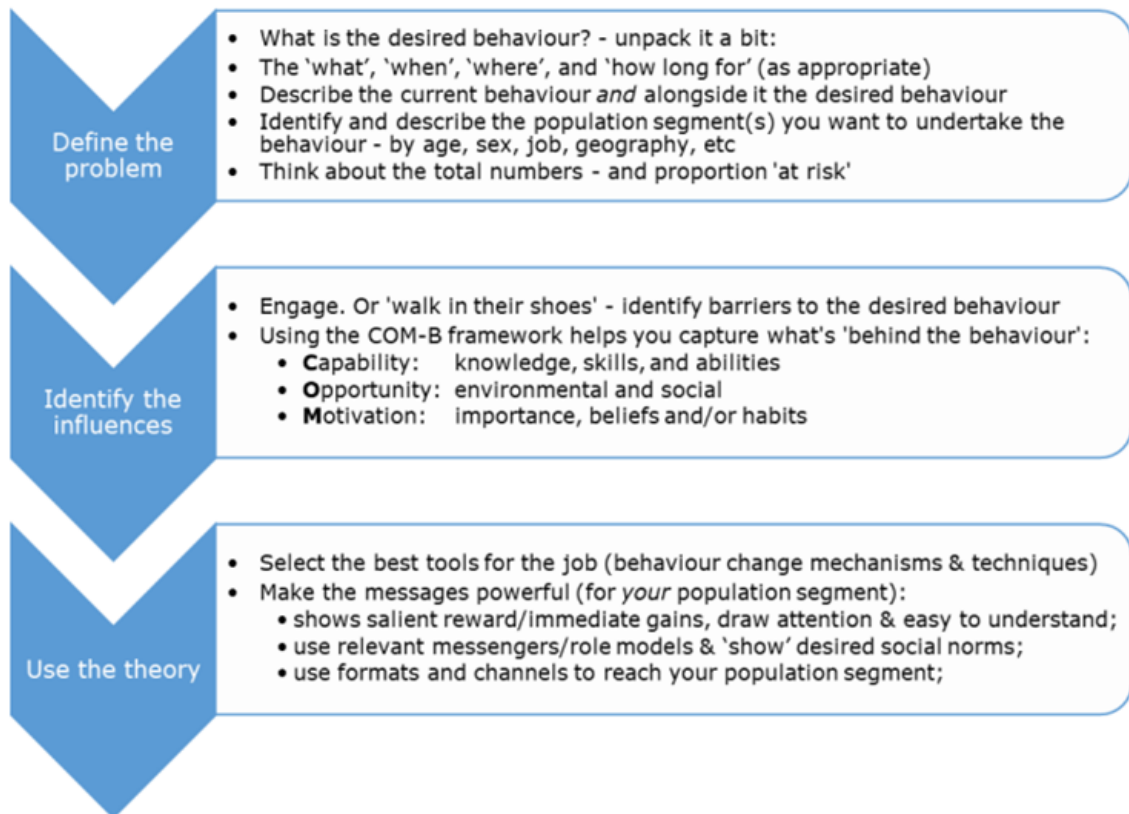
All human behaviour is a product of biological, psychological, economic, environmental and social influences. To modify behaviours, those determinants need first to be understood and then 'treated' with relevant behaviour change techniques. More systematic application of behavioural science in the development of public communication interventions (and policy) increases the likelihood they will have the desired effect.

Public Health Wales has developed a [guide](#) to support anyone who develops and delivers public communication interventions that aim to encourage behaviours that will prevent the transmission of COVID-19. The guide sets out how to apply behavioural science to improve the effectiveness of public communications using the following steps:

1. Defining the behavioural goal(s) specifically including when, where, for how long as well as the 'what', and in which populations. Selection of the important behaviours in the important populations should be based on the time/persons/place of greatest opportunity to prevent transmission and inequality of impact.
2. Identify the determinants of the behaviour(s), the barriers to change, using a behaviour change framework which is broad enough to help identify all important barriers to the behaviour.
3. Select behaviour change mechanisms of action relevant to the identified determinants to develop core content, then use other elements of behavioural science to make the message powerful.

