



Community Transport & Health - Making health accessible to all



Introduction

Wales is famous for its beautiful countryside, with around one in three people currently living in an area defined as ‘rural’. However, patients living in rural communities often face longer travelling times to access essential health services due to acute services becoming increasingly specialised and the current workforce recruitment challenges that we face across the UK. Even in urban areas, there are marginalised groups which face barriers to accessing transport, making travel to health services difficult.

People living in rural areas are more likely to need to use their cars to access essential services than those who live in urban areas, mainly because there is less public transport available than in urban areas. The proportion of people in rural areas who must use a car to respond to medical issues, to access education or to maintain their social life, is more than double that in urban areas.

This can be an even greater problem for elderly or vulnerable people who may not have access to their own vehicle. The ability to access reliable and sustainable transport is key to people maintaining their independence and quality of life. Not everyone can ask a family member or friend for a lift for appointments; that is why local community transport often provides a lifeline for many elderly and vulnerable individuals.

Community transport is about providing flexible and accessible community-led solutions to help local people. It can be the only means of transport for many vulnerable and isolated people, especially for older people or people with disabilities. Having the ability to access suitable transportation can improve people’s health and wellbeing by reducing social isolation, which is harmful to physical and mental health.

The Community Transport Association (CTA) is a national charity that represents and supports providers of community transport: thousands of local charities and community groups across the UK that all provide transport services that fulfil a social purpose and community benefit. Their members provide a whole range of vitally important services to those who need them most. Many CTA members deliver contracted support to the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust (WAST) to transport patients to access health services. There are also community car

schemes which are paid by the patients themselves to take them to their health appointments. There are lift share schemes, 'Bus Buddies' who support people to build their confidence using the public bus network, and community bus services which take visitors to see their friends and relatives during evening visitor hours.

The examples in this briefing highlight how community transport operators across Wales are supporting patients and their local Health Boards and NHS Trusts in Wales. We hope the briefing will raise awareness of the positive work that CTA members are doing every day and the different ways in which patients get to their appointments, to make health accessible to all.



CTA also wants to raise awareness of the importance of accessible and sustainable transport and to encourage public bodies to consider 'access from the outset' to ensure that services are planned in a way that ensures everyone in the community can reach them.

**Aneurin Bevan
University Health
Board**

Identifying the need across the Health Board

Following the closure of the dementia ward at Chepstow Community Hospital, and to mitigate the effects on patients and their carers, the Monmouthshire Integrated Services Partnership Board received an allocation from the Health Board to implement some initiatives. One of which was the setting up of a Service Level Agreement for a voluntary car scheme with a social enterprise in Monmouthshire. This scheme enables relatives to visit family members in hospital, as patients who would have been previously admitted to Chepstow are now admitted to either St Woolos or Ysbyty'r Tri Chwm, depending on where they live in Monmouthshire. The funding also supports people living with dementia in accessing community activities and some health appointments, such as attending GP appointments.

Public transport links for patients to access health services is also high on the Health Board's agenda with the opening of the Grange University Hospital, scheduled for April 2021. The Health Board is working closely with commercial bus companies and Transport for Wales to look at public travel provision and how this can best meet regional demands across the whole catchment area.

There are several projects already up and running in the area, such as Monmouthshire County Council operated Grassroutes transport scheme for residents isolated and lacking in transport options. It is a membership scheme serving approximately 5000 people per month, who book the journey a day in advance to a number of daily routes.

The Integrated Responsive Transport (IRT) project, which is being funded through the Welsh Government with Blaenau Gwent as the pilot area, similar to the scheme in Monmouthshire, could assist in facilitating those with travelling needs to and from surgeries and hospitals that are not serviced by local bus services.

The Health Board is also working to finalise a Sustainable Travel Strategy to reduce the number of single-occupancy journeys. As part of this work, they will be looking at staff modes of travel and promoting active travel and public transport provision.

