



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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# Connected Communities

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A strategy for tackling loneliness and social isolation and building stronger social connections



“Good relationships  
keep us happier  
and healthier.”

**Robert Waldinger**

Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School.

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# Ministerial Foreword



**Julie Morgan AM**

Deputy Minister for  
Health and Social Services

I am delighted to be able to launch the Welsh Government's first strategy for tackling loneliness and social isolation and building stronger social connections.

Loneliness and social isolation can be experienced by anyone of any age and from any background, from the young person moving away from home to start university, to someone with a long term health condition, or an older person caring for a loved one. In fact we have all probably experienced loneliness and/or social isolation at some point in our lives. However, it is when these feelings become long-term and entrenched that they become problematic. In addition these feelings can be made worse by not knowing what services are available locally, not being able to access them or not feeling able to ask for help.

Our modern way of life often serves to isolate us from others. Many of us live alone, work at home, and shop and socialise online. Or we commute long distances back and forth to work and spend long hours working instead of spending time with our families and friends. Congested streets and fear of unsafe communities prevent our children from playing outside, where they would be free to meet other children. More of us live alone as our population is ageing and we are having fewer children. At the same time, the divorce rate has almost doubled in the past 50 years. The number of lone parent households is rising. Because of moving for careers or education, more of us live further from our families and the communities we grew up in.

Shifts in attitude also play a part. Today socialising and investing time in social ties are generally seen as less important than 'productive' activities like work and we therefore neglect what appear to be 'unnecessary' relationships. We feel less able to chat with and start conversations with neighbours and those we do not know.

There is growing recognition this loss of social contact is hugely damaging to our health and well-being and has far-reaching implications including reduced mortality, sleep problems, high blood pressure, poor quality of life, increased risk of heart attack and stroke, depression and suicide.

Preventing people of all ages from becoming lonely and/or socially isolated must therefore be a national priority for us. It will not only improve people's lives, but it will also help reduce demand for health and social services in the future and ensure our communities and the social fabric that binds them together are as resilient as they can be.

It is the strength of the links between people, within families, neighbourhoods, workplaces or wider communities, which gives us our sense of belonging and well-being. Government cannot create communities, but we can foster environments where these links are broadened and deepened. We want a Wales of connected communities, and that means making sure the necessary foundations are in place to bring them together and to provide the services we all need to stay healthy, to learn, to access employment, and to build prosperity.

This strategy sets out the Welsh Government's aims and calls upon all of us to work together to play a part in building a more connected and inclusive society. We need to change how we think and act upon loneliness and social isolation within government, public services, businesses, communities, and as individuals, in order to help tackle these issues. To support this objective I will make an additional £1.4 million available over the next three financial years in the form of a Loneliness and Social Isolation Fund. This will enable us to test out or scale up innovative and promising approaches.

I am extremely grateful to those who took the time to respond to the public consultation that closed last year and to tell us what is important to them, what needs to change and how we can work together to achieve that. I hope this strategy will build on the excellent work which I know already exists across Wales and help to take us forward. This is just the start; over the months and years ahead we want to extend our understanding, improve our responses to loneliness and social isolation and ensure we are taking all the steps necessary to tackle these issues.

# Executive Summary

**Tackling loneliness and social isolation is a long-term challenge. This strategy is the Welsh Government's first step in tackling these issues, which we know are complex and affect many different groups of people.**

Increasingly we understand the impact being lonely and/or socially isolated can have on our physical and mental health, and therefore the importance of the relationships we have with friends, family, colleagues and neighbours in giving us our sense of belonging and well-being.

Our ambition is for Wales to be a country which supports these connections between people and where we build on people's strengths to ensure everyone has the opportunity to develop positive and meaningful relationships regardless of their age, status, circumstances or identity.

We are all likely to experience times when we feel lonely or socially isolated: being bullied at school; moving from school to university; starting a new job or the end of a loving relationship. The Wales we want is one where people are aware of these trigger points in life, know how to prevent these feelings from having an impact on their well-being, or are supported when they do, and do not feel stigmatised for asking for help or saying "I'm lonely".

In line with the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, this strategy focuses on approaches that reduce the risk of, or prevent, loneliness and social isolation or that intervene early, before these become more entrenched. These approaches include encouraging people to understand the trigger points of loneliness and social isolation and to build emotional and psychological resilience to equip them to cope and respond. However, we also need to ensure support is available for those who are already lonely and socially isolated, or who, despite our best efforts, become so, and this is also a feature of the strategy.

The Welsh Government held a public consultation on how best to tackle loneliness and social isolation in Wales from October 2018 to January 2019. This set out our 'current offer' in terms of work being undertaken across a range of key policy areas within Welsh Government, using existing legislative and strategic frameworks. None of the respondents to the consultation indicated they wanted a fundamentally different offer from Welsh Government. The overriding message was it needed to do more in the areas where it is already taking action, or needed to do things differently in these areas in order to make more of an impact, including how it encouraged and influenced other partners to take action.

In developing this strategy therefore we have sought to maximise the potential benefits of government action across a range of policy areas using all available levers to encourage and promote action to tackle loneliness and social isolation. We have also sought to maximise the impact of existing funding streams across Welsh Government by considering how their objectives and outcomes can better align with our ambition for reducing loneliness and social isolation. The strategy contains a number of cross-cutting policies and commitments to benefit all of society, alongside recognising there are certain groups within society at greater risk of experiencing loneliness and social isolation and for whom more tailored support is required.

It was clear from the consultation responses that Government alone cannot solve these issues and the strategy seeks to enable all parts of society to play a role. Whilst Government cannot create communities, it can foster environments where these links are broadened and deepened. The strategy therefore focuses on the role Government can play but also how it can support local authorities, wider public services, the third sector and also the private sector. In addition, it describes the important role that we all as individuals can play in supporting and looking out for each other and our communities.

## Priorities for Action

**The following priorities have been informed by our approach, by our internal and external engagement and by the key messages from the consultation. Each priority is supported by a number of aims and actions which will help to deliver the priorities.**

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### Priority 1: Increasing opportunities for people to connect

Increasingly we understand the link between having strong and meaningful social connections and living a healthy and happy life. Greater degrees of social connectedness have been seen to be related to increased life expectancy; to protection against the development of depression and promotion of recovery from existing depression; and potentially to the promotion of cognitive health.

Opportunities for people to connect exist in their communities. This priority sets out how we will work with others to increase the number and range of opportunities that exist, ensure people have an awareness of them and encourage and support people to use them.

#### Key commitments under this priority include:

- Working with the Welsh Physical Activity Partnership (WPAP) to increase participation in physical activity across Wales.
- Hosting of a conference by the WPAP to engage a range of partners to develop a delivery plan by summer 2020, which will include links with loneliness and social isolation.
- Working with Sport Wales to report on what impact its programmes have on loneliness and social isolation, including consulting on the possibility of including a question/s in Sport Wales' School Sport Survey 2021 and beyond.
- Ensuring loneliness and social isolation are key considerations when enacting our volunteering policy.
- Funding for implementation of a national programme of Time Credits. Engaging with Time Credits has been shown to have an impact on reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- Further development of the Fusion programme which provides opportunities for people in deprived communities to take part in culture and heritage opportunities.
- Through our £2 million per annum dedicated digital inclusion and health programme, a focus on improving the digital capabilities of citizens and health and social care staff, allowing more people to become more active participants in their own health and well-being, including management of health conditions, reducing loneliness and social isolation and enjoying the wider opportunities digital can offer.
- Working with public and third sector partners to raise awareness of the benefits and opportunities that our national well-being directory, DEWIS Cymru, provides for frontline practitioners; local grass-roots, community based organisations; town and community councils and health services.
- Supporting the development of social prescribing schemes across Wales, including the development of an online resource portal and a national skills and competency framework for the social prescribing workforce in Wales, and additional funding to develop the evidence base and to support the development of robust quality standards.



## Priority 2: A community infrastructure that supports connected communities

We know good community infrastructure is vital to preventing and tackling loneliness and social isolation. This priority sets out how the Welsh Government, working with partners, will seek to improve community infrastructure in order to support people to come together, through good planning and housing, a high-quality transport system, towns and high streets that act as a focal point for social and economic interactions, digital technology and community spaces.

### Key commitments under this priority include:

- Building on existing pilots, exploring how to run innovative, demand responsive transport services across other parts of Wales.
- The introduction of free rail travel for all those aged 16 or under travelling with a fare paying parent or guardian.
- The establishment, over the next three years, of new community rail partnerships across Wales and the employment of a network of community ambassadors across Wales to engage with communities to better understand the barriers to accessing rail services.
- The development of recommendations for the implementation, evaluation and monitoring of a default 20mph speed limit in built up areas for motorised vehicles and introduction of pavement parking restrictions across Wales.
- A continued focus on digital infrastructure as a means of staying or getting connected, and on empowering children and young people, and adults to participate and remain safe online. This will include development of a new set of educational resources about social media and loneliness and social isolation.
- Working with local authorities and partners to improve access to good quality, timely housing adaptations.
- Supporting the implementation of place making and the creation of sustainable places that build people's social connections.
- Building on the 20 pilot projects funded through the £15m Community Hubs capital fund, to develop and publish resources for schools and colleges to enable further support and ideas for widening community access to their facilities.
- Delivery of a range of grant schemes to improve the resilience of our natural resources and access to them.

## Priority 3: Cohesive and supportive communities

Building cohesive and supportive communities requires strong social networks. Communities and the people within them need to be protected and feel safe; they need a health and social care system that promotes well-being and community engagement; and communities need to be fair and inclusive, where everyone has a voice and can participate.

We are committed to working closely with partners at a national and local level to take forward our ambition to build a more connected and united society. This priority sets out some of the areas where the Welsh Government is already taking action and how, working in partnership, it can go further.

### Key commitments under this priority include:

- Expanding our Community Cohesion Programme to support small teams in each region of Wales to engage more with local communities and public services, responding to whatever tensions may arise and making people feel safer and more willing to connect with others and with their local area
- Creating an environment where Community Hubs can develop and thrive and be a central point of contact and support for communities across Wales so that they become stronger, more resilient and empowered
- Working with Public Health Wales to pilot the use of guidance on the 'Principles of Community Engagement' and use the learning from the pilot to develop a training programme to help professionals create the conditions where communities can take control and become empowered
- Through the establishment of a single integrated outcomes framework for health and social care we will define regional and local performance measures that demonstrate how services are supporting people to reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation
- Ensuring people have the knowledge and skills to support self-management of long-term conditions for both good health and mental well-being, enabling them to continue to maintain their social connections and participate in their communities. This will include continuing to support our self-management and well-being fund.
- Exploring the potential for developing a specific training module for public and third sector staff to access through our Making Every Contact Count initiative to develop their skills in considering loneliness and social isolation when promoting healthy lifestyles and signposting to relevant services.
- Working with Care Inspectorate Wales to consider how loneliness and social isolation can be incorporated into Inspection Frameworks
- Working with statutory and third sector partners to deliver on the Welsh Government's ambition to make Wales the world's first Compassionate Country; one which recognises that care is a civic responsibility for all and where people are supported to remain in their own homes and as independent as possible for as long as possible
- Re-engineering existing funding programmes to ensure that they have the maximum impact on the lives of children living in poverty
- A new Single Advice Fund of £8.04m for the provision of information and advice services in 2020.

#### **Priority 4: Building Awareness and Promoting Positive Attitudes**

Priority 4 describes how the Welsh Government will work to raise the profile of loneliness and social isolation across Wales and reduce stigma. Building people's understanding of loneliness and social isolation and supporting the development of strong and positive relationships at an early age is crucial, so that as people move through life they are better able to establish and nurture their social connections.

##### **Key commitments under this priority include:**

- Emphasising the importance of people's social well-being and encouraging them to take action through Public Health Wales' forthcoming National Conversation on mental well-being.
- Ensuring that the Framework for schools to assess and evaluate their own emotional and mental health landscape makes specific reference to tackling loneliness and social isolation.
- Developing and disseminating best practice guidance about whole school approaches to well-being as part of the Wales Network of Healthy Schools Scheme.
- Continued financial support for the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Support Hub and the development of trauma/ACE informed services in order to enable greater support for those affected by childhood trauma and adversity to establish safe and trusted relationships.
- Establishing and strengthening systems to identify and support young people where there could be high levels of loneliness and social isolation, including those at risk of disengaging with education, employment or training; those with mental health or emotional well-being issues; or those at risk of youth homelessness.
- Working with third sector partners to develop the evidence for mental health social prescribing, through evaluation of pilot projects and models, to inform future investment.
- Developing a guide for businesses on how to tackle employee loneliness and social isolation and actions they can take to support those who do experience these emotions. The guide will be published on the Business Wales website and promoted through social media channels.
- Continue to consider the role of kindness in public policy making as part of an ongoing conversation with stakeholders.
- Organising a 'national summit' to discuss the recommendations contained in the Welsh Government-commissioned intergenerational review report, to raise awareness, share good practice and consider what more can be done.

#### **Building for the Future**

Loneliness and social isolation are very personal and tackling their causes and effects is a long-term challenge. This strategy is a first step, but there is more to be done and we are committed to building on the actions it contains in the future.

We want to build a cross-government approach to tackling loneliness and social isolation and embed consideration of these issues when developing and implementing policy through our integrated impact assessment process. We will also establish a cross-government loneliness and social isolation advisory group to oversee implementation of the strategy, to identify opportunities to progress the Welsh Government's work in this area and to tackle emerging issues.

This strategy commits the Welsh Government to working to build a stronger evidence base about the causes of loneliness and social isolation and how they can best be tackled in the future. We will therefore make an additional £1.4 million available over the next three years for a Loneliness and Social Isolation Fund to test out innovative approaches to tackling loneliness and social isolation and/or scale up promising approaches to reaching out to those who are already lonely and/or socially isolated. We will use the projects supported by the Fund and data from the National Survey to help build our knowledge. The strategy also gives a commitment to publishing every two years a report on progress on implementing the policies and commitments it contains.

Through this strategy the Welsh Government seeks to shine a light on the importance of tackling loneliness and social isolation and to support and highlight the many examples of good practice that already exist across Wales.