Public Health Wales have provided this quick guide as a template for the work described in the document:

Quick Guide



How the NHS is engaging with the public across Wales

The NHS sees public engagement as a vital way of talking to people about their health needs and listening to what they have to say about NHS services. The range of methods used by NHS organisations in Wales provides opportunities for communities, groups and individuals to have their say, get involved, develop their own healthcare and develop their NHS services locally.

The following case studies provide a snapshot of the methods used, including formal consultation to involve people in making decisions about services; information provision and exchange to let people know what is going on in the NHS and listening to their views; and partnership working with people in the community to respond to the healthcare challenges that are being faced.

Changing communication methods

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

The health board launched an Engagement & Recruitment Roadshow during October 2021 half term week as part of the Winter Plan to deliver two key objectives:

- Equitable geographical engagement with its citizens to improve understanding of access to health care services, with a key focus on the use of the Emergency Department at The Grange University Hospital and Minor Injuries Units.
- Promotion of a range of roles within the health board, including health and social care job vacancies in conjunction with partner organisations.

Since the 'Work With Us' series of roadshows began, 43 locations have been visited with either the specially commissioned double decker bus or pop-up gazebo. The geographical spread of events has been well balanced, capitalising on routine, established events (market days), attendance at high footfall venues (supermarkets and town centre locations) and presence at Christmas/winter events. The team also attended four Coleg Gwent campuses and the roadshows have involved attendance from partners including local authority partners and third sector organisations.

Over 1,100 face-to-face conversations with visitors to the roadshows have taken place and 345 Expressions of Interest received for job roles within the health board (broken down further: Facilities 142; Health Care Support Worker 99; Admin Bank 96, Signposted 8).

To share these messages far and wide, the health board created a #HelpUsHelpYou animation which was shown in cinemas across the health board area during January 2022.

Living Healthier, Staying Well refresh

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

During 2017, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board spent time discussing what their priorities should be with patients, carers and community representatives as well as staff and partner organisations. The engagement events fed into their long-term strategy, Living Healthier, Staying Well (LHSW), published in 2018. In 2021, the health board embarked on formal consultation to refresh the strategy to ensure that they focus on the right things as we emerge from the pandemic.

As part of the process to refresh the strategy, engagement was undertaken with key groups, prior to a formal six-week consultation process in September 2021. A wide-ranging engagement programme had previously taken place in the development of the LHSW strategy, and this 'light touch' engagement approach was about building on the existing strategy, not creating a new one.

Due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, engagement was undertaken through several different channels, including:

- online public survey. This was the key engagement tool; at the time of writing, over 300 people had completed the survey
- LHSW web pages
- social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to promote key messages and the survey
- a dedicated email address and telephone line
- links to surveys and information shared widely through regional, area and community networks and groups
- staff engagement through internal communication channels
- cascading information through third sector and community groups as well as stakeholders that represent people with protected characteristics
- key stakeholder telephone interviews
- focused events and general discussions with a wider range of groups, including with Black, Asian and minority communities, children and young people, students, and health and wellbeing networks
- a LHSW document, summary and easy read document.

CAV24/7

Cardiff and Vale University Health Board

Since August 2020, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board has introduced a new and innovative approach to how patients access urgent care through phoning first if they think they need to attend the emergency unit and do not have a life-threatening emergency.

Traditionally, patients have been able to access the emergency department by walking into their local emergency unit. The 'phone first' system replaces this for non-emergencies, with patients being encouraged to phone ahead and, if required, they will get a booked appointment - saving precious time.

A clinical review of patients accessing the emergency unit at University Hospital Wales, Cardiff was undertaken before introducing the CAV 24/7 'phone first' system. The review found that approximately 200 of the unit's daily attendances had a low acuity level, which means these patients could be safely managed as a planned event or seen in an alternative setting. Typically, the emergency unit sees an average of 240 patients just 'walk in' to be triaged.

During the coronavirus pandemic, health boards had no choice but to review the way in which they were providing services. This resulted in a number of innovative digital solutions being used to enable patients to receive a consultation remotely.

The success of these new ways of working together, with the absolute requirement to keep people safe through social distancing, has led to GPs and hospital clinicians across the health board setting up the phone first model, 'CAV 24/7'. This is a round-the-clock service where doctors and nurses will assess people's needs and direct them to a service which best meets them, all while you wait at home.