Conwy Community Car Scheme

Conwy Community Car Scheme is being developed as a direct result of the need identified by a cluster of GP surgeries in Conwy. The number of primary and secondary care appointments being missed – known by GP’s as ‘Did Not Attend’ (DNAs) appointments – is such that the Practice Managers in the cluster approached Community and Voluntary Support Conwy (CVSC) to explore the potential to develop a new scheme to help patients to better access their appointments.

Geraint Davies, the Health and Wellbeing Facilitator for CVSC, said that in Betws-Y-Coed “*public transport is almost non-existent. With only one bus a week, patients had no options for appointment times and the local surgery had to ‘turn around’ appointments within an hour to allow people to get the bus home.*” This was having a negative impact on both the patients and the surgery, forcing people to rush through consultations and creating delays for other patients. With some of Wales’ most rural and mountainous landscapes, an ageing population where more than 25% of residents are over 65, and low levels of both private car ownership and funding for traditional public transport, an innovative approach is needed to support patients to have greater choice and control over their health appointments.

Although there is no published data on primary care appointments, in developing the project CVSC found that some 52,800 secondary care appointments with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board were missed by patients from Conwy West in 2015-16, at an estimated cost of £9.56m. The Practice Managers estimate that over 10% of these appointments were missed because of a lack of accessible transport options in the area.

Pulling on the experiences of another recently established community car scheme and a local volunteer-led prescription delivery service, the partners identified that factors such as low income, restrictive eligibility for Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPT), additional mobility needs and a lack of public transport means that residents are highly reliant on family, friends and neighbours to get to appointments. In practice, this means that often people are making choices about what to ask for help with, potentially sacrificing their mental health by giving up visiting friends to attend regular hospital appointments.

In developing the project, CVSC held meetings with Practice Managers and community groups, had discussions with local community navigators and residents, and consulted with the Community Transport Association about cost-effective models of transport for smaller communities in rural areas. Engaging with such a wide range of stakeholders was an invaluable exercise in helping them to define the problem (difficulties accessing medical services and appointments, and local facilities including health and wellbeing services) and in considering different options before agreeing on a preferred model - the community car scheme.

The emerging project is a truly needs-led, innovative solution which will not only tackle the problems identified, but will have a much wider impact on the rural wards of Conwy. Working in close partnership with CTA's Connecting Communities in Wales project, both GP surgeries in the cluster and the existing volunteer schemes, CVSC have secured funding through the Lottery Community Fund and the Steve Morgan Foundation to set up a volunteer car scheme and lease an accessible vehicle. Initially prioritising health appointments and based 50/50 between the two surgeries, as the service grows the partners will also be able to support people to access other wellbeing appointments, improving the mobility of isolated residents by providing affordable, accessible transport.

Volunteering is a key component of the project – there will be volunteer driver opportunities for the community car scheme and also for volunteer drivers who are willing to use their own cars to provide transport. Additional volunteer roles include: travel buddies to accompany people who may need support on their journeys due to ill health, disability, or low confidence; and ambassadors to help promote the scheme in the villages so that as many local people as possible know about the service and are able to access it.

The project will enhance the community by providing an interesting range of volunteering opportunities and a community resource (the community car) that helps people get to where they want to go, providing a door-to-door service that will mean people can access services regardless of any age, health, or mobility issues. As CVSC will be using the project to identify learning and critical success factors, they intend to share 'what works' with other rural communities facing similar challenges.

**Cardiff and
Vale
University
Health Board**

Dinas Powys Voluntary Concern

Dinas Powys Voluntary Concern (DPVC) often acts as the first port of call for those seeking help or advice. Offering a wide range of community-based initiatives, they develop projects as needed by the groups and individuals they support, such as wellbeing and befriending schemes, a community club, advice services and community transport. The common thread that runs through all of their highly-valued services is a focus on reducing loneliness and isolation, and maintaining independence.