# About this strategy

**This strategy marks the first step in bringing about the society-wide change needed to overcome loneliness and social isolation.**

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- It sets out a vision of the kind of society we want to see, one which supports connections between people and where we build on people's strengths to ensure they have the skills, resources and capacity to access opportunities.
- It defines what we mean by loneliness and social isolation.
- It describes our key priorities and aims in tackling these issues and how we all can work together to play a part in building a more connected and inclusive Wales.
- It gives a commitment to contributing to the evidence base so we better understand what causes loneliness and social isolation, what the impacts are and the range of interventions needed to tackle it.
- It sets out our approach to implementing the strategy.

## Our Vision

The Wales we want is one where everybody has the opportunity to develop meaningful social relationships and where people are supported at those times in their lives when they are most vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation, by friends, family, communities and institutions and organisations within wider society. A Wales where people feel able to say "I'm lonely" without stigma or shame.

Prosperity for All, the Government's strategy for delivering Taking Wales Forward, sets out an overarching long term vision to build a Wales that is prosperous and secure, healthy and active, ambitious and learning and united and connected. It provides a framework to improve cross government working and to improve the quality of people's lives.

It also sets a number of priority areas which are considered to have the greatest potential contribution to make to long-term prosperity and well-being including early years, housing, social care, mental health, skills, employability and decarbonisation. They reflect the times in people's lives when they may be most in need of support, and when intervening early, with the right help, can have a significant positive effect on their life course.

Both the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, are based on the principles of well-being and placing people at the centre of decision-making about their lives; on working in partnership with individuals in order to achieve their desired outcomes, and on prevention and early intervention.

This legislation and Prosperity for All are fundamental to developing a coherent, holistic and long-term response to loneliness and social isolation in Wales.



## How have we developed the Strategy?

The Welsh Government's Programme for Government Taking Wales Forward 2016-21 includes a commitment to develop a cross-government strategy on loneliness and social isolation.

This was followed in 2017 by the National Assembly for Wales' Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's valuable inquiry into loneliness and social isolation amongst older people. Its report, published in December that year, made a number of recommendations<sup>1</sup>.

To help inform the strategy and respond to the committee's recommendations, we have engaged with a number of stakeholders about what they consider important and established a strategy development board of both internal and external stakeholders. We have undertaken extensive research and have worked with the UK and Scottish Governments, both of which have published strategies, to share insights and learn from one another.

Based on this, between October 2018 and January 2019 we undertook a 12-week public consultation on how best to tackle loneliness and social isolation in Wales.

We also hosted engagement events in different parts of Wales to enable people to come along and tell us what mattered to them.

We received over 230 responses from individuals and organisations as well as preparing written summaries from the four engagement events. We analysed these responses and drew out the key themes in order to understand what people and organisations had told us. In March 2019, we published a report<sup>2</sup> on these findings and thereafter continued to discuss key issues with external stakeholders and within government.

## Some of the key messages from the consultation responses were:

- the importance of promoting more positive attitudes towards our social connections, tackling stigma and helping people to understand the trigger points and identify signs of loneliness and social isolation
- the key role of schools in building emotional and psychological resilience in children and young people and in developing an early understanding of loneliness and social isolation themselves and empathy towards others
- the need to focus on building individual and community resilience; developing and protecting the social fabric of communities by growing and supporting local solutions and encouraging everyone to play their part, including local businesses
- creating opportunities for people to connect through better access to information about what services and support are available, sharing and scaling up good practice, promoting and enabling volunteering and physical activity and sport and supporting people to be able to participate in communities through schemes such as social prescribing and community connectors
- the importance of a community infrastructure that supports social connections such as access to community spaces, a good transport network, access to digital technology, good quality accessible housing and good neighbourhood design
- the key role that the workforce can play in recognising the signs of loneliness and social isolation and referring people to services or support, particularly the health and social care workforce, but also education, housing and transport
- longer term and sustainable funding for the third sector.

<sup>1</sup> [www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11310/cr-ld11310-e.pdf](http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11310/cr-ld11310-e.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2019-04/summary-of-responses.pdf](http://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2019-04/summary-of-responses.pdf)

## How do we define loneliness and social isolation?

There are a number of definitions of loneliness and social isolation in use and the terms are often used interchangeably. However, while they are clearly linked and can often overlap, they are not the same. Isolation refers to separation from social or familial contact, community involvement, or access to services. Loneliness, by contrast, can be understood as an individual's personal, subjective sense of lacking these things to the extent that they are wanted or needed. It is therefore possible to be isolated without being lonely, and to be lonely without being isolated. For instance, a person can be physically isolated (living on one's own, not seeing many other people etc.) without feeling lonely. For some, physical separation is even a result of choice. Similarly, a person can feel lonely even when regularly surrounded by other people.

So loneliness and social isolation are different but related concepts. Social isolation can lead to loneliness and loneliness can lead to social isolation. Both may also occur at the same time. People can experience different levels of social isolation and loneliness over their lifetime, moving in and out of these states as their personal circumstances change.

The responses to our consultation emphasised how important it is to understand the distinction between loneliness and social isolation in order to ensure that solutions are not focussed simply on increasing opportunities for people to meet or speak, but on helping to build, maintain and re-establish meaningful relationships. Bringing people together to increase the number of social contacts is not an end in itself to combatting loneliness. The quality of relationships needs to be addressed, including the barriers to achieving this.

### Drawing upon existing definitions and the feedback from our consultation our definitions are:

Choosing to be alone and experiencing loneliness are two quite different things. Likewise choosing to be socially isolated is not the same as unwanted social isolation. No doubt sometimes after a busy few days we all have looked forward to having some time on our own, some peace and quiet to do what makes us happy. However this describes a temporary, chosen experience which can benefit our well-being. Chronic loneliness or unwanted social isolation are different, serious and can be harmful to our well-being.

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**Loneliness is a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of social relationships. It happens when there is a difference between the social relationships we have and those we want.**

*"Loneliness means something different to everyone because everyone experiences things differently. But I don't think people should be afraid of loneliness. All your emotions are important... if you're lonely it means you're missing out on something, you need that social connection."*

#### **Patience, Manchester, aged 20**

'Loneliness Connects Us' 42nd Street and Manchester Metropolitan University March 2018

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**Social isolation is when an individual has an objective lack of social relationships (in terms of quality and/or quantity) at individual, group, community and societal levels.**

*"My mum helped me. We were being told (because I had learning disabilities) you can't go to that school; you can't have this and you can't have that. But my mum fought for me not to have to go to a special school. You get really isolated from all the other kids if you live in a small place and you go to a special school."*

#### **Alan, Norwich, aged 17**

'Loneliness Connects Us' 42nd Street and Manchester Metropolitan University March 2018

## The impact of loneliness and social isolation

We will probably all experience loneliness and social isolation from time to time as we go through life and this is perfectly normal. However, when people are lonely or isolated for prolonged periods of time it can have a significant impact on their physical and mental well-being.

Loneliness and social isolation are both linked to premature deaths, and have been described as having a health impact equivalent to that of other public health concerns such as smoking and obesity<sup>3</sup>. Lonely and socially isolated people are also at greater risk of being inactive, smoking and having behaviours that put their health at risk<sup>4</sup>. Research also shows that they are linked to an increased risk of coronary heart disease and stroke<sup>5</sup> and high blood pressure<sup>6</sup>.

We also know that loneliness and social isolation are associated with an increased risk of depression, low self-esteem, reported sleep problems and an increased response to stress<sup>7</sup>. Loneliness has also been linked to cognitive decline<sup>8</sup> and dementia<sup>9</sup>.

Understanding and improving people's resilience, making them less susceptible to the harmful effects of loneliness and social isolation and ensuring they have access to appropriate support services are all crucial therefore in maintaining health, well-being and independence.

The economic, health and social consequences of loneliness and social isolation are significant, particularly in respect of their impacts on public services. For example, we know that people who are lonely or isolated are more likely to visit a GP or an A&E Department and more likely to go into residential care<sup>10</sup>.

Research commissioned by the Eden Project estimates that disconnected communities could be costing Wales a potential welfare improvement of some £2.6bn a year in Wales. This is thought to include a £427m demand on health services, a £10m demand on policing and a £8m cost to employers due to stress and low self-esteem. The estimated financial benefits from greater happiness and neighbourliness are thought to be substantial<sup>11</sup>.

## The Extent and Causes of Loneliness and Social Isolation

Loneliness has been measured through the National Survey for Wales since 2016-17<sup>12</sup>. It found 17% of those participating in the survey, of just over 10,000 people aged 16 and above, reported being lonely and 54% of people had experienced some feelings of loneliness.

Younger people were more likely to report being lonely than older people (20% of 16-24 year olds compared with 10% of those aged 75 or over).

The survey for 2017-18 showed little variation in those figures: 16% of the population reported being lonely (21% of 16-24 year olds and 11% of those aged 75 or over)<sup>13</sup>.

In respect of children and young people, in December 2018 the Office for National Statistics published figures which show in Great Britain those aged 10-12 years were more likely to say they were often lonely than those aged 13-15 years (14% and 8.6% respectively). The survey also showed girls were more likely to say they had experienced loneliness than boys. Research by Childline in 2018 found the most common reasons cited by young people for feelings of loneliness were mental health issues, bullying and social media use.

Loneliness and social isolation are caused by a combination of personal, community and societal factors rather than being the result of one event or circumstance. For some people, certain life events may mean they feel lonely or become socially isolated, such as:

- experiencing a bereavement
- going through a relationship break-up
- becoming a carer for a family member or friend
- retiring and losing the social contact you had at work
- changing jobs and feeling isolated from your co-workers
- starting at university
- moving to a new area or country without family, friends or community networks.

<sup>3</sup> Holt-Lunstad, K. et al. (2015) Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review

<sup>4</sup> Shankar, A. et al. (2011) Loneliness, Social Isolation, and Behavioural and Biological Health Indicators in Older Adults

<sup>5</sup> Valtorta et al. (2016) Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for coronary heart disease and stroke: systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal observational studies

<sup>6</sup> Hawkey et al. (2010) Loneliness predicts increased blood pressure: 5-year cross-lagged analyses in middle-aged and older adults

<sup>7</sup> Steptoe, A. et al. (2004) Loneliness and neuroendocrine, cardiovascular, and inflammatory stress responses in middle-aged men and women

<sup>8</sup> James et al. (2011) Late-life Social Activity and Cognitive Decline in Old Age

<sup>9</sup> Holwerda et al. (2012) Feelings of loneliness, but not social isolation, predict dementia onset: results from the Amsterdam Study of the Elderly (AMSTEL)

<sup>10</sup> Fulton, L., and Jupp, B., (2015). Investing to tackle loneliness: A discussion paper. London: Social Finance.05(5):1013-1019.

<sup>11</sup> Centre for Business and Economic Research (2017). The Cost of Disconnected Communities. Executive Summary.

<sup>12</sup> gov.wales/docs/statistics/2018/180620-national-survey-wales-2017-18-headline-results-en.pdf

<sup>13</sup> Some caution may be needed when comparing adults with children and young people due to the different data collection methods used.

These life events or transitions can lead to the breakdown of existing connections, or reduce access to everyday interactions. They make it harder to build new connections and have a negative impact on self-esteem<sup>14</sup>.

The National Assembly for Wales’ Health, Social Care and Sport Committee report highlighted a range of groups of people, from across the life course, who may experience higher levels of loneliness and social isolation. These included: young people aged 18-34; service veterans; disabled people; people with serious and long term health conditions such as MS or dementia; people with mental health problems; unpaid carers; people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT); people from black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities and people with certain personality traits such as shyness.

We also know that people’s circumstances can also influence the likelihood of loneliness. The National Survey for Wales 2016-17 found that not being married, or in a civil partnership, experiencing material deprivation, using the internet, not having a sense of community; being dissatisfied with the local area as a place to live, not feeling safe after dark and not being a volunteer were all associated with a higher risk of loneliness.

The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee also identified a range of other factors which can influence feelings of loneliness and social isolation such as location, environment, skills, access to public, private or voluntary transport, housing and access to community facilities and activities.

The Welsh Government has a key role to play in tackling loneliness and social isolation, but these are not issues it can solve on its own. We all have a responsibility to ensure our communities are more connected and cohesive and we want everyone to play their part.

Welsh Government’s Role:	Local Authorities’ Role and wider public services including health:	Third Sector’s Role:	Individuals’ Role:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to raise awareness, lead, influence and inspire in order to drive change</li> <li>to foster the right environment and create the right conditions for people and communities to design and deliver solutions which best meet their needs</li> <li>to champion and bring together existing initiatives which are making a difference.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to think about how tackling loneliness and social isolation can be a constant feature in their planning, commissioning and decision-making processes</li> <li>to recognise and include loneliness and social isolation as issues when assessing an individual’s well-being</li> <li>to register and promote a variety of local services to which an individual could be referred</li> <li>to share examples of good practice and work collaboratively across sectors to maximise the public purse in providing a range of services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to help build resilience and well-being at individual and community level through awareness raising, advice and support and service delivery, especially for ‘seldom heard’ groups (i.e. those who do not feel comfortable approaching public services).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to recognise potential trigger points in life which may have an impact on well-being and to take mitigating action where possible - “to talk and ask for help”</li> <li>to support and connect with friends, neighbours and local groups</li> <li>to be kind to one’s self and others.</li> </ul>

<sup>14</sup> [www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/action-on-loneliness](http://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/action-on-loneliness)





## Priority 1

Increasing and Promoting  
Opportunities for People to Connect

## Increasingly we understand the link between having strong and meaningful social connections and living a healthy and happy life.

Greater degrees of social connectedness have been seen to be related to increased life expectancy, to protection against the development of depression and promotion of recovery from existing depression, and potentially to the promotion of cognitive health.

In the same way we need food and shelter, we also have a human need to feel we belong. This sense of belonging comes from having strong connections and feeling part of a community.

*Social connectedness is "the sense of belonging and the subjective psychological bond that people feel in relation to individuals and groups of others"*

Haslam et al, 2015

Opportunities for people to connect exist in their communities. We want to increase the number and range of opportunities that exist, ensure people have an awareness of them and encourage and facilitate people to use them.