Vaccination offer for 12-15-year-olds

Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board

Following the Welsh Government decision that NHS organisations should offer the COVID-19 vaccine to young people aged 12–15-years-old, the health board developed an engagement and communication plan to ensure that all 12–15-year-olds in Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM), and their parents/guardians, had all the information they needed on the benefits and risks of the vaccine, enabling them to feel confident in making a decision as a family on whether to have the vaccine.

The health board introduced a number of initiatives to engage with 12–15-year-olds, including:

- set up a virtual Q&A engagement event with head teachers of all CTM's secondary schools and local authorities to gather valuable insight
- wrote to all 12–15-year-olds in CTM (through their schools) explaining the situation and included an information leaflet around vaccinating 12–15-year-olds.
- tailored all communication (language, images etc) to a 12–15-year-old audience
- shared all communication with local authorities and third sector stakeholders
- set up a virtual event for 12–15-year-olds to have the opportunity to ask the health board's immunisation nurses questions about the vaccine. This event was recorded and posted online and on social channels to view after the event.
- produced a walk-through video of a vaccination centre so people could see what it is like inside and provide reassurance to those who may be anxious
- created dedicated space on their website to the vaccination offer for 12–15-year-olds. The website included Q&As, links to more information and explained the Gillick competence
- set up an exclusive vaccination advice line for 12–15-year-olds (and their parents/guardians)
- 12–15-year-olds are able to fill in a form on the health board's website where their questions are sent straight to an expert. Participants can choose whether to have a phone call back or an email (tailored for this age group who may prefer to communicate through digital means)
- checked anyone who didn't make their appointment by writing again inviting them to make a new appointment or opt-out of having the vaccine. This letter included QR codes to scan for more information.

Digital Services for Patients and the Public programme

Digital Health and Care Wales

The aim of Digital Health and Care Wales (DHCW) is to take forward the digital transformation needed for better health and care in Wales, making services more accessible and sustainable while supporting personal health and wellbeing. DHCW work collaboratively with health and care professionals, patients and the public, industry and academia to ensure the best digital solutions for the people of Wales.

The Digital Services for Patients and the Public (DSPP) programme will help people in Wales to access better healthcare and support health providers to deliver care more efficiently, by developing new digital health services and applications (apps). The goal is for patients and the public to:

- personalise their health journey
- monitor health conditions more easily
- share and receive important health information
- take an active part in their own health and wellbeing
- plan for and take control of their health and care journey
- stay healthy for longer.

The programme has started work on the NHS Wales app to give people access to health and care services through their smartphones and tablets. Longer term, the aim is for the people of Wales to use the NHS Wales app to access a wider range of health, care and wellbeing services so they can proactively manage every aspect of their health. This could include access to social care services and information from self-monitoring devices such as smartwatches.

DHCW are developing additional technology to help health and care providers manage the security, access and exchange of patient data across Wales. Providers can use this technology to develop their own digital services faster and more effectively for the people they support. Patients and the public in Wales are working with DHCW, alongside health and care practitioners, to co-produce this technology and ensure the needs of our community are met.

A Patients and the Public Assurance Group (comprising patient representative groups, public commissioner and third sector organisations covering age, condition, accessibility, disability, equity and diversity, digital inclusion, carers, advocacy, social prescribing, innovation and networking, NHS Wales patient experience leads and independent members) meet monthly to discuss progress of the programme and patient facing digital services being implemented in DHCW.

The Patients and the Public Assurance Group is also part of the [Networked Data Lab Wales project](#), funded by the Health Foundation, to look at data analysis, sharing and evaluation of Covid from a patient's perspective to ensure the information is understandable to the people of Wales. The group also provides contacts to a wide range of stakeholders across Wales who are being contacted to be part of co-production and person-centred design of the NHS Wales app through user involvement surveys, focus groups and online activities.

COV-Boost study

Health and Care Research Wales

Health and Care Research Wales leads on communication and engagement for the COVID-19 vaccine studies across Wales, including the COV-Boost study.

The COV-Boost study was the first study in the world that looked at the booster vaccine and how it affects people's immune response and their protection against the virus. In June 2021, volunteers in Wrexham were given a third Covid vaccine as part of a UK-wide trial. Wrexham was one of 18 sites across the UK to take part in the COV-Boost study, with more than 2,800 volunteers required.