DPVC are situated between two hospitals which are both poorly served by public transport. With no local buses to Barry Hospital and the main bus stop at Llandough Hospital some 10 minutes' walk away from the main entrance, patients used to rely on expensive taxis to get to their appointments. DPVC provide a fully accessible service to both hospitals, including regular transport for those with long term conditions requiring regular treatment. They also support people to access appointments at the dentists, opticians, audiology clinic and physiotherapy – all in addition to their 'traditional' community transport services for clients going on day trips, heading to the shops or to visit day centres or family members.

Following a review of local GP provision in the area and an exhaustive search for sites which would be fit for purpose and able to better serve the community, four years ago the new Dinas Powys Medical Centre was opened. This state of the art, fully accessible building offers primary and secondary care appointments and is of great value to the community – unfortunately, the site does not yet have a bus stop or public transport services and is at the top of a large, steep hill. For those with access to a car this is no problem; for those unable to drive it presents a huge barrier which was preventing people from getting to the surgery for their appointments. DPVC, in partnership with Greenlinks Community Transport and the Vale of Glamorgan Council, developed a demand-responsive transport service which offers a door-to-door, return journey for anyone who needs it across Dinas Powys.

Using a fully accessible VW Caddy which is owned and maintained by Vale of Glamorgan Council, DPVC offers transport to patients every weekday to get to and from their appointments. This completely free service is open to anyone who needs it and is mainly used by people with additional mobility needs. For example - Mrs. C has a condition which means she cannot bend her legs. Even if she was

able to afford the taxi fare – more than £3 each way, sometimes several times a week – she physically can't get into a standard taxi and as a result would be forced to miss her appointments if an accessible vehicle wasn't available. The DPVC transport means she has been able to attend more of her appointments and manage her condition more effectively.

Wendy Lees, DPVC Coordinator says that *“volunteers are at the centre of our organisation and they have stepped up once again this year with their support and generosity. We regularly support between 3 and 10 patients a day to get to the surgery, 5 days a week, which would not be possible without the team of volunteer drivers. On one Saturday, our volunteers gave up their leisure time to help 23 people get to the Medical Centre for their flu jabs – the local care home weren't offering their usual service, so our drivers stepped in to help everyone get the injections they needed.”* When the morning's passengers have all been settled safely home again, the volunteers will then move on to taking patients and visitors to the local hospitals in the afternoons.

All the transport services offered by DPVC are flexible and supportive for those with additional needs, meaning they are suitable for all. They are free or very low cost, directly tackling transport poverty by creating accessible services for everyone in the community. They are also independently delivered by the charity – there is no formal agreement, contract or SLA in place with Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, so often it can be hard to identify the benefit in terms of the cost of missed appointments vs. the value of a contracted service. It's clear that DPVC are highly valued by their clients and many refer to them as their 'lifeline' – for some customers, DPVC is their only transport option and without the community transport service they would be unable to leave the house at all. Not only would this create a direct cost in terms of missed health appointments, but the increase in loneliness and isolation would be highly detrimental to their mental and physical health, which ultimately leads to an increased risk of deterioration and the need for crisis point clinical intervention by health and social care professionals.

Accessible Caring Transport

Accessible Caring Transport (ACT) are a community transport charity based in Mountain Ash, South Wales. They enhance public transport services by providing an accessible minibus/car scheme, door to door, for individuals and groups of vulnerable people with priority given to older people, people with disabilities and people living in isolation in the Cynon Valley, Rhondda and Merthyr Tydfil areas.

The initial service was set up in 1989 to meet the needs of elderly and disabled people living in the Cynon Valley and surrounding areas. In 1998 the organisation became a charity, and ACT expanded to develop new projects with and for people living in isolation, young people journeying to training and work and a Dial-a-Ride service across the Cynon and Rhondda valleys. With group and individual member numbers growing annually, ACT have an enormous impact on their community. Of the 500+ individuals they support each year, many of them are isolated and have health and/or mobility issues and would be housebound without ACT's support. With no regular buses around the area, ACT provides essential transport to appointments, social events, day trips and visiting friends to help people remain active and engaged in their local community.