## Promoting Sport and Physical Activity

Getting involved in sport and physical activity, whether it be as a volunteer, participant or spectator, can improve the quality of life of individuals and communities, promote social inclusion and connections, improve health, raise individual self-esteem and confidence and broaden horizons<sup>15</sup>.

*Chief Medical Officer Guidelines 2019*<sup>16</sup> show the importance of regular activity for people of all ages. They also highlight how even small changes can make a big difference and contribute to improved health and quality of life

It is important however we make being active easy, accessible and part of our normal routine. Increasing opportunities to access the natural environment, whether for walking, cycling, or any other responsible recreational activity is an integral part of the Welsh Government's drive to increase physical activity levels amongst the population of Wales<sup>17</sup>.

In October 2019, we published our "*Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales*" strategy<sup>18</sup>. This sets out our long-term, 10 year plan to help to reduce the risks and impacts of obesity across Wales to enable the healthy choice to be the easy choice, whilst also placing an emphasis on supporting lifestyle behavioural change.

Through the delivery of "*Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales*", the Welsh Physical Activity Partnership will boost partnership working to increase levels of participation in physical activity across Wales, which will help to tackle social isolation and loneliness. (The partnership, which is Welsh Government funded, was created between Public Health Wales, Sport Wales and Natural Resources Wales to develop shared priorities and actions to encourage and support a substantial increase in physical activity as set out in "*Prosperity for All*").

**The Welsh Government will work with the Welsh Physical Activity Partnership to increase participation in physical activity across Wales. In spring 2020, the partnership will host a conference to engage a range of partners to develop a delivery plan by summer 2020, which will include links with loneliness and social isolation.**

Sport Wales is the Welsh Government's delivery partner for sport in Wales and works closely with a number of partners including local authorities, governing bodies of sport and third sector organisations to deliver a range of inclusive opportunities for people of all ages to participate in community sports activities.

<sup>15</sup> Caddick, N. and Smith, B. (2014). 'The Impact of Sport and Physical Activity on the Well-being of Combat Veterans: A systematic review 2014' *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 15, 9-18

<sup>16</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/832868/uk-chief-medical-officers-physical-activity-guidelines.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/832868/uk-chief-medical-officers-physical-activity-guidelines.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/natural-resources-policy.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> [https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-10/healthy-weight-healthy-wales\\_0.pdf](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-10/healthy-weight-healthy-wales_0.pdf)

In 2018-19, Sport Wales gave out over £21 million in funding for community sport. This included targeted investment to specifically tackle loneliness and social isolation. An example of this is the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority's Active Ageing Project.

**The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority's Active Ageing Project commenced in January 2019. The aim of the project is to enable isolated older people to engage or re-engage with sport and physical activity in a social setting, thereby supporting their physical and mental health. The project will make the best use of the Brecon Beacons National Park area in carrying out activities such as walking, cycling, and geocaching (a type of treasure hunt).**

In January 2019, an additional £5 million was allocated to Sport Wales for the delivery of a range of sporting facilities across Wales which supports our aim of increasing participation in sport and physical activity by helping sports facilities providers, organisations and clubs to improve and upgrade their facilities.

In order to improve our understanding of how sport can help build social connections and protect against loneliness and social isolation, **we will work with Sport Wales to report on what impact its programmes have on these issues, including consulting on the possibility of including a question/s in Sport Wales' School Sport Survey 2021 and beyond, as well as other partners as appropriate.**

**Sport Wales also will use the Young Ambassador Programme Survey to provide an insight into what impact sport and volunteering has on loneliness and social isolation in respect of young people.**

Adopting and maintaining healthy behaviours is challenging and is strongly influenced by our environment, our social networks, the influence of social and cultural norms and wider commercial interests. Increasingly we recognise the value of enabling communities to build positively on existing assets to find their own solutions to problems rather than prescribing action from outside. Creating connections within and between communities to enable change can often be facilitated by access to relatively small amounts of funding, expertise or the willingness to share physical and human assets and resources.

In 2018, we established the £5.4 million Healthy and Active Fund (HAF) with Sport Wales and Public Health Wales to improve mental and physical health by enabling the adoption of healthy and active lifestyles across Wales. Phase 1, running from April 2019 to March 2022, focuses on supporting delivery projects which strengthen and develop community assets, such as community groups, sport clubs, schools and workplaces. It seeks to:

- Sustainably increase physical activity in those who are currently sedentary or have very low levels of activity.
- Improve levels of mental well-being by promoting social interactions and increasing access to green spaces, beaches and waterways.

In total, 17 projects have been funded under Phase 1 including the Sporting Memories project.

**Sporting Memories is an innovative and unique model which will support the ageing community of Wales to lead a healthy and more active life. The project will promote the mental and physical well-being of people over 50, using the power of sport as a focus to engage those in particular who are living with dementia, depression or are socially isolated.**

We are currently evaluating the HAF to determine whether a similar approach should be used again to identify and support projects which make a difference to physical activity and mental well-being.

**We will learn from the evaluations undertaken by the individual projects in respect of what has worked in tackling loneliness and social isolation in those projects where this is a specific focus.**





## Promoting and Enabling Volunteering

Volunteering has benefits for the individual in building their social networks, in improving their health, well-being and skills and also in creating a sense of belonging to an issue or a community<sup>19</sup>.

**One of the biggest things for me was the confidence it brought me.'**

*"My volunteering work attracted the attention of someone from another community group, who in turn put my name forward to a local firm who were recruiting in the area... and in the space of seven weeks I went from nothing to a full-time job."*

*"Without volunteering, I know I would never have managed to get a job. It gave me life-skills and confidence that I probably couldn't have gained elsewhere. I have a number of health issues, and the fresh air and exercise helped me control my illness better."*

*"I would certainly recommend volunteering as not only do you make new friends and gain confidence, you also make a difference to the local community and that surely is good for the soul."*

**Canal River Trust Volunteer**

But it is not just the individual who benefits from volunteering<sup>20</sup>:

- Communities benefit in a variety of ways including through the creation of social cohesion and increased social capital.
- Organisations benefit from the involvement of volunteers through their contribution to the achievement of the organisation's mission in addition to the flexibility and added value they bring in experience and skills.
- Public services benefit from involving volunteers to enhance and extend their services and from working with third sector organisations to involve volunteers in new citizen-centred delivery models.

The Welsh Government is committed to working with partners to develop more opportunities for people to volunteer and **we will ensure loneliness and social isolation are key considerations when enacting our volunteering policy.**

Building on this, **the Welsh Government is funding a national programme of Time Credits. Engaging with Time Credits has been shown to have an impact on reducing feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Reducing these feelings will be one of the focuses of the programme.** Time Credits are a currency that is earned for voluntarily giving time to a number of community based projects. For each hour that an individual contributes to their community, they can earn a 'Time Credit' which can be spent on an hour's activity on a social experience such as a cinema, play area or attraction. Time Credits can also be gifted to others and recognise the informal contribution an individual is making to their community and, for some, provide an opportunity to try an activity that would otherwise be unaffordable.

<sup>19</sup> [www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-well-being/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-well-being/)

<sup>20</sup> [gov.wales/volunteering-approaches-tackling-loneliness-and-social-isolation-among-older-people-0](http://gov.wales/volunteering-approaches-tackling-loneliness-and-social-isolation-among-older-people-0)

## Enabling social connections through culture, heritage and the arts

The culture and heritage of Wales provides opportunities for people to come together, and connect through shared interests. We want to make sure everyone has an equal opportunity to take part in, or contribute to, our culture and heritage.

Across these areas, the Welsh Government already delivers a range of things that have social benefits, and thus help to reduce loneliness and social isolation.

These include:

- Volunteering initiatives where people can get involved and help others.
- Other opportunities to participate in cultural activities such as public programmes at our monuments and events at museums.
- Initiatives that target vulnerable groups, such as dementia awareness training at cultural and historical sites.

Our capital funds help revitalise towns, keep local community assets in use, support outdoor leisure and recreation and provide physical access to visitor attractions. We provide support for local cultural assets including libraries, museums, theatres, places of worship and heritage assets. Such assets are increasingly playing a wider role as local community hubs, providing access to: IT and council services; group activities; health information; special events; classes; learning and other community based activities.

The particular role which culture and heritage can play in successfully transforming the life chances of individuals in deprived communities is being progressed by a major policy initiative, under the title of “*Cyfuno: Creu Cyfleoedd drwy Ddiwylliant / Fusion: Creating Opportunity through Culture*”.

The Fusion programme is providing individuals in deprived communities with greater opportunities to take part in culture and heritage activities. Through it, we are working in partnership with museums, archives, libraries, castles, theatres, housing associations, schools and volunteering agencies. The support of the cultural sector is pivotal in the successes of Fusion with input into the programme provided by all of the lead Welsh Government sponsored bodies.

The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee (CWLC) held an inquiry into the role of Fusion and published its findings at the beginning of November 2019.

**We will be developing plans regarding the future of the Fusion programme taking into account the findings of the CWLC report.**

The arts also play an important part in helping tackle loneliness and social isolation in Wales. By bringing people together to participate in fun, meaningful and stimulating creative activities, the arts can be a vital means of connecting people and preventing social isolation.

The role of the arts in tackling loneliness was the focus of the Senedd’s cross-party group on arts and health held in March 2019 with the Arts Council of Wales, the Welsh NHS confederation, health boards and practitioners at the Wales Arts for Health & Well-being Network (WAHWN). This highlighted case studies and shared best practice. An example included ‘Caban Sgriblio’, a project which brings together young people to develop communication skills and reduce social isolation.

**Caban Sgriblio offers weekly creative writing sessions to young people. The workshops were led by professional writers who used creative writing and digital media to promote positive mental well-being. Creative activities allowed the young people to develop their communication skills as well as offering them the opportunity to reflect positively upon their lives. The outcomes achieved were: improved self-confidence, enhanced communication skills (both oral and written) and reduced social isolation. The young writers developed networks of friends within which they felt supported and appreciated.**

[wahwn.cymru/knowledge-bank/caban-sgriblio-](http://wahwn.cymru/knowledge-bank/caban-sgriblio-)

In order to continue the good work that is already underway:

- **The Welsh Government will work with the Arts Council of Wales to continue to raise awareness of the health and well-being benefits of participating in the arts. Arts centres and venues will be encouraged to act as vital social and community hubs working to break down barriers to interaction by making it easier for people to come together.**
- **The Arts Council of Wales will explore the role that arts on prescription (as part of Wales’ wider social prescribing offer) can play in preventing loneliness and social isolation.**
- **The Arts Council of Wales will continue to work to ensure tackling loneliness through the arts is interwoven into its strategic partnership work with the Welsh NHS Confederation, the seven health boards; WAHWN and the cross-party group on arts and health and other community based partnerships.**

## Supporting and enabling digital inclusion

Whilst not replacing the need for human interaction, ensuring everyone has access to the internet and the motivation and skills to use it effectively will help to create a more prosperous, healthier and resilient society with equality at its heart. People's life chances can be transformed, including reducing feelings of loneliness and social isolation, by helping individuals to stay in touch with friends and family through video messaging services and opening up access to other online support, social networks and interest groups, as well as access to local services and community organisations.

Digital inclusion is about ensuring everyone has the opportunity to benefit from the rapid pace of technological change taking place in our society, so people can use digital technologies, particularly the internet, in ways that enhance their lives. The National Survey for Wales 2018-19 showed 11% of adults (aged 16 and over) in Wales do not personally use the internet. However, this figure is much higher (21%) for those with a limiting long-standing illness, disability or infirmity and those aged 75 and over (51%).

Through our £2 million per annum dedicated digital inclusion programme, "Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being" **we will focus on improving the digital capabilities of citizens and health and social care staff, allowing more people to become more active participants in their own health and well-being.** The programme enables people to use digital technology in a way suited to their personal lives, including management of health conditions, reducing loneliness and social isolation and enjoying the wider opportunities digital can offer.

More generally, the "Digital Communities Wales" (DCW) programme will continue to engage with any organisation that can help reach digitally excluded people (older people; disabled people; those living in social housing; the economically inactive and unemployed) to help them save money, stay in employment for longer and help them to feel less socially isolated.

**Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's Digital Inclusion Officer applied to DCW for a loan of four tablet devices. The county has the highest levels of digital inclusion in Wales, yet many lack the basic digital skills needed to get online, access information or find work. Social isolation is also a problem. The county's Digital Inclusion Officer used the tablets with a reading group and a sheltered housing scheme over three months.**

*At the end of the loan the officer said the tablets had had a massive impact on improving people's digital skills but also "The most positive impact was combatting social isolation within the community... The ease of use improved people's confidence levels and helped them feel less isolated."*

[www.digitalcommunities.gov.wales/case-studies/blaenau-gwent-council-helps-people-get-online-to-combat-social-isolation/](http://www.digitalcommunities.gov.wales/case-studies/blaenau-gwent-council-helps-people-get-online-to-combat-social-isolation/)

The "Digital Heroes" (young volunteers) intergenerational initiative will also continue building on the over 4,500 Digital Heroes already encouraging care home residents and hospital patients to engage with technology.

**In addition, a Digital Companions volunteering initiative will train individuals working for groups/organisations that deliver doorstep services in order to help digitally excluded people within their own homes (peer-to-peer support).**





## Raising awareness of opportunities to connect

We know, from our engagement with stakeholders and from the consultation responses, there are a range of excellent initiatives and services being delivered by our partners, such as the public sector and community groups, that help to address loneliness and social isolation and improve people's relationships. Some of these are showcased in this document.

But people can often find it difficult to know and identify what activities and support are available close to home. Public services and organisations also can find it difficult to direct people to relevant services and support, as it can be challenging to maintain up-to-date information on what is available.

DEWIS Cymru is a national well-being directory developed, owned and resourced by local government in Wales. It provides information or advice about people's well-being, such as feeling safe and secure at home or getting out and about and also on how to help somebody else with their well-being needs.

It is able to share information with the third sector's directory "Infoengine" and NHS Direct Wales' directory of health services to provide a shared directory of local and national services. The creation of this shared directory is significant in tackling loneliness and social isolation as it can help the public and frontline staff to identify and connect with the right care, support or opportunity, from the right service, organisation or person, at the right time.