As part of the communication and engagement for the COV-Boost study, Health and Care Research Wales worked with the set up team to create the communications. A range of communication methods were used including: direct emails; text messages; messaging relevant groups on social media; GP engagement; publishing case studies of study volunteers; messaging relevant groups on internal and external bulletins; and arranging broadcast media interviews.

Through this communication and engagement, the study had 17 pieces of media coverage; approximately 11,637,359 opportunities to see the study was being undertaken; Health and Care Research Wales' Facebook reach grew by 909 per cent; over 150 organisations were contacted; over 500,000 subscribers of the Vaccine Research Registry newsletter received information; and over 40 GP surgeries were contacted, leading to over 500 text messages being sent out to relevant audiences.

Due to the communication and engagement, nearly 2,000 people registered through the pre-screener for the study and filled the numbers of Pfizer vaccines allocated for both under & over 70-year-olds.

Dr Orod Osanlou, principal investigator for the study said: "Thank you so much to the whole comms team. We have been struggling to recruit to COV-Boost and without the strong push in comms over the last 72 hours we would not be where we are. Thank you very much."

Development of the Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care

Health Education and Improvement Wales

As an all Wales strategic organisation, working with partners and stakeholders is essential to the way that Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) undertake their business. This includes trainees and students, NHS Wales organisations, Social Care Wales (SCW), education providers, regulators, private sector businesses, the voluntary sector, professional bodies, the public and Welsh Government. This engagement was key when developing the Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care in partnership with SCW.

Wales' ten-year workforce strategy, 'A Healthier Wales: Our Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care' was launched by HEIW and SCW in October 2020. The document represents the culmination of almost a year's development work by HEIW and SCW and involved extensive stakeholder engagement, including staff, professional bodies and trade unions, employers, unpaid carers, patients, people who access care and support, third sector organisations, commissioners and volunteers.

The development of the strategy started with extensive engagement involving well over 1,000 people. That helped shape the content of a public consultation document that was released in summer 2019. During the consultation period, HEIW and SCW continued to engage with stakeholders to draw in their views through webinars, online surveys, attending networks and meetings and speaking at conferences.

The consultation received 200 formal responses in addition to the feedback provided at events. In all, engagement included nearly 100 one-to-one interviews, attending nearly 40 NHS Executive Group meetings, presenting at over 40 webinars and 290 people attending one of 14 stakeholder workshops. It is estimated that over 2,000 people helped to shape the strategy, with the overwhelming majority in favour of the ambition, themes and approach proposed.

A vision for a healthier mid and west Wales

Hywel Dda University Health Board

Hywel Dda University Health Board (UHB) has a shared long-term vision with its population, detailed in [A Healthier Mid and West Wales Our Future Generations Living Well](#): “A mid and west Wales where individuals, communities and the environments they live, play and work in are adaptive (able to change as they need to), connected (able to work together) and mutually supportive (able to help each other). This means people are resilient and resourceful and enabled to live joyful, healthy and purposeful lives with a strong sense of belonging.”

The health board arrived at this vision following extensive engagement and formal consultation between 2016 and 2018 (The Big Conversation and Our Big NHS Change) with people in their communities. The health board has made a commitment in this strategy to continuous engagement with their population, which means working together every step of the way.

It is in that context, and due to the significance of the global pandemic, that the health board undertook a six-week engagement exercise in May and June of 2021 (Building a healthier future after COVID-19). The health board used their new digital engagement platform, delivered through Engagement HQ, allowing them to have [interactive discussions](#) with the public, which was particularly useful during times of public restrictions.

This has given the health board a great deal of relevant feedback and learning about how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people’s health and care, access to it and implications of these experiences in relation to their long-term strategy. This feedback is being shared across the organisation so it can inform service delivery now and in the future.

One area of impact is around public responses regarding the nominations of sites for a new planned and urgent care hospital in the south of the Hywel Dda UHB area. New site nominations, as well as rich feedback on what is important to their communities when considering the location of a proposed hospital and what criteria they should consider when shortlisting sites, is now being used in their land appraisal programme.