In addition to the regular Dial-a-Ride services individuals pay for directly to access GP, hospital, or other health appointments, ACT offers a range of health-related services which are very important to both residents in the area and the Cwm Taf Health Board.

ACT were approached in August 2015 to discuss providing transport for the Wales Ambulance Service Trust, to pick up patients from their homes and convey them to Merthyr Renal Unit (MRUM) for dialysis treatment. With approximately 54 patients being transported every week between home and hospital, this service runs six days a week and is instrumental in ensuring these patients have an accessible and supportive transport service to get to and from these essential appointments.

Dialysis has a range of side effects following treatment. Fatigue, dizziness, and muscle cramps are very common, even for those who have been renal patients for some time. ACT provides extensive support and training for their drivers and passenger assistants to ensure that these patients are supported to travel safely.

Not motivated by profit margins or cutting journey times to increase capacity, ACT are valued highly by their partners in the Health Board for their ability to provide safe and caring transport that is needs-led and patient-focused.

Without this essential support, the Wales Ambulance Service Trust would struggle to meet the needs of patients accessing the MRUM which would mean significant health deterioration and increasing care needs. ACT's service is pivotal in ensuring these patients remain at home and active in their communities, rather than stuck in hospital at risk of increasing complications.

ACT also provides an evening service from the Cynon Valley area to Prince Charles Hospital for evening visiting. Passengers can use their concessionary pass, or if not, there is a small charge of £3.75. This service provides transport Monday – Saturday and needs to be booked in advance, with at least 24 hours' notice. The service has been running for several years and is part-funded by Rhondda Cynon Taff Council, transporting an average of 10 people per day.

Due to the location of the hospital and no public transport in the evenings, without a friend or family member who can provide transport, the only alternative for a non-driver would be a prohibitively expensive taxi fare. For many of ACT's passengers, this would mean they would be unable to visit the hospital as often if at all – this would have a detrimental effect on both the patients and the visitors.

Community Transport is an essential part of the transport mix which tends to be less visible and known to the general public. For those with additional mobility needs or on low incomes, or for people living in communities which have limited public transport networks, community transport becomes fundamental in ensuring that people remain healthy, well, and active in their communities. Accessible Caring Transport want to raise the profile of their organisation so they can grow and serve more residents of the Rhondda and Cynon Valleys, continuing to deliver accessible and inclusive transport services as they have been for the last 30 years.

West Wales Transport Services

Across West Wales, there are several schemes in place to help individuals access the appropriate transport. Whether this helps them get to their health appointments or helps individuals who are unable to access conventional public transport.

Nantyci Park and Ride Service

This is a bus service within Carmarthenshire, which begins at Nantyci Showground and terminates at Glangwili General Hospital (GGH). Parking at Nantyci is free, with patients charged £1 for a return bus journey; travel for children under the age of 16 when travelling with a fare-paying adult and concessionary pass holders are free. The service currently runs from 07:30 – 19:25 Monday to Friday.

Green Dragon

This is a voluntary “Dial a Ride Service”, operating in Cardigan and extending into Pembrokeshire. The Cardigan Town Rider is a minibus service operated by Preseli Rural Transport Association (PRTA), also known as Green Dragon Bus. It runs in Cardigan town and the surrounding areas – including Aberporth, Beulah, Llechryd, Llangoedmor, St. Dogmaels, Penyparc, and Parcllyn to name a few. The service runs in different areas on the three days of operation - Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays between 9.30 and 15.30. Anyone can use the service if they cannot access normal public transport for whatever reason.

Those with the All Wales Concessionary Bus Pass can travel for free, otherwise a fare applies. Passengers must book their seat on the bus giving 48 hours’ notice. Journeys are chargeable with some funding from Pembrokeshire County Council. Passengers are requested to register with the PRTA, providing any emergency contact details, along with detail of any mobility/health issues.

Bwcabus

This is an accessible local bus service operating in Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion. The service provides non-bookable fixed routes, which provide a link-up service with main bus services, in addition to bookable services that suit individual needs. This is particularly useful for patients not living on regular bus routes.