A Health and Well-being Wales app provides off-line access to all the resources within the shared directory, ensuring access to accurate and up-to-date information regardless of mobile connectivity. Providing the app to frontline staff such as community connectors, blue light services, health visitors, housing officers and hospital discharge teams, will enable them to have immediate access to local, regional and national resources.

**We will work with public and third sector partners to raise awareness of the benefits and opportunities the shared directory provides for frontline practitioners; local grass-roots, community based organisations; town and community councils and health services.**

We will also:

- **Encourage leaders across local government and the NHS to embed its use in practice and use across organisational digital systems.**
- **Make the app available for all blue light services.**
- **Identify and agree effective mechanisms to raise awareness amongst the public.**

## Supporting and enabling people to connect through well-being services

Those at risk of becoming lonely and socially isolated or those who are already experiencing these issues, may need some support to access opportunities to connect with others within their communities. There is increasing acceptance that sources of support in local communities have an important role to play alongside clinical care or even as an alternative to it in improving someone's health and well-being.

Well-being or social prescribing services offer people a wide range of support within the community, improving emotional and physical well-being and reducing loneliness and social isolation. The services are provided often by people working and volunteering in the third or independent sector, complementing the role played by statutory organisations.

### What is social prescribing?

Social prescribing links people to a range of community assets or services that offer support for social, emotional or practical needs. This could include feelings of loneliness and social isolation, as well as housing, employment or debt-related problems for example.

Social prescribing schemes can include a range of interventions and activities such as volunteering, physical activity (e.g. walking, cycling) and sports, gardening, adult learning, befriending and arts/creative activities. There are many different models for social prescribing, but most involve a link worker or navigator who works with people to access local sources of support.

Many primary care clusters and local authorities already are investing in social prescribing schemes. The Primary and Community Care Development and Innovation Hub published a report in May 2018 on Social Prescribing in Wales. The report highlights the progress in developing social prescribing and outlines the arrangements in place to support the concept. The Welsh Government will also invest over £220,000 for three years from 1 April 2020 in social prescribing research as part of the Health and Care Research Wales research development infrastructure. This research will contribute to the available evidence to inform future policy and practice.

In order to further support the development of social prescribing schemes across Wales, through the Strategic Programme for Primary Care, we will:

- **work with Regional Partnership Boards to identify the number and functions of social prescribing roles across Wales.**
- **develop a national skills and competency framework for the social prescribing workforce in Wales.**
- **develop and launch an online resource portal to support social prescribing activities in Wales.**
- **continue to work in partnership to develop the evidence base and an outcomes framework for social prescribing.**

In addition, through our forthcoming policy framework for unscheduled care, **we will make clear we expect local health boards and NHS trusts to develop social referral models as a means of enabling GPs, nurses, allied health professionals and other primary care professionals and staff to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical community services and groups to tackle loneliness.**

This could be in the form of tailored support to help people improve their health and well-being, instead of accessing urgent care. Success will be measured against an increase in social referrals into community support services.

## Supporting those at greatest risk

The actions in this strategy are intended to benefit a range of different groups and support people at a number of different transition points throughout life. However, as we have set out, we know there are particular groups within society who have an increased risk of experiencing loneliness and social isolation and may need additional support.

One such group is **older people**. Although the causes of loneliness and social isolation are complex and can vary for different age groups, many of the trigger points, such as bereavement, retirement, giving up driving, taking a caring role and the onset of ill health, are more common in later life.

As we age and leave the workplace, our social networks can diminish. Recent research by the Centre for Ageing Better<sup>21</sup> showed the main thing that retirees miss from work is the social contact it gave them. In addition, the sense of isolation following bereavement can be particularly acute. Closures of places to meet, such as libraries, community centres, pubs and churches can make it more challenging for older people to develop and maintain social networks.

To ensure we improve support for older people **we will publish a “Strategy for an Ageing Society”** later this year.

The strategy will consider loneliness and social isolation through the lens of age-friendly communities and how we can create an age-friendly Wales that builds resilience and prevents people from experiencing these issues. From legislating for person-centred care, to developing travel systems and housing that cater to individual need, it aims to keep people connected within their local communities.

We know individuals who become **unpaid carers**, at any age including as children, are at increased risk of experiencing loneliness and social isolation, and are seven times more likely to say they are always or often lonely compared with the general population<sup>22</sup>. The number of people in Wales who are more heavily involved in caring is quite substantial. The National Survey for Wales found 6% of people in Wales aged 16 and over to be caring for a relative, friend or neighbour for at least 20 hours a week. Caring can be hugely rewarding but also really challenging. Some carers need support as a carer and in maintaining their own lives alongside caring, which can help prevent a sense of loneliness and social isolation from developing.

There can be different reasons for experiencing loneliness and social isolation as a carer, with carers finding the demands of caring for someone mean they do not have the time or energy to see friends and family. There can be costs associated with caring and if someone has given up work to care, this can mean struggling financially and not being able to afford to do some of the social activities they did previously.

<sup>21</sup> Centre for Ageing Better and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation UK branch survey (October 2017) ‘Supporting people through the transition into retirement’

<sup>22</sup> Getting Carers Connected, Research Summary Carers Week 2019

Our three national priorities for carers are: supporting life alongside caring; identifying and recognising carers; and providing information advice and assistance. These are supported by a ministerial advisory group (MAG) for carers which provides a national forum to steer the delivery of improvements for carers and to provide a cross-sector response to the challenges all carers face. **We will also create a new engagement and accountability group to provide a voice for a more diverse range of carers and carers' representatives than is possible on the MAG, including parent carers and young carers.**

Building on the three national priorities for carers, during 2020 in co-operation with the MAG members and in consultation with stakeholders and through public consultation, **we will develop a new strategic action plan for carers**<sup>23</sup>. This will strengthen the national co-ordination of support for carers, considering key issues which affect their health and well-being, including loneliness and isolation.

In 2018, the Welsh Government undertook a scoping exercise to identify perceived gaps in services for **veterans** and families in Wales. The responses highlighted evidence of loneliness and social isolation amongst some veterans and their families. Some respondents cited feelings around loss of identity, difficulty readjusting or not feeling valued upon leaving the Armed Forces as reasons for feeling the way they did.

Also in 2018, the Royal British Legion conducted research into the issues of loneliness and social isolation in the Armed Forces community. The key findings were:

- 1 in 4 of survey respondents indicated they feel lonely and socially isolated 'always' or 'often'.
- Almost 70% agreed loneliness and social isolation are issues in the Armed Forces community.
- Moving to a new area was the most common cause of social isolation amongst survey respondents.
- Exiting the Armed Forces was the most common cause of both loneliness and social isolation.

The Welsh Government supports delivery for the Armed Forces in a number of ways. We provide funding for mental health treatment via the Veterans NHS Wales service and funding for veterans who require prosthetics due to injuries received in service. We provide funding for schools to provide the extra help some service children may need and also support for Service leavers and veterans to gain qualifications. We have developed a toolkit for employers to highlight to companies the skills and experience members of the Armed Forces community can bring to a workplace and we have developed a housing pathway to outline what housing support is available. The Armed Forces Expert group also brings together the key stakeholders to look at policy, identify gaps and provide expert advice to help us support our Service personnel, veterans and families.

**We will also be providing additional funding to undertake targeted activity to alleviate loneliness and social isolation amongst one or more of the following groups:**

- Spouses of serving military personnel living in Wales
- Members of the Armed Forces community who have caring responsibilities or carers of members of the Armed Forces community
- Members of the Armed Forces community living with limb loss / loss of use of a limb / loss of sight
- Members of the Armed Forces community who may be digitally excluded from society
- Members of the Armed forces community who are living in rural areas

**Disabled people** are another group who are more at risk of experiencing loneliness and social isolation. According to the disability charity Sense<sup>24</sup> almost one quarter of disabled people (23%) say they feel lonely on a typical day, and over half of disabled people (53%) report feeling lonely, rising to three-quarters (77%) for young disabled people.

The causes of loneliness and social isolation among disabled people are complex and will vary for each individual depending on their personal circumstances. In many cases, the barriers to making social connections are practical ones, but public attitudes can also have a profound impact on disabled people's ability to make connections and find common interests.

We recently published our new framework, "Action on Disability: the Right to Independent Living"<sup>25</sup>. This sets out how we are addressing social barriers to equality and inclusion so disabled people have access to the same opportunities as everyone else. The framework is accompanied by an action plan which sets out a wide range of actions happening across Welsh Government to tackle some of the key barriers identified by disabled people including transport, employment, housing and access to buildings and places so that disabled people can connect with their communities. This is significant as we know many of these issues are contributing factors to loneliness and social isolation. **We will ensure we continue to make links with the framework as this strategy is implemented.**

People with a learning disability and/or autistic people – and their families – may be at more risk of experiencing loneliness and social isolation throughout their lives. They can often be perceived as not being able to engage in relationships without assistance and many autistic people may find social interaction and communication very difficult. Developing skills to build relationships is not always a priority for support services, and people with a learning disability and/or autistic people may not recognise when they may be lonely or how they can access community services and support to prevent loneliness.

<sup>23</sup> gov.wales/written-statement-national-carers-rights-day-2019

<sup>24</sup> www.sense.org.uk/support-us/campaigns/loneliness/

<sup>25</sup> gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-09/action-on-disability-the-right-to-independent-living-framework-and-action-plan.pdf





**We will ensure the ongoing work on tackling loneliness and social isolation links to our learning disability 'Improving Lives' programme and to the Autism Strategic Action Plan, Integrated Autism Service and the forthcoming Code of Practice on the delivery of autism services.** All of these reforms want to ensure people with a learning disability and autistic people lead healthier lives, have choice and control over the way services are designed and delivered and are supported to be independent and active citizens.

**Refugees and asylum seekers** are disproportionately more likely to experience loneliness and social isolation than others of the same age<sup>26</sup>. This can be caused by a lack of social connections; a lack of language proficiency in English or Welsh; cultural or gender norms which limit exposure to neighbours; lack of funds to be able to socialise or orientate themselves to new communities; experience of hate crime or restrictions on the right to work.

Through our new "Sanctuary" website **we will be providing refugees and asylum seekers with information about their rights and where they can find help**<sup>27</sup>. We have worked with DEWIS Cymru to ensure services supporting these community members will appear on the Sanctuary website.

Our "Nation of Sanctuary" plan includes commitments from across the Welsh Government to help to integrate refugees and asylum seekers into wider society. We are seeking to improve information sharing between those who work with these community members, create more mentoring and volunteering opportunities for refugees and extend eligibility for schemes to asylum seekers in order to combat loneliness and social isolation.

As stated above, our National Survey for Wales also found that young people were more at risk of experiencing loneliness. Supporting **children and young people** to establish and maintain meaningful social connections is covered in Priority Four.

<sup>26</sup> migrantsorganise.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Loneliness-report\_The-Forum\_UPDATED.pdf

<sup>27</sup> sanctuary.gov.wales/





## Priority 2

A Community Infrastructure that Supports Connected Communities



**We know from our consultation responses that good community infrastructure is vital to preventing and tackling loneliness and social isolation. People need facilities and places within their communities where they can express themselves and connect with others and they need a transport system that enables them to get there. Good planning and housing can also make a difference, making it natural and straightforward for people to see each other, to be more active, engaged and independent, as can towns and high streets that act as a focal point for social and economic interactions. Digital technology can also be a real solution to loneliness and social isolation by connecting people to their communities, developing support and social networks, and contributing to overcoming some of the impacts of physical or mental illness.**

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## **Creating a transport system that supports social connections**

The Welsh Government recognises that access to good quality transport is a key enabler for social connections, not only for people to maintain independence and existing relationships with family and friends, but also to develop new connections. Good transport networks can ensure communities are well connected and that services, facilities and amenities are accessible. Without these, there is an increased risk that social isolation and loneliness will be more prevalent. Whilst we know that this can be a particular problem in rural areas, it can also be an issue in urban areas too.

### **Our vision for integrated transport is to:**

- Provide an integrated public transport network that is safe, reliable, punctual, environmentally sustainable and accessible, and that meets the needs of the travelling public regardless of their economic status or whether they share a protected characteristic under the Equality Act (age, disability, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, marital or maternity status).
- Increase the number of people using public transport, or walking and cycling by encouraging travellers to switch to these modes from private car use, thereby reducing pollution and congestion.

We know from our consultation responses that having accessible transport for people who are less mobile or visually impaired is critical to tackling loneliness and social isolation. Many day-to-day problems for disabled and older people in the field of transport stem from lack of clarity due to poor or insufficient communication, inadequate training and/or a lack of enforcement.

Transport for Wales, a not for profit company, wholly owned by the Welsh Government, is driving forward our vision of a transport network that the people of Wales are proud of. To improve accessibility of our train services, **Transport for Wales will invest £200 million across all rail stations in Wales.** This money will fund step-free access, better waiting rooms, shelters, toilets, lighting and seating. Transport for Wales is also improving the services it offers to people in need of assistance on their journeys. In addition, all trains were required to have audio-visual passenger information systems from 1 January 2020.

The responsibility for the accessible information regulations for the bus industry remains with the UK Government. However, the Welsh Government has already invested in improving accessibility on buses in Wales. The Bus Services Support Grant, of £25m per annum, has promoted the adoption of the Welsh Voluntary Quality Standards (WVQS). These standards include the provision of audio/visual facilities on buses used for local bus services. **We will continue to work closely with the UK Government to roll out audio/visual facilities on all buses in Wales.**

Local scheduled bus services are, and will continue to be, the foundation of our transport system. The 2018-19 National Survey for Wales showed that 14 per cent of the population of Wales had no access to a car or van. Many people rely on bus services for travel to work, for hospital appointments, visiting friends, shopping and accessing leisure services. Despite bus services being an essential part of the public transport network in Wales, they are in decline with passenger numbers falling steadily for many years on most routes in Wales. In order to try and change this, Ministers have agreed a new Vision for the delivery of bus services in Wales, and as a consequence plans to reverse the current decline are being developed. As part of this work, through the proposed Bus Services (Wales) Bill, **we will give local authorities a range of tools to use when planning and delivering local bus services, including greater powers to take over the running of local bus services and to enter into partnership with bus operators to better respond to local public transport needs.**

We also recognise that we need to make Wales' transport system more flexible and responsive so that people can get to where they want to go, when they want to go there. We are therefore funding new pilot projects to test innovative forms of integrated and demand responsive bus travel across Wales. The projects will provide public transport options to isolated people who are currently outside the reach of public transport. This will provide social and economic benefits for many who currently rely on taxis or help from neighbours, family and friends.