WhatsApp community messaging

Public Health Wales NHS Trust

Public Health Wales has expanded its WhatsApp messaging format by sending it directly to network leaders who operate on channels like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Slack and more.

Many community and shared interest groups organise themselves in WhatsApp channels, meaning it's a great space to share reliable and important information from people they trust. Regular messages are sent to community and network leaders who can then pass them on to the people they help. This may be via a WhatsApp group they run, other messaging services or through word of mouth.

Through engagement activities with partners, Public Health Wales know there is a need to offer more tailored advice and materials for people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. WhatsApp allows them to take a more equitable approach to delivering this directly to the community while also continuing to improve representation and inclusion in their broader work.

The premise:

- Messages will be short and to the point, short enough to send on or read aloud to relate to a friend or relative.
- Plain language will be used.
- Text will always be accompanied by an image, video or link to a video / resource.
- Images will be text light to avoid contrast when the main text is translated.
- Generally, messages will end with a prompt to share it with others.

Eye check-ups help prevent falls in older people

Powys Teaching Health Board

A leading Powys optometrist is asking the public to look out for eye problems among the older generation in a bid to help prevent falls. The appeal is part of the Help Us Help You campaign, which is encouraging people to take preventative action to help avoid urgent medical care as the NHS recovers from Covid-19.

The appeal aims to raise awareness of the small signs that someone might be struggling with their vision. These can include tripping over because someone has misjudged the step edge or kerb or missing the cup when pouring a kettle. Another sign of an eye problem is struggling to fill out forms, misreading the post or maybe burning or scalding yourself while cooking. Through being aware of the little clues, it is hoped it will help older people stay safe.

The College of Optometrists has reported that, across the UK, falls are the most common cause of hospitalisation for people aged over 65, and of accidental death in those aged over 75.

The Eye Health Examination Wales scheme provides free urgent eye care for all patients at your high street optician and people over the age of 60 can access free routine eye tests to ensure that all is well. Opticians are operating in a Covid-safe way with socially distanced appointments.

Changing for the future

Swansea Bay University Health Board

Swansea Bay University Health Board, in partnership with the Community Health Council, conducted a public engagement known as ‘Changing for the Future’ between 26th July and 1st October 2021, to obtain the widest possible range of views and opinions on proposals to make permanent changes to the way in which urgent and planned care services in Swansea Bay are delivered to Swansea Bay, Hywel Dda and South West Powys residents.

As the pandemic restricted face-to-face interactions, the health board provided information in various formats to create opportunities for engagement. It became the largest health engagement ever undertaken in Swansea Bay. Channels of engagement included social media posts; social media marketing to encourage responses; media releases on service change to generate local and national coverage; email marketing promoting the engagement and how to get involved; online meetings for the public; held conversations in shopping centres; and targeted stakeholder events with Members of the Senedd, local authorities, representative groups and organisations.

The results from the engagement included:

- 109,930 people saw the health board’s sponsored posts on social media
- 1,047 users engaged with event promotion posts
- 1,267 people completed the online questionnaire
- 88 booklets were handed out and 45 conversations were had at shopping centres
- 7,793 visited the dedicated microsite.

The overall number of responses received (1,267) meant that the health board had a robust and statistically relevant set of data to analyse. The overriding observation was that there was a clear positive response to these proposals, providing a clear mandate for changes in the ways in which urgent and planned care services are delivered across Swansea Bay University Health Board.

Velindre Cancer Centre

Velindre University NHS Trust

In summer 2021, Velindre University NHS Trust launched two initiatives related to the development of the new Velindre Cancer Centre.

In partnership with Cardiff University and the TechnoHub, the Velindre Minecraft Competition was launched to encourage children and young people from primary and secondary schools across the south east Wales region to design their own version of the new Velindre Cancer Centre. The competition received 120 registrations, 35 worlds were submitted by teams and individuals, with ten shortlisted. The trust welcomed the winners, runners up and entrants to a Green Design Workshop hosted at Down To Earth to celebrate their success and get further ideas from those involved.

Alongside the Gower-based social enterprise Down to Earth, the Digital Conversation launched in June 2021 focused on how health and green spaces can work together to create an enhanced patient, staff and public experience at the new cancer centre. The Digital Conversation focused on a survey and public engagement events relating to the updated reference design of the new Velindre Cancer Centre, with a focus on the landscape and materials used for inside and outside the centre.