**Powys
Teaching
Health Board**

Community Transport Facilitator Service in Powys

A community transport facilitator service is provided in Powys by the third sector organisation Powys Association of Voluntary Organisation (PAVO).

This invaluable service promotes and assists with accessible and inclusive transport solutions for communities and residents in Powys. The rurality of the County and the nature of the public transport network means that there is a need for alternative options for those who are unable to travel themselves.

It helps to lessen the impact of social isolation for those living in more remote rural areas alongside other services which aim to connect and support people such as the Powys Community Connectors scheme. It is an essential part of an integrated system for such a rural County, feeding into and out from the main transport corridors and schedules.

The service also shapes the provision of services, identifying community transport needs proactively and harnessing the experience and energy of volunteers to shape responses that meet this need. PAVO provides advice and guidance to those delivering community transport and connects the providers to raise awareness and ensure consistency in delivery and standards.

Health and social care are intrinsic in the service and links have been forged with the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust, who are able to signpost to community transport when appropriate for those people who do not have an urgent need or do not fall into the patient transport requirement. The call takers can offer community transport in addition to other costed transport suggestions, giving service users and carers or families more flexibility in getting to health and care services.

This could include attending health appointments, clinics and collecting medication from the chemist as well as accessing a range of health and wellbeing activities that are part of an individual's wellbeing or care plan.

The service fosters collaboration and innovation, working across organisations to enhance the options available and to build on new ideas or emerging needs. Options that have been developed include a community care scheme where

volunteers use their own cars to support services users who are unable to travel by other means, dial a ride services and door to door services where larger vehicles can take multiple passengers where mainstream services would not offer the same journeys and group hire which is tailored towards community groups and clubs.

This year a new community transport signposting service was developed in response to a branch closure of a GP practice, which ensured that those in the most rural parts of the catchment area for the alternative practice were still able to find transport options to assist with their journeys for GP appointments.



PAVO also facilitates the use of co-production with stakeholders including the Health Board, County Council, Police, Fire Service, Ambulance Service and others. They have an important role in informing and supporting the interaction between public services and the service for service users and carers.

**Swansea Bay
University
Health Board**

Gower Voluntary Transport

Gower Voluntary Transport (GVT) is a community car scheme, to provide transport for disabled people, older people and socially excluded people for whom public transport is either not available or accessible. Since its inception, the volunteer-led service has grown substantially and now delivers around 7000 journeys a year.

In an increasingly digital age, Volunteer Co-ordinator Hildegard Roberts and her small volunteer office team take an old-school approach of meeting the needs of their service users. With around 30 volunteer drivers all with varying availability through the week, the team can match a client with a driver from memory with just 24 hours' notice and offer journeys six days a week. The organisation has no paid employees and the team donate more than 5000 volunteer hours a year. Sadly, they still have to decline around 2% of requests for journeys due to a lack of resources and are constantly seeking volunteer drivers to help them meet demand. Most of their volunteers are referred by friends already volunteering for GVT, with some joining the scheme after seeing posters in their local community.

While Penclawdd is one of the Gower's most picturesque villages, it is fairly remote and not well served by public transport. *"Our service users really couldn't manage without us,"* said Hildegard, *"there really is no alternative here. The public buses are so limited with large distances between the bus stops and people living up narrow lanes with their homes a long way from the bus route. The majority of the older people living in the village don't have cars; GVT was started to support those older and disabled people who otherwise would be stuck at home."*

GVT's service has grown beyond Penclawdd and now has volunteers across much of the West of Swansea who use their own cars to support people who have no other form of transport available to them. These journeys cost the passenger 60p per mile with a minimum charge of £3, and passengers are supported to undertake a wide range of journeys including medical appointments, accessing day centres and social clubs, doing the weekly shop or simply meeting friends. There is no restriction on the passengers' destinations, creating a democratic and accessible service for those whose health, mobility or income would otherwise see them trapped in their own homes. Many of GVT's clients use the service for all their journeys, staying connected and active in their own communities.

Around 45% of GVT's journeys connect passengers with health appointments, primarily the hospital and local GP surgeries with some people also accessing dentists, opticians and physiotherapy appointments. While the local hospital used to make up a more substantial percentage of their health journeys, the recent closure of a small, local GP surgery has seen GVT's clients travelling further to access their nearest doctor. This has impacted on journey times and distances, particularly as their ageing client base has increasingly complex needs.

GVT receive around £10,000 each year from Swansea Council to support them to deliver their services by covering back-office costs and volunteer expenses. This funding, supported by the passenger contributions, is instrumental in ensuring GVT's passengers can complete these essential journeys which they have no other way of making. The threat of funding cuts each year, however, is putting some 3000 journeys connecting patients, and everything that comes with them, at risk. With a limited public bus service and prohibitively expensive taxi journeys, any reduction in GVT's service will mean that many of these older and vulnerable clients will be unable to make their appointments. So far, they've been fortunate and funding has not been reduced, but it's touch and go and Hildegard is already exploring alternative funding sources to ensure these essential journeys can continue.

Welsh Ambulance Service Trust

Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services (NEPTS)

Operated by Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust (WAST), the services provide free transport for patients to routine appointments at clinics, hospitals and day centres. Each year the WAST undertakes over 780,000 non-emergency patient transport journeys.

Patients need to meet certain criteria to qualify for transport, as listed below:

- Need to travel in a wheelchair
- Need continual support to walk
- Suffer from a mental health problem, learning disability, speech, sight or hearing difficulty, which prevents the use of public transport
- Experience side effects as a result of medical treatment or condition, which prevents the use of public transport
- Requires a stretcher, or oxygen, or other medical gases to travel
- Receives regular dialysis or cancer treatment

To support in the delivery of non-emergency patient transport to patients who meet the eligibility criteria for free patient transport, the WAST engages with a range of alternative transport providers. The community transport sector plays a vital role in supporting the delivery of patient transport to patients across Wales. The community transport sector is able to provide professional, safe and accessible modes of transport to all patients; particularly to those who live in rural or isolated communities due to limited public transport services. WAST currently delivers services in partnership with community transport operators across 6 health board regions in Wales.

WAST also operates their own Voluntary Car Service (VCS) across Wales. Volunteers use their own vehicles to transport patients to appointments across Wales and England. The service provides a comfortable, reliable and caring way to travel long distances, especially for those patients travelling for life-sustaining treatments like kidney dialysis or radiotherapy, for example. Each year the volunteer car service undertakes over 160,000 patient journeys.

In 2020 the WAST NEPTS team will be introducing a Transport Solutions Team to help support and effectively signpost non-eligible patients to alternative transport solutions. For those patients who are not eligible for non-emergency patient transport under the defined eligibility criteria, finding ways to access transport for medical appointments can be difficult. The Transport Solutions Team will develop an effective network of alternative transport providers from the voluntary, public and private sector, where non-eligible patients can be signposted to. The community transport sector will play a key role in developing this effective network of alternative transport providers, ensuring that people from across Wales can effectively access medical appointments.



Who are the Community Transport Association?

The Community Transport Association (CTA) is a national charity that represents and supports providers of community transport: thousands of local charities and community groups across the UK that all provide transport services that fulfil a social purpose and community benefit.

For further information please contact Christine Boston, Director for Wales, Christine@ctauk.org

Find your local Community Transport provider: <https://ctauk.org/find-ct-provider>



How can the Welsh NHS Confederation help you?

Please get in touch if you want further details on anything highlighted in this briefing. Please contact **Nesta Lloyd-Jones, Assistant Director**, on Nesta.Lloyd-Jones@welshconfed.org

The Welsh NHS Confederation is the only national membership body which represents all the organisations that make up the NHS in Wales: the seven Local Health Boards, the three NHS Trusts and Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW).

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