Building on these pilots, **we will explore how to run innovative, demand responsive transport services across other parts of Wales that can integrate with existing transport services.**

Young people report that transport issues are a significant barrier to play and socialising. This includes the cost of public transport and families being able to afford using cars due to the cost of running them and of parking charges. In the responses to our consultation, subsidised travel for young people was felt to be important and there was support for the recent extension of the My Travel Pass to 21 year olds. Building on this, **Transport for Wales will introduce free rail travel at all times in 2020 for those up to age 11 and off peak for those aged 11-16 when both are accompanied by a fare paying parent or guardian. It will also provide for fare reductions for 16 to 18 year olds (up to 19th birthday).**

Respondents to the consultation expressed the view that a more integrated rail network that meets more needs has to be built from the ground up, building on existing assets and capacity within communities. Often services are commissioned in isolation, or without reference to the wider public need. **Transport for Wales will therefore establish over the next three years, new Community Rail Partnerships across Wales and employ a network of community ambassadors to engage with communities to better understand the barriers to accessing rail services.**

We know that the volume and speed of motorised vehicles on our roads can reduce opportunities for positive contacts with residents in our neighbourhood, and, for many people, can lead to increased social isolation<sup>28</sup>. Our transport and wider policy agenda therefore seeks to create neighbourhoods that prioritise people's needs over those of traffic. This includes our ambition to reduce the default speed limit in built up areas from 30mph to 20mph as well as creating and improving safe and comfortable walking and cycling routes, and crossing opportunities. Pavement parking can seriously restrict people's ability to get out and about safely, in particular users of mobility aids, or people with push chairs, and this is another area where we are looking to make changes.

We have set up two task and finish groups to advise on these key policies that will help create people-centred urban environments. **These groups will develop recommendations by Summer 2020 for the implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the default 20mph limit and introducing pavement parking restrictions across Wales.**

<sup>28</sup> (Hart, J & Parkhurst, G (2011) Driven to excess: Impacts of motor vehicles on the quality of life of residents of three streets in Bristol UK. World Transport Policy & Practice, 17 (2). pp. 12-30. ISSN 1352-7614, Appleyard D (1981) Liveable Streets. University of California Press.)

## Making the most of digital technology to connect people

We want a Wales of connected communities, and that means making sure that all the links needed are in place to bring them together. Digital infrastructure is critical to providing the services we all need to stay healthy, to learn, to access employment, and to build connectedness and prosperity.

Fast and reliable electronic communication allows people to keep in touch and can decrease feelings of social isolation and loneliness. It can provide increased lifelong learning opportunities and improved digital literacy levels, and gives people flexibility in their working lives. High speed fixed broadband and mobile phone connectivity offers a lifeline for rural communities, allowing virtual access to services. It also enables the development and delivery of new services.

The Welsh Government Superfast Cymru project has provided more than 733,000 homes and businesses across Wales with access to fast fibre broadband. When combined with telecommunications companies' own commercially driven rollouts around 94 per cent of homes and businesses in Wales now have access to fast broadband connectivity.

**A further 26,000 will be addressed through a £26 million successor project.**

**We will continue to deliver the Welsh Government funded Public Sector Broad-band Aggregation (PSBA) project.**

The PSBA is a broadband network that provides high speed connectivity to 5,000 public sector sites across the country belonging to 110 public sector bodies. Currently around 560 GP surgeries and more than 1,500 schools benefit from being on this fast, resilient and secure network.

Access to fast broadband will enable public bodies to develop and deliver new services, including those that help to tackle loneliness and social isolation.

Whilst we know that the latest technologies can be an overwhelming force for good, we also know that digital technology, social media and the internet is a double-edged sword. For children and younger people, the internet and digital technology is an integral part of their lives. But it can be an avenue for bullying, harassment and social pressure<sup>29</sup> that can cause, or contribute to, a child's sense of social isolation and loneliness and that may be difficult for parents and teachers to identify and prevent.

The Welsh Government is committed to promoting safe, responsible and considerate behaviour online and to helping to protect children and young people in Wales from illegal and harmful content on the internet. The Online safety action plan for children and young people in Wales 2019<sup>30</sup> outlines the details of the progress we are making with our plan to keep children and young people safe online.

Since January 2014 it has worked in partnership with South West Grid for Learning to develop a range of online safety tools, resources and activities aimed at education practitioners and professionals, governors, learners, parents and carers in Wales.

These cover a wide range of online issues, including online bullying, radicalisation and extremism, and the impact of technology and social media on mental health and well-being. The Welsh Government has supported the improvement of schools' online safety provision via the 360 degree Safe Cymru tool, which allows schools to review and improve their online safety policy and practice. **During 2020-21 as part of our online safety programme we will develop and publish a new set of educational resources entitled 'Loneliness, social isolation and social media'**. These will be specifically for primary learners, secondary learners, education practitioners and professionals, and parents and carers in Wales. The resources will be available on the online safety zone on Hwb<sup>31</sup>, our digital platform for learning and teaching in Wales.

**The Welsh Government will also include online safety as a topic in the National Survey for Wales from 2020-21.**

Each year, the survey involves face-to-face interviews with around 12,000 randomly selected people aged 16 and over across Wales. Questions about online safety will be asked of the parents/carers of children aged 5 to 15. The topics will include what steps parents/carers take to manage their children's internet use, whether teachers talk to their children about internet safety, and how parents would seek advice about information safety. The outcomes will directly feed into future policy and delivery decisions.

It is not just children and young people who need to learn how to use technology safely. Trust and security concerns remain a key barrier to many adults embracing the internet and other technologies. Addressing basic security concerns, and highlighting the precautions people should take, can increase new users' confidence in making the most of the opportunities the digital world offers. Non-users or limited users of digital technology are missing out on improving their well-being, access to social connections, financial security and health.

Through our Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being Programme **we will embed online safety within our face to face training to front-line staff, volunteers and Digital Heroes (young volunteers). We will also ensure online safety is included as a key topic in all wider digital inclusion training material for staff and volunteers.**

**We will also consider the need for further research into how digital technology supports those experiencing loneliness and social isolation and helps people to connect, and also of the risks and impact that the shift to online communication may have.**

<sup>29</sup> [www.rspg.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/d125b27c-0b62-41c5-a2c0155a8887cd01.pdf](http://www.rspg.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/d125b27c-0b62-41c5-a2c0155a8887cd01.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> [gov.wales/online-safety-action-plan-children-and-young-people](http://gov.wales/online-safety-action-plan-children-and-young-people); [hwb.gov.wales/](http://hwb.gov.wales/)

<sup>31</sup> [gov.wales/online-safety-action-plan-children-and-young-people](http://gov.wales/online-safety-action-plan-children-and-young-people); [hwb.gov.wales/](http://hwb.gov.wales/)

## Enabling communities to come together through good quality planning and housing

Living in a safe and secure neighbourhood and in the right accommodation can play a part in reducing the risk of experiencing loneliness and social isolation. For older and/or disabled people who can spend much of their time in their home, being in appropriate housing – meaning its location, how warm and safe it is, and how suitable it is to their needs - is fundamental in providing the foundation to enable them to live independent, fulfilling lives. More generally, poor quality and inaccessible housing can lead to ill health and feelings of anxiety about going out, and feelings of embarrassment about inviting people in, both of which may heighten feelings of loneliness and social isolation at all ages.

In order to try and address some of these issues, the Welsh Government has created a three year £105 million Integrated Care Fund capital programme to support investment in accommodation that is integrated with health and care services. This is important to help the increasing number of elderly frail people, people with dementia, and people with a disability to continue to live independently in their own homes. The Fund also supports the development of community hubs to bring services closer to people's homes, as well as 'step up' and 'step down' accommodation to facilitate the transition in and out of hospital or care home, and assistive technology that supports people to live well.

**Cylch Caron Integrated Resource Centre is a strategic health, housing and social services project in rural Ceredigion. The development includes a new Health Centre with GP practice, pharmacy, outpatient clinics, community nursing and social care. It will also provide 34 Extra Care flats with communal facilities and services, and six step-up/step-down units for intermediate care and rehabilitation. The scheme is funded with capital grants from the Welsh Government (including ICF), Ceredigion County Council, Hywel Dda UHB, and borrowing by Mid-Wales Housing Association.**

Cylch Caron will bring important services in a rural location under one roof, closer to the people who need them. By working together and focusing on prevention and early intervention, these services will help people to live active, independent lives in a thriving community. The scheme will reduce the need for acute hospital and residential care, and improve efficiency by integrating health, social care and community services.

Housing Related Support helps householders to remain independent by increasing people's skills and confidence to tackle the issues which can result in homelessness or the need to move into institutional settings. Support workers provide a range of advice and practical assistance including help to integrate within communities, access community facilities and develop networks.

Our Housing Support Grant provides nearly £127 million a year to local authorities to fund housing related support services, including services to a range of groups who are vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation such as people with mental ill-health, older people or people with substance misuse problems. As such it plays an important role in our response.

**We will continue to provide housing related support to help vulnerable people (including younger, older and disabled people) live independently in their own homes and tackle the loneliness and social isolation that they often feel.**

We recognise that having access to good quality, timely adaptations that support independence, regardless of housing tenure, plays an essential role in helping disabled and older people to remain confident in their ability to live safely and independently and to continue to participate in, and be a part of, their communities. Timely adaptations can facilitate quicker safe hospital discharges, reduce accidents and admissions or re-admissions to hospitals, and prevent or delay a need to move into residential care.

**We will work with local authorities and delivery partners to promote:**

- single points of access for all, irrespective of age or tenure
- consistent and accessible information about how to access services
- clear information about what service to expect
- consistent assessment and delivery processes irrespective of whether people are tenants or owners.

The Welsh Government and local authorities allocate nearly £50 million of funding through five grant programmes to support the provision of housing adaptations for older and younger adults and children. We are reviewing the extent to which current funding streams and their allocation reflect the needs of people across Wales. **Using this research we will make decisions on future approaches to simplifying the complex funding arrangements for housing adaptations.**

Many respondents to our consultation felt that a range of different housing provision across Wales which is varied and caters for diverse needs was important so that as people age they have the option of remaining within their communities. Following a recommendation from the Report of the Independent Affordable Housing Supply Review **we will ensure that all new build affordable homes are more adaptable to people's changing circumstances and long term needs, through the introduction of minimum space standards, and Lifetime Homes Standards.**





Lifetime Homes are ordinary homes designed to incorporate 16 Design Criteria that can be universally applied to new homes at minimal cost. Each design feature adds to the comfort and convenience of the home and supports the changing needs of individuals and families at different stages of life. **We will ensure the Lifetime Homes Standards will be met in full for homes financed by Welsh Government grant schemes.** In addition, the Independent Affordable Housing Supply Review Report has also recommended that **the same standards should be set for all new homes irrespective of tenure (market and affordable homes) by 2025 at the latest.** The Welsh Government has accepted this recommendation and work is therefore ongoing to achieve this goal.

We also know that all types of community-led housing solutions can help to tackle wider issues such as social isolation and loneliness – as well as provide locally-driven housing solutions for local communities. Our Communities Creating Homes project, jointly funded by the Nationwide Foundation, helps to provide support to new and existing community-led housing groups across Wales<sup>32</sup>.

The extent to which people interact is heavily influenced by their lived environment. Our consultation highlighted the impact of good neighbourhood design on community cohesion. Poor design, barriers, poor lighting, alleyways, the structures of buildings and streets, and an absence of good quality green spaces has been shown to inhibit individuals' use of space and can prevent people leaving their homes. Infrastructure, travel opportunities and places for people to meet need to be an integral part of the planning and building of new housing developments in order to help prevent loneliness and social isolation.

Planning Policy Wales is our national land-use planning policy document for Wales. It is used by Local Planning Authorities to inform policies and land-use allocations in Local Development Plans. It places the concept of 'place making' at the heart of national planning policy.

Place making requires an integrated approach to development which ensures that communities have all the services they need within easy reach and that development is of high design quality. The principle moves away from processes such as simply counting houses to thinking about the outcomes and the quality of the places with the intention of creating developments that promote people's health, happiness, and well-being. It is therefore closely integrated with the wider objectives of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

PPW makes explicit reference to good design encouraging people to meet and interact with each other, helping to address issues surrounding loneliness and social isolation. It also makes clear that planning authorities have a role to play in the prevention of mental illnesses caused or exacerbated by disconnection of people from social activities (which contributes to loneliness).

Building on this we will support the implementation of place making and work with stakeholders to create a series of initiatives throughout Wales, including additional guidance and training. These measures will be aimed at supporting the creation of sustainable places and improving the well-being of communities and will positively contribute towards building people's social connections.

<sup>32</sup> [wales.coop/co-operative-community-led-housing/](https://wales.coop/co-operative-community-led-housing/)

Loftus Garden Village, Newport focuses on quality, space, fostering a community environment and sustainability and flexibility for each home. The main characteristics of Loftus Garden Village are two parks and kitchen gardens arranged within a linear street pattern which is integrated with the surrounding street network. The road lay-out avoids car-crammed streets, with the majority of parking spaces located behind homes, leaving green streets quiet for walking, cycling, playing and all things social.

Town centres are fundamental to Wales. We want to make our town centres fit for the future so that they are great places to live, work and play, and are a backdrop to well-being, confidence and a sense of pride. We know that in order to achieve this, our towns must become more diverse and sustainable, and go beyond a retail offer. Towns need to provide the encounters, activities and events that matter to people and keep them connected. There are a number of opportunities, not just for the towns themselves but their communities, which are aligned with our Transforming Towns agenda and our focus on town centres.

We will continue to invest and support regeneration projects in our town centres as part of our Transforming Towns agenda. We will establish a Town Centre First principle to support the transformation of our town centres. We will think differently about our public body location strategies. We will incentivise local communities to take ownership and prioritise investment in towns where this is the case and there is a clear vision.

## Making better use of community spaces

The importance of having access to community spaces (both buildings and outdoors) as a means of fostering community participation and cohesion was a recurrent theme in the consultation responses. Community spaces give people the chance to share interests, to celebrate, to exercise or to enjoy themselves. They allow people to come together naturally, in relationships that develop at their own pace.

Community facilities provide a focus for communities and opportunities for volunteering, improving skills and encouraging empowerment as well as for social interaction. Without local facilities, people face travel and cost barriers. Poorly maintained facilities can quickly become unwelcoming.

Schools play a vital role within communities, and we need to ensure that they are not only fit for purpose but also able to cater for the needs of local communities. Earlier this year, we announced funding of £15 million for schools to build an additional 20 community hubs and learning centres. This is supporting a number of pilot approaches, for example adapting existing buildings for wider community use, increasing the size of a school hall, or providing specialist or sporting facilities which can be used by local people. The funding will also be used to create spaces that meet a specific need within the local community, such as learning new languages or vocational skills.

We have rebranded the 21st Century Schools and Colleges Programme, under which the Community Hubs pilot programme sits, with the strapline “developing learning spaces for communities”. The second phase of the programme, which was recently launched, will see a further investment of £2.3 billion to transform the school estate. This funding will recognise and build upon the key role played by school buildings, not only as places to educate our children, but also as centres to be used by wider communities. A key focus of the second phase will be to transform schools and colleges into hubs for wider learning and local activities, challenging and supporting schools, colleges and communities in Wales to work together to put these facilities at the heart of their communities.

**To further this we will evaluate the twenty pilot projects funded under the £15m Community Hubs capital fund and disseminate the outcome so that good practice is shared more widely. We will also develop, test and publish resources, including guidance and case studies, so that schools and colleges can access further support and ideas to develop a community-focused approach.**



We want to help communities to protect existing community assets which bring people together and also to help community groups take ownership of these assets where this is the most appropriate option. In support of this, Ystadau Cymru (formerly the National Assets Working Group) has recently updated its best practice guide on Community Asset Transfers in Wales to enable communities to play a more active role in service design and delivery. It aims to help organisations to be better equipped to undertake community asset transfers and supports community empowerment by ensuring that land, buildings or services are retained or transformed and then used for public benefit through community asset ownership and management.

Ystadau Cymru has also commissioned research which will help us to understand the barriers community groups face when considering taking on a community asset. **The findings of this research will enable us to identify gaps in support available to community groups in this position and inform future policy development in this area.**

Our Community Facilities Programme provides capital grants of up to £250,000 for community-led projects seeking to improve well used and much needed community facilities that allow people to come together locally. This can include sports clubs, community centres, village halls and green spaces. 35 projects have benefited from the Community Facilities Programme in 2019-20 and the total amount of grant awarded was £5.125 million.

These projects provide opportunities for local people to improve their day to day lives through volunteering, work placement or job opportunities. They also offer local access to learning or health and well-being activities, enabling people to maintain or develop the interests and relationships they care about and reduce or prevent feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

All applicants to the Programme are currently required to demonstrate how the community has been involved in the process and how they will continue to be involved in the operation of the community facility. However, we want to go further and **will therefore include loneliness and social isolation as a criteria when the Programme's guidance is reviewed later this year.**

We also recognise the importance of access to the outdoors in empowering local people and groups to use the natural environment to help tackle loneliness, social isolation and mental ill health.

Green spaces in both rural and urban areas can be highly beneficial to people's health and well-being and provide space for them to meet<sup>33</sup>. Studies<sup>34</sup> show that there are significant positive links between mental well-being and increased green space in urban areas, and that we receive benefits not only by being more active in green spaces, but also just through *being in and near* green spaces. Even limited open green space in dense urban areas can provide benefits to large numbers of people, provided that it is high quality and accessible.

Our Natural Resource Policy (NRP) sets priorities on how Wales' natural resources can best support our well-being; this includes support for actions to tackle loneliness and social isolation. The NRP aims to provide more and better quality opportunities for outdoor recreation, as well as access to the natural environment and local green spaces. It also sets out how we will improve the quality of our environment to help bring people together.

**We will deliver a range of grant schemes with objectives to improve the resilience of our natural resources and our access to them** that also have clear links to how this can be used to promote health and well-being, **as well as undertake legislative reform to enable wider use of our Rights of Way network and open access land.**

**We will continue to work with our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (our designated landscapes)** to get more people passionate about the natural environment and the positive well-being benefits it brings to those who live in or visit them.

**We will also continue to support the Green Flag Awards in Wales, the UK's benchmark national standard for publicly accessible parks and green spaces as well as funding the Community Land Advisory Service in Wales that supports community groups, local authorities and landowners to help people access, own and improve green spaces in their local areas.**

<sup>33</sup> Hartig T., Mitchell R., De Vries S. and Frumkin H. (2014) Nature and health. Annual Review of Public Health 35, 207-228

<sup>34</sup> [link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-56091-5\\_11](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-56091-5_11)



## Priority 3

Cohesive and supportive communities

**Building cohesive and supportive communities requires strong social networks. Communities and the people within them need to be protected and feel safe; they need a health and social care system that promotes well-being and community engagement; and communities that are fair and inclusive, where everyone has a voice and can participate.**

Living in a neighbourhood that is felt to be unsafe or uninviting is a barrier for individuals to go out and engage with their community, particularly for older and vulnerable people. This can be due to a sense of unfriendly neighbours or due to visible signs that raise safety concerns e.g. hostile environments, people shouting and intimidating others, criminal activity etc.

## Developing More Cohesive Communities

We recognise the connection between loneliness and social isolation and community cohesion. People tell us the fear of harm both in their communities and homes can impact on how willing and able people they to engage with others and with their local area.

Community cohesion is strong in Wales<sup>35</sup> and we have a proud history of welcoming diverse communities, seafarers, traders, refugees and migrants that stretches back hundreds of years. We need to safeguard that strength as we leave the European Union and make it stronger. We want Wales to be a country that celebrates diversity before, during and after EU withdrawal.

One sign of our commitment to this is that our Community Cohesion Programme is being expanded with an additional £1.5million over the next two years. **This funding will support small teams in each region of Wales to enable them to engage more with local communities and public services, responding to whatever tensions may arise.**

**We will also continue to monitor tensions across Wales, working closely with local authorities, police and Victim Support Cymru to provide support and identify when and where collaborative intervention is necessary.**

Similarly, through our Equality and Inclusion Communications Network we work with over 30 public bodies and organisations across Wales to promote positive messages of respect and inclusion, celebrating diversity. Members of the network include local authorities, the four police forces and third sector organisations.

No person in Wales should have to tolerate prejudice or hate crime. We continue to make tackling hate crime a high priority and we are working hard with our partners to protect and support victims of hate crime and to hold perpetrators to account. Working with the four Welsh police forces and the Hate Crime Criminal Justice Board Cymru we have robust systems in place to investigate hate crimes, support victims and punish perpetrators.

**We will develop a £350,000 Hate Crime in Schools project** to build children's critical thinking skills and recognise and challenge hate speech online or offline, consider the causes of hate crime, and dissuade them from becoming perpetrators of hate crime in future.

**We will also launch a hate crime communications and awareness raising campaign** and are committed to challenging prejudice and stereotypes to ensure that Wales is a welcoming and diverse place to live.

Community hubs help build cohesive and supportive communities, bringing people together and helping them form new social relationships and peer support networks as well as opening up new opportunities for community participation. They also offer a mechanism for providing integrated front line services in a locally-led way through community involvement and partnership.

<sup>35</sup> gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-11/community-cohesion-and-safety-local-national-survey-wales-april-2018-march-2019-739.pdf

As part of the work of the Valleys Taskforce we looked at how an environment can be created where Community Hubs can develop and thrive and be a central point of contact and support for communities across Wales and become embedded in the community. A working group was set up to understand what we need to do to create that environment. From this work we know that involving local people in making decisions about the services needed, how services are run, how buildings are managed, and also then supporting delivery through volunteering, can help to develop a stronger and more resilient and empowered community.

The type and remit of Community Hubs across the Valleys footprint and Wales as a whole can make it very difficult to prescribe a model that fits all. The Working Group to date have concluded that there are two broad types: those that grow holistically from a community led organisation, and those that are developed around a statutory service – both have equal merits and a role to play in supporting those most vulnerable and hardest to reach. **We will continue to support community empowerment and learn from the work of the Valleys Taskforce in order to help address loneliness and social isolation and assist the most vulnerable people in our communities.**

Cardiff Council's Community hubs have an important role to play in encouraging community participation and hold a variety of activities targeted towards Cardiff's older population. Llandaff North and Gabalfa Hub hosts a Well-being Wednesday every week, with activities specifically aimed at the over 50s. This includes a gardening and lunch club, an over 50s weights class and a stroke clinic. Age Connect also facilitate a nail care service. Information is also provided regarding meals on wheels, the community nursing team and Telecare. United Welsh Housing Association provide well-being sessions in which customers are assisted to make connections with the community and with recreational activities and hobbies they may be interested in. There are also plans to deliver intergenerational yoga classes in the near future.

Public Health Wales recently published guidance on the 'Principles of Community Engagement'<sup>36</sup> which aims to inform both individual and organisational practice when engaging with communities.

The new guide will help professionals to create conditions where communities can take control and become empowered. The guidance was informed by findings from focus group work with community members, community facing organisations and staff from across Public Health Wales. **Working with Public Health Wales, we will pilot the use of this guidance and use the learning from the pilot to develop a training programme for public sector organisations.**

## An integrated health and social care system that supports well-being and community engagement

We know that loneliness and social isolation can have a detrimental impact on our health and well-being and that people with poor physical and/or mental health may become more lonely and/or socially isolated because of this<sup>37</sup>. Good quality, person-centred health and social care is therefore crucial to enabling people to continue living independently within their communities and participate in society in a meaningful way<sup>38</sup>.

The key principles within the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act focus on improving well-being and placing people at the centre of decision making about their lives; on working in partnership with individuals in order to achieve their desired outcomes, and on prevention and early intervention. All of these have a part to play in helping to address loneliness and social isolation. Our long term plan for health and social care 'A Healthier Wales' sets out a future vision of a 'whole system approach to health and social care', which is focused on health and well-being, on preventing illness, on supporting people to manage their own health and well-being, and on enabling people to live independently for as long as they can.

In order to help deliver this vision **we are working to establish a single integrated outcomes framework for health and social care.** This demonstrates the commitment to jointly own, plan and deliver services to improve the population outcomes for the people of Wales. The Framework will consider integration at national, regional and local levels. The national level will specify the national population outcomes health and social care will jointly own. Against the outcomes will be a number of indicators to measure if we are making a difference, one of which will be the "number and % of people reporting overall emotional and social loneliness".

At the regional and local (organisational) level **we will look to define performance measures that demonstrate how services are supporting people to reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation.**

Evidence has shown that changes in health status such as diagnosis of a long-term condition like diabetes can raise the possible risk of loneliness and social isolation as people change lifestyle behaviours, and/or their usual resilience is affected. Patients and or carers need to be signposted to local education programmes shortly after a new diagnosis to help them adjust to their new circumstances and to try to prevent loneliness and/or social isolation occurring.<sup>39</sup>

Through our Education Programmes for Patients (EPP) **we will ensure people have the knowledge and skills to support self-management of long-term conditions for both good health and mental well-being.** EPP Cymru provides a range of self-management health and well-being courses and workshops for people living with a health condition or for those who care for someone with a health condition.

<sup>36</sup> [phw.nhs.wales/news/1/news/rules-of-community-engagement-relinquish-your-power-so-that-communities-can-take-control/principles-of-community-engagement-for-empowerment/](http://phw.nhs.wales/news/1/news/rules-of-community-engagement-relinquish-your-power-so-that-communities-can-take-control/principles-of-community-engagement-for-empowerment/)

<sup>37</sup> [gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-02/national-survey-wales-loneliness-2016-17.pdf](http://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-02/national-survey-wales-loneliness-2016-17.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> [www.sense.org.uk/support-us/campaigns/loneliness](http://www.sense.org.uk/support-us/campaigns/loneliness)

<sup>36</sup> <sup>39</sup> [www.hull.ac.uk/work-with-us/more/media-centre/news/2017/diabetes-research](http://www.hull.ac.uk/work-with-us/more/media-centre/news/2017/diabetes-research)



While having a chronic disease can affect an individual's ability to engage in social interactions, social engagement can help slow or delay the progression of someone's condition(s). Wherever possible, we want people to have the confidence and skills to be able to take more responsibility, not only for their own health and well-being, but also for their family and for people they care for, perhaps even for their friends and neighbours.

To support this, **the Welsh Government will continue to provide its £300,000 self-management and well-being fund.**

The aim of the fund is to encourage people to manage their own health by supporting initiatives that enable people to improve physical functioning, psychological (and spiritual) well-being and social connectedness.

It is being used to build the capacity of people with long term conditions to effectively self-manage; encourage new approaches to self-management and/or well-being; promote awareness of self-management and/or well-being techniques; and support initiatives that provide safe places for individuals in distress to talk about their well-being and supportive listening.

Health and social care staff are often among the few individuals with whom lonely and isolated individuals have on-going contact. Approaches are being developed across Wales that utilise the knowledge and connections of health and social care professionals to identify potentially lonely and isolated individuals and connect them with appropriate support such as social prescribing and community connectors, but we recognise that we need to do more.

We want to equip more staff with the information and tools they need to identify 'trigger points' and to understand the barriers that people face. One of the ways that we will aim to do this is through our Making Every Contact Count (MECC) initiative.

MECC is an approach used widely in the health service, and gaining support in other sectors, which is aimed at empowering staff to recognise the role they have in promoting healthy lifestyles, supporting behaviour change and reducing health-harming behaviours. MECC recognises that staff across the public and third sectors have thousands of contacts every day with individuals and are ideally placed to promote health and healthy lifestyles. Training has been developed and rolled out to help staff, when the opportunity arises, to be confident and competent in starting a brief conversation or having a more in-depth behaviour change conversation. The aim is to support their patients or clients to consider change, feel encouraged and supported to change, and know where to go for further support if they feel ready to change. The MECC approach goes beyond training with the longer term aim of embedding prevention into the core business of all public and third sector organisations by adapting working systems and processes and creating working environments that support behaviour change conversations.

**We will work with Public Health Wales to explore the potential for developing a specific training module for public and third sector staff to bolt onto brief advice and behaviour change training to develop their skills in considering loneliness and social isolation when promoting healthy lifestyles and signposting to relevant services.**

In late 2019, Social Care Wales and Health Education and Improvement Wales submitted the final draft of a health and social care workforce strategy to Welsh Government. The Strategy is currently being considered by Welsh Government with a view to developing a plan for the implementation of the Strategy. It is anticipated that **the strategy will be supported through a series of more detailed implementation plans and we will ensure that loneliness and social isolation are included within these.**

**We will also work with Care Inspectorate Wales to consider how loneliness and social isolation can be incorporated into Inspection Frameworks** in order to help us build the evidence base about what good looks like and to continue to learn from people's experiences.

Another way in which we will use our workforce to help identify people who may be lonely and socially isolated is by **funding a pilot project to train pharmacy delivery drivers to undertake an evidence-based assessment of well-being in frail elderly patients, including whether they are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, loneliness and/or social isolation.**

The funding will be used to develop the necessary software to deliver a validated reporting tool that can be used by the drivers upon delivery of medication. A report will then be shared with health and social care professionals in order to enable them to make targeted interventions to reduce the risk of loneliness and social isolation, as well as addressing other health and care needs.

Another way in which Welsh Government is seeking to integrate health and social care services to improve the lives of the most vulnerable people in our society is through our £89 million (2019-20) Integrated Care Fund (ICF). Established in 2014, the ICF is a preventative programme which also seeks to integrate health and social care services to improve the lives of the most vulnerable people in our society.

The programme places people at the centre of their care and support by providing services that help them achieve 'what matters to them' and enable them to live their lives their own way. For many people that means being able to access services and support at or close to home rather than in hospitals. It also means being able to access holistic support that will consider their health, care and other needs as an integrated and seamless package. In addition to this approach being better for citizens, it has also helped to reduce pressures on finite health and social care resources, ensuring that the more acute and specialist services are available to those who most need them.

Many of the ICF funded services and projects are contributing to the reduction of loneliness and social isolation in individuals by helping citizens to connect with other people and services within their own communities so they are better able to achieve what matters to them and support their own well-being. This can prevent a wide range of illnesses that are linked with loneliness and social isolation. This social prescribing is therefore an important element of the ICF. Allied to this, all regions across Wales have community connectors or community navigators to help connect people with services and activities within their own local communities.

In Powys a team of 10 Community Connectors help people over 18 and their families or carers to access community services. The aim is to support people to live independently and to prevent deterioration in their circumstances which may lead to a higher level of health and social care being required. Working with local community and voluntary organisations Community Connectors offer a wide range of assistance including befriending, shopping, advocacy, home adaption, community transport and support for people with dementia. In 2018-19 the service supported 1519 individuals from across Powys with 84% maintaining their independence and day to day living skills.

Wrexham has a team of 'Community Agents' employed by Community Councils to provide a valuable local service for people over the age of 50 years. The agents help to connect older people in their area with information, services and support that they need to help them feel connected and live independently within their own community. The service has supported 686 people in 2018/19 with 76% of the participants reporting that they feel less lonely than before they engaged with the service. The service has also supported an increase in volunteering in the community as well as seeing the development of new community groups and activities such as 'men's sheds' and walking groups.

In early 2019 a conference was co-hosted between the Welsh Government and Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations to bring together community connectors/navigators from across Wales to share learning and best practice. **As part of the scheduled ICF evaluation we will look to explore the benefits and impacts of these new types of services in order to help shape future development in this area.**

Compassionate, dignified care also plays a critical part in strong communities, and ensures that people can remain healthy and independent for longer, thereby reducing the risk of becoming lonely and socially isolated. The Welsh Government is working with statutory and third sector partners to deliver on its ambition to make Wales the world's first Compassionate Country. A compassionate country is one that recognises that care is a civic responsibility for all, and that professional care services are not substitutes for social responsibilities of caring for others in serious illness, through ageing, in care giving and following bereavement<sup>40</sup>.

The intention is to enable more people to remain in their own homes including care homes, reduce hospital admissions and develop a more open approach to conversations about care wishes and decisions. Good progress has already been made connecting people to community well-being resources such as self-management groups and talking cafes, through the recruitment of Macmillan facilitators to embed the approach throughout Wales and through the development of a Compassionate Country Charter for Wales.

The Charter represents a commitment to embrace a view of health and well-being that embraces citizenship and community empathy, directly supporting its citizens to address the negative health impacts of social inequality and marginalisation attributable to dying, death, bereavement and loss.

#### Through the Charter we will:

- Provide information and support resources for the public and professionals that build on self-management and well-being initiatives; schemes to tackle loneliness and social isolation, and developments in social prescribing already underway;
- Encourage our schools, colleges and universities to have policies or guidance documents in place for dying, death, loss, bereavement and care;
- Work with our places of worship to have dedicated groups to support those with end of life care needs; who are affected by loss or bereavement; are lonely and/or isolated and long term carers;
- Support our prisons and homeless organisations to plan for end of life care and loss and bereavement; and
- Support our museums and art galleries to include experiences of ageing, dying, death, loss or care as part of their exhibition programmes.

<sup>40</sup> [www.compassionate-communitiesuk.co.uk/](http://www.compassionate-communitiesuk.co.uk/)

## Tackling Poverty

Living in a low income household can limit opportunities for community participation and social networking. Poor social bonds combined with material deprivation can damage employment prospects, impact on living standards and contribute to feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Significant life events such as bereavement and divorce may increase the risk of poverty. Evidence<sup>41</sup> suggests that levels of poverty in Wales will rise in the coming years due to the impact of welfare reform which has a particularly detrimental effect on families, single parents, disabled people and minority ethnic groups.

Our Child Poverty Strategy recognises that child poverty is a direct reflection of the poverty of their parents. Therefore the objectives for tackling child poverty are focused on improving outcomes for the whole family: reducing the number of children living in workless households, increasing the skills of parents and young people, reducing inequalities in education, health and economic outcomes, creating a strong economy and labour market and action to increase household income.

To support this approach, **we will re-engineer existing funding programmes to ensure that they have the maximum impact on the lives of children living in poverty.**

Poverty has also been included as an additional priority in the budget planning process to **ensure that our collective spend has a greater impact on improving outcomes for low income households.**

One of the key themes that arose from our public consultation was the impact of welfare reform in particular on people's household income and therefore on their ability to socialise and build strong relationships with others. The Welsh Government currently provides grant funding of around £6 million for the provision of information and advice services so we can feel confident that some of the most vulnerable people in our society have access to the free and impartial advice that they need to resolve problems with their housing, welfare benefits and managing their financial commitments. The successful advice service interventions not only help people to maximise their income, but by resolving their problems with debt or poor housing, etc. help to bring improvements to a person's health and well-being.

We know the uncertain economic climate that lies ahead, together with the ongoing implementation of the UK Government's Welfare Reform programme, will increase demand on advice services across Wales. **Therefore, the Welsh Government's new Single Advice Fund will make over £8 million of grant funding available for the provision of information and advice services during 2020.** The services have been established upon an innovative and collaborative service delivery model that will ensure services reach deep into communities, promoting maximum engagement amongst people who tend not to visit traditional advice service venues or who do not seek help until a problem has escalated to a crisis. The services will also offer people access to wraparound support to build their capability and develop their resilience to prevent future social welfare problems.

<sup>41</sup> Reed, H., and Portes, J. (2018) The cumulative impact of tax and welfare reforms: [www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/cumulative-impact-tax-and-welfare-reforms](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/cumulative-impact-tax-and-welfare-reforms)





## Priority 4

Building Awareness and Promoting Positive Attitudes





**We should not underestimate the stigma that is attached to loneliness and social isolation which prevents people from asking for help, sometimes even from close family and friends<sup>42</sup>. Many people feel that loneliness and social isolation will not be recognised as real issues, or certainly not issues that require any kind of professional attention. People often feel that other social issues are more important, preventing them from seeking help before a temporary feeling of loneliness or social isolation becomes more chronic. We need to challenge and overcome this stigma.**

Reducing stigma starts with working to raise the profile of loneliness and social isolation across Wales. Building people's understanding of loneliness and social isolation and supporting the development of strong and positive relationships at an early age is crucial, so that as people move through life, they are better able to establish and nurture their social connections.

## **Building a national conversation to promote mental well-being and raise awareness**

LWe want to raise awareness of the importance of social connections to people's well-being and encourage them to take action for their own and others' benefit. We want to say that simple human kindness and every day, positive interactions can make a big difference to people's lives.

Public Health Wales has been developing and testing a conceptual framework to guide work to promote mental well-being in the population. The framework recognises the inter-relationship between mental well-being; the wider determinants of health such as poverty, housing and employment; health-harming behaviours and psychological trauma. It positions mental well-being as a bridge between these factors and poor health outcomes both positively and negatively.

The model recognises the importance of an individual's ability to form and sustain relationships as a core component of mental well-being alongside the availability of good social networks within the community. These two components describe how loneliness and social isolation impact on health and well-being outcomes.

The framework will be the basis of a new, long-term programme of work called *Hapus* which will be launched in 2020. This work will be with a range of partner organisations known to aid positive mental well-being such as the arts and culture; heritage; green space and the natural environment and sport. It will work through community organisations, workplaces, schools and the NHS to encourage people to reflect on what makes them feel well and to prioritise time to focus on what matters to them; working with others to create positive opportunities to build well-being for themselves, with their families and in their community.

**We will emphasise the importance of people's social well-being and encourage them to take action through Public Health Wales' forthcoming National Conversation on mental well-being and through the *Hapus* programme.**

<sup>42</sup> [whatworkswell-being.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce\\_uploads/2018/10/briefing-tackling-loneliness-Oct-2018.pdf](https://whatworkswell-being.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2018/10/briefing-tackling-loneliness-Oct-2018.pdf)

## Supporting children and young people to establish and maintain meaningful social connections

Supporting the development of individual resilience and strong and positive relationships at an early age is crucial, so as people move through life, they are better able to establish and nurture their social connections. Welsh Government and its partner organisations are leading work to help deliver our ambition of a population of emotionally-resilient and mentally healthy children and young people in Wales.

One way in which the Welsh Government is taking action to support children and young people is via its whole school approach to emotional and mental well-being. Many children and young people report feelings of loneliness and social isolation which impact on their mental health and their ability to perform at their best in school.

A Framework for schools is being developed which will help schools assess and evaluate their own 'emotional and mental health landscape' and how best to meet the emotional and mental well-being needs of their pupils, addressing weaknesses and building on their strengths. Part of this work will ensure that schools have access to a range of evidence-based universal and targeted prevention and intervention techniques to build children and young people's resilience and support those requiring more targeted interventions. This will include ensuring the range of services can work with schools to meet children and young people's needs. **We will ensure that this Framework makes specific reference to tackling loneliness and social isolation.**

In addition, **Public Health Wales will develop and disseminate best practice guidance about whole school approaches.**

According to a report by Samaritans Cymru in 2019, excluding children and young people from school can have a negative impact on their social relationships. For many, being at school is their only form of connection to peers their own age and their only source of support and community. Children and young people are more likely to experience exclusion from school if they are experiencing social inequalities such as poverty, disability and/or exposure to ACEs. The adverse effects of exclusion are often the very same factors which predict exclusion in the first place, along with loneliness and social isolation, risk of homelessness and declining mental health<sup>43</sup>.

Welsh Government's vision is for an inclusive education system. To fulfil that vision, action is being taken to support children and young people at risk of exclusion to remain in mainstream education. This includes:

- using our approach to accountability to recognise inclusive schools and to reduce incentives to remove pupils from schools;
- developing a framework, as part of the whole school approach to mental health and well-being, which will provide schools with guidance on how to embed well-being throughout the school;
- supporting schools to understand why children have difficulties in school that can result in behaviour which leads to exclusion; and
- the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal legislation, which will ensure the needs of all learners with additional learning needs (ALN) are identified early and the right support is put in place.

The decision to permanently exclude a child is a serious one and should be used as a last resort after the school has exhausted all available ways of keeping the young person in school. We have published guidance on making a decision to exclude a learner and the arrangements for their education during and after exclusion. The aim of the guidance is to ensure the exclusions process is applied fairly and consistently.

**We will analyse existing education and health data to explore correlations between exclusions or being educated other than at school and mental well-being, including loneliness and social isolation.**

Children and young people who have experienced abuse, neglect and other Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), such as living with domestic violence and parental alcohol and substance misuse, are at greater risk of mental and emotional ill health and the associated loneliness and social isolation that these can bring. They can also have an adverse effect on a child's behaviour which can result in exclusion from school. The impacts can be felt throughout the life course<sup>44</sup>.

The Welsh Government has funded the establishment of the *ACE Support Hub*<sup>45</sup> to increase professional and societal understanding and support of ACEs and change thinking and behaviour. To date, the Hub has provided and offered training to a number of sectors, including education, housing, youth services, refugee and asylum support services, sport, health visitors and public service boards. In addition to the training, the Hub has undertaken:

- a public ACEs awareness campaign
- a baseline survey of public service professionals' level of ACE awareness
- a series of stakeholder engagement events which will shape and refine this government's policy on ACEs.

<sup>43</sup> [www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/inequality-suicide/exclusion-school-wales-hidden-cost/](http://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/inequality-suicide/exclusion-school-wales-hidden-cost/)

<sup>44</sup> [www.bangor.ac.uk/news/documents/RespondingToACEs-PHW2019-english.pdf](http://www.bangor.ac.uk/news/documents/RespondingToACEs-PHW2019-english.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> [www.aceawarewales.com/about](http://www.aceawarewales.com/about)

In order to provide better understanding and support to those who have experienced, or who are experiencing, ACE's and the associated loneliness and isolation that can occur **we intend to continue our financial support for the ACEs Support Hub and will work with Public Health Wales, the NHS, police, local authorities, the third sector and other partners to develop trauma/ACE informed services.**

Youth work has an important role to play in helping young people to avoid feelings of loneliness and social isolation<sup>46</sup>. Effective youth work can provide young people with safe spaces as well as opportunities to engage with their peers, socialise, have fun and build healthy relationships. It can also help ensure they have a trusted adult to talk to about issues which are affecting them.

In 2019, the Welsh Government launched its new *Youth Work Strategy for Wales*<sup>47</sup>. The Strategy and its implementation document, set out a vision where young people are thriving, with access to opportunities and experiences, in Welsh and English, which provide enjoyment and enrich their personal development through youth work approaches. The strategy acknowledges the role of youth work provision in helping to combat loneliness and isolation and promoting community cohesion, with young people being supported to understand their rights, exercise their voice, and participate in the decisions that affect them. This vision is being delivered by concentrating efforts across five aims focusing on the experience of young people, the accessibility of provision, the skills of the workforce, and ensuring a sustainable approach to youth work delivery grounded in a shared understanding of its value to young people and the nation.

Being actively engaged in education, employment or training helps ensure young people take part in meaningful activities that will both support their development and help them maintain relationships with peers and trusted adults. Our Youth Engagement and Progression Framework provides a systematic approach to identifying young people not in education, employment or training, or those at risk of disengaging. These efforts help ensure young people are connected to local and wider communities, whether through their continuing learning or the world of work. The Framework helps local authorities identify those in need of support, establish what support may be available, and track the progress of young people as they make the transition from education into further education or employment.

In 2019-20 the Welsh Government signalled its commitment to youth work and youth engagement and progression activities by investing more than £10m of funding via the Youth Support Grant, an uplift of more than £6.6m. This included funding to tackle emerging mental health and emotional well-being issues in young people, as well as funding to address youth homelessness, both of which are key areas where improvements will translate into reduced loneliness or social isolation.

**We will establish and strengthen systems to identify and support young people where there could be high levels of loneliness and social isolation, including:**

- those at risk of disengaging with education, employment or training;
- those with mental health or emotional well-being issues; or
- those at risk of youth homelessness.

## Supporting good mental health, well-being and resilience among the wider population

It is not just children that need support to achieve good emotional and mental health. Loneliness and social isolation can lead to poor mental well-being in people of all ages and can be a contributory factor in suicide and self-harm, particularly among men. Conversely, poor mental well-being can be a factor that contributes to loneliness and social isolation.

*Together for Mental Health*<sup>48</sup> is the Welsh Government's 10 year cross-government and cross-sector Strategy to improve mental health and well-being for people of all ages. The Strategy recognises that the causes and effects of poor mental health and well-being are complex, challenging and multi-faceted and therefore require an integrated, partnership approach. The Strategy is supported by a series of Delivery Plans and the final Delivery Plan, covering the period 2019-2022, was published in December 2019<sup>49</sup>.

The Plan contains a number of actions that support our ambition of reducing loneliness and social isolation, including work around mental health social prescribing, designed to reduce demand on medical services, and suicide and self-harm prevention. Preliminary studies about the effectiveness of mental health social prescribing in relation to reducing the impact of loneliness have encouraging results. For example, research has found an average of 28% fewer GP consultations and 24% fewer attendances at A&E in instances where the social prescribing connector service was working well<sup>50</sup>. We want to support this emerging area of service so **we will work with third sector partners to develop the evidence for mental health social prescribing, through evaluation of pilot projects and models, to inform future investment.**

We know that loneliness and social isolation are risk factors for suicidal behaviour and suicide<sup>51</sup>; they are the second most common concern expressed in contacts from males and the fourth from females on the Samaritans' helpline across the UK and Republic of Ireland<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> [ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/A-Place-To-Belong-The-role-of-local-youth-organisations-in-addressing-youth-loneliness.p](https://ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/A-Place-To-Belong-The-role-of-local-youth-organisations-in-addressing-youth-loneliness.p)

<sup>47</sup> [gov.wales/youth-work-strategy-2019](https://gov.wales/youth-work-strategy-2019)

<sup>48</sup> [gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/together-for-mental-health-summary.pdf](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/together-for-mental-health-summary.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> [gov.wales/mental-health-delivery-plan-2019-to-2022](https://gov.wales/mental-health-delivery-plan-2019-to-2022)

<sup>50</sup> [www.mentalhealthtoday.co.uk/news/awareness/the-benefits-of-social-prescribing-and-a-word-of-warning](https://www.mentalhealthtoday.co.uk/news/awareness/the-benefits-of-social-prescribing-and-a-word-of-warning)

<sup>51</sup> 4. Stravynski A, Boyer R. Loneliness in relation to suicide ideation and parasuicide: a population-wide study. *Suicide Life Threat Behav.* 2001;31(1):32-40.

<sup>52</sup> [www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/inequality-suicide/exclusion-school-wales-hidden-cost/](https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/inequality-suicide/exclusion-school-wales-hidden-cost/)

**Therefore we will work with the Suicide and Self-Harm National Advisory Group to:**

- drive implementation of the Talk to Me 2 Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Strategy (extended to 2022) through regional forums and plans and the establishment of national coordinator posts;
- strengthen bereavement support in Wales by developing a National Bereavement Pathway; and
- improve access to information and support about suicide and self-harm prevention including in educational settings, at risk occupational groups, rural areas and primary care. We will also highlight areas of good practice.

The link between dementia and loneliness is stark. Loneliness puts individuals at greater risk of cognitive decline, with one study concluding that lonely people have a 64% increased risk of developing clinical dementia<sup>53</sup>. We have also been told that a diagnosis of dementia can make people feel excluded and less welcome in everyday activities they used to enjoy, leading to feelings of loneliness and social isolation. *The Dementia Action Plan for Wales 2018-2022*<sup>54</sup> sets out our vision for Wales to be a dementia friendly nation that recognises the rights of people with dementia to feel valued and to live as independently as possible in their communities. Through implementation of the plan we want to increase the number of people in Wales who are able to recognise dementia and understand where to access additional support through the expansion of dementia friends and dementia supportive communities and organisations. We also want to tackle stigma and discrimination which can lead to unwillingness to seek help and advice when the early signs of dementia arise, and enable people who are affected by dementia to feel included in their communities.

**Therefore, we will develop community approaches that provide more opportunities for those affected by dementia to be involved in activities and therefore reduce loneliness and social isolation.**

**We will also work with the third sector and people with lived experience to increase the number of people in Wales who are able to recognise dementia through expanding initiatives such as dementia friends and dementia supportive communities.**

We recognise the role that decent and sustainable employment can play as part of a wider network of social interactions to help to prevent or combat individual feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Our Economic Action Plan sets out the actions we are taking to grow our economy, spread opportunity and promote well-being and to support the creation of decent and sustainable employment opportunities across Wales.

Many people's only source of interaction with other people is through work, so employers can play a vital role in supporting good mental health and tackling loneliness and social isolation. **We will support people with mental health problems to remain in or return to work through health-led, European Social Funded (ESF) In-Work Support, Out of Work Support and the Individual Placement Scheme Pilot.**

While being in employment provides a meaningful activity which helps to improve health, well-being and quality of life, we also know that many employees can feel lonely and socially isolated at work which can be linked to modern working trends, such as home working or technology replacing social interaction<sup>55 56</sup>. We want to work with employers to help understand these issues and look at the support which can be provided.

**We will therefore develop a guide for businesses on how to tackle employee loneliness and social isolation and actions they can take to support those who do experience these emotions. The guide will be published on the Business Wales website and promoted through social media channels.**

**We will work with Public Health Wales to support and encourage employers to promote good mental health and well-being in the workplace through *Healthy Working Wales*<sup>57</sup> and the *Economic Contract*<sup>58</sup>. There will be a review of the existing evidence to identify effective approaches for promoting mental well-being at work. Evidence-informed advice, tools and training to support the promotion of mental well-being at work will be disseminated.**

We know that activities which bring generations of people together bring positive benefits to those that participate. Research published by the Welsh Government<sup>59</sup> describes intergenerational practices as activities which aim to bring people together to promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contribute to building more connected communities. The research showed there were different benefits identified between three main age groups (children and young people, adults and older people):

- levels of loneliness and social isolation were reduced and mental and physical health and well-being was improved in adults and older people; whilst
- children and young people reported improved confidence and knowledge.

There were also benefits from intergenerational activities at the community level such as improved connections and an increased sense of belonging.

<sup>53</sup> [www.mentalhealthtoday.co.uk/news/awareness/the-benefits-of-social-prescribing-and-a-word-of-warning](http://www.mentalhealthtoday.co.uk/news/awareness/the-benefits-of-social-prescribing-and-a-word-of-warning)

<sup>54</sup> [gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/dementia-action-plan-for-wales.pdf](http://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/dementia-action-plan-for-wales.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> [www.cv-library.co.uk/recruitment-insight/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CVL\\_MentalHealthWorkplace\\_Report.pdf](http://www.cv-library.co.uk/recruitment-insight/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CVL_MentalHealthWorkplace_Report.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> [www.totaljobs.com/insidejob/how-to-combat-the-rise-of-workplace-loneliness/](http://www.totaljobs.com/insidejob/how-to-combat-the-rise-of-workplace-loneliness/)

<sup>57</sup> [www.healthyworkingwales.wales.nhs.uk/home](http://www.healthyworkingwales.wales.nhs.uk/home)

<sup>58</sup> [gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-02/prosperity-for-all-economic-action-plan-executive-summary.pdf](http://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-02/prosperity-for-all-economic-action-plan-executive-summary.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> [gov.wales/key-mechanisms-intergenerational-practices-effectiveness-reducing-loneliness-social-isolation](http://gov.wales/key-mechanisms-intergenerational-practices-effectiveness-reducing-loneliness-social-isolation)



### What is intergenerational practice?

Whilst there are a number of definitions and descriptions offered for the term intergenerational practice one of the most commonly cited definition is that offered by the Beth Johnson Foundation:

*'Intergenerational practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contribute to building more cohesive communities. Intergenerational practice is inclusive, building on the positive resources that the younger and the older have to offer each other and those around them'<sup>60</sup>.*

Intergenerational practice can take many forms but it usually contains a range of processes that are linked together to build positive relationships between generations with the outcome of mutual benefit for all involved. Improved community cohesion can be an initial outcome but research identifies that the impact can also be much wider. For example, a reduction in social isolation and negative stereotyping which benefits older and younger people alike as they gain awareness into the lives of one another. We support the provision of opportunities for people of different ages to come together and connect in a meaningful way. Bringing older and younger people together maximises opportunities for people to become active participants in their communities.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales and the Commissioner for Older People established the #GenerationsTogether Hub which provides further information and a range of resources about intergenerational practice.

**Aneurin Bevan University Health Board is undertaking work via Ffrind I Mi and its intergenerational working programme, demonstrating the Health Board's commitment to the well-being of its population. A Partnership Board was established and it developed an Intergenerational Strategy — over 50 local partners have signed up to the strategy.**

**The Ffrind I Mi service takes a compassionate community approach to well-being. It is designed to find and help anyone who feels lonely or isolated to facilitate reconnection with their communities. Further information about Ffrind I Mi is available here: [www.ffrindimi.co.uk/](http://www.ffrindimi.co.uk/)**

**We will encourage all LHBs across Wales to establish, embed and grow intergenerational practice in order to promote and support meaningful and mutually beneficial activity for younger and older people.**

**We will hold discussions with the Commissioners for Children and Older People about what further resources for practitioners might be required.**

**We will work with third sector organisations to organise a 'national summit' to discuss the recommendations contained in the research report, to raise awareness, share good practice and consider what more can be done.**

Everyone has a part to play in preventing loneliness and social isolation, and kindness matters. Loneliness and social isolation can make a person feel vulnerable so a friendly welcome can be the difference between someone engaging or withdrawing again. Small moments of connection matter; from looking out for a neighbour, to smiling and saying hello. The quality of connections affects how people relate to the places they live. Creating connections can help to build a sense of community – which in turn can create more connections.

The Carnegie Trust<sup>61</sup> has identified that kindness can go a long way to reducing loneliness and social isolation, and also what helps to encourage kindness in communities. It has also challenged us to think about how we incorporate kindness into public policy and delivering public services.

We recently held a roundtable event with key stakeholders to discuss what strengths we have in Wales that enable kindness in public policy making. **We will continue to consider the role of kindness in public policy making as part of an ongoing conversation with stakeholders.**

<sup>60</sup> [generationsworkingtogether.org/about/intergenerational-practice/](http://generationsworkingtogether.org/about/intergenerational-practice/)

<sup>61</sup> [www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/place-kindness-combating-loneliness-building-stronger-communities/](http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/place-kindness-combating-loneliness-building-stronger-communities/)

# Building for the future

**This strategy is an important first step in tackling loneliness and social isolation but in order to bring about fundamental change continued and long-lasting action is required by all of us. This chapter sets out how we will build on the actions contained within the strategy and the good work that already exists.**

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## Knowledge sharing and spreading good practice

There are some excellent examples of work that is already happening across Wales to tackle loneliness and social isolation and improve people's relationships with others. We want to contribute to developing the evidence base in terms of effective interventions by increasing knowledge and information sharing across organisations and strengthening their approach to tackling these issues. Through our Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) and our Public Service Boards (PSBs), we want to work with local authorities, local health boards, and the third sector to ensure examples of 'what works' (and doesn't work) and 'why' are shared and to enable these organisations to learn from each other and to improve.

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Public Service Boards were established under the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being in each local authority area by working together to achieve the well-being goals set out in the Act. Each PSB is required to undertake an assessment of well-being in their area and to produce a local well-being plan. The current plans cover the period 2018-2023. Statutory members are the relevant local authority, local health board, fire and rescue authority and Natural Resources Wales. The following are also invited to participate: Welsh Ministers, Chief Constables, Police and Crime Commissioner, relevant probation service