The trust launched the [survey](#) following a public engagement event for community groups with the local MSs and MPs, communicated with the public to encourage responses. All activities had to be developed with sensitivity to the latest COVID-19 regulations. The survey received more than 500 responses, with 35 per cent from staff and 32 per cent from the local community. The survey found that enhancing biodiversity and natural principles was one of the biggest priorities.

The best gift winter campaign and national partnerships

Welsh Blood Service

The Welsh Blood Service (WBS) is responsible for supplying 20 hospitals across Wales with blood and blood products collected from whole blood, platelets and bone marrow donations. Last year, WBS had 90,000 visits to one of their blood donation clinics held across the country.

In 2021, the WBS launched a winter campaign to help maximise appointment uptake over a traditionally challenging period. The campaign was titled '#thebestgift' as it was relevant for donors and recipients alike.

The integrated campaign featured across the WBS channels, including banners and updated logos for web and socials, filmed content featuring two unique blood recipients, as well as thank you videos from First Minister, Mark Drakeford, and Dominic Littlewood, who filmed BBC's 'Dom Delivers Blood' with the Service earlier in the year. Donor invites sent were also tailored over the period to reflect the campaign.

The campaign received national coverage through two S4C news shows and BBC radio. Locally, the campaign was pushed in local media in areas with donation appointments available.

Overall, 735,000 social accounts were reached, and the targeted bookings were exceeded by 113 appointments, filling 91 per cent of the total slots available.

A key to the WBS success in reaching donors is through the strong partnerships that they have developed with national organisations that can be used in local communities across Wales. Partnerships include:

- School donation venue programme: Selected comprehensive schools across Wales were invited to become donation venues for students aged 17 and over. In total, 15 schools enrolled across 13 school sites.

- **Welsh Baccalaureate:** Students can now take on the challenge of encouraging more young people to start donating blood, platelets or bone marrow in Wales as part of the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification.
- **Football Association of Wales (FAW):** The FAW and WBS are working with 68 clubs across the men and women's Cymru Leagues to promote the importance of donating at upcoming blood sessions in the area. In the first season, over 1,300 lives were potentially saved thanks to donations from fans despite two of the four leagues unable to play due to the pandemic.
- **Running:** In partnership with Welsh Athletics and Run 4 Wales, WBS has created engagement packs specifically for runners and running clubs. Influencers are encouraged to promote the importance of donating blood, platelets and bone marrow through to their audiences using the content provided.
- **Facebook:** Facebook users in Wales are asked if they are interested in supporting blood donations. Those who select yes, are more likely to see messages pushed through the WBS page. For fixed site venues, WBS can send a push notification to Facebook users within a 15km radius, encouraging them to book for their local clinic. Over 26,000 people follow WBS on Facebook.

A gaming app to educate the next generation of emergency service users

Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

The Welsh Ambulance Service has launched a revolutionary new gaming app to help young people understand what to do in an emergency. The trust's [Blue Light Hub app](#) boasts four games which teach users about what happens when they call 999, the appropriate use of 999, how ambulance resources are dispatched and the different uniforms they might encounter on their NHS journey.

The bilingual app is aimed predominantly at 7–12-year-olds and hosts four games which are:

- Quiz: A fun game which asks players about using 999 wisely, calling 999, uniforms, equipment and vehicles
- 999: Educates on what happens when the emergency phone system is used
- Dress Up: Familiarises users with all the different uniforms they may encounter on their NHS journey
- Dispatch: Helps users understand how resources such as ambulances are utilised

The idea was borne out of discussions with a clinical psychologist and a social development expert on how to best engage with and form positive behaviours in young people.

Conclusion

Every part of the country is different and has specific challenges, but we hope the information within this briefing provides an overview of why engaging and communicating with the public will continue to be key to responding to the challenges that we face, providing some recommendations for national and local leaders around how we can build and improve the approach that we are currently taking.

Strong public engagement must be underpinned by robust partnership working, which has been a hallmark of the health and care response to COVID-19. Effective partnerships require engagement and communication strategies, which enable regional systems to achieve their aims of more joined-up care and improved population health.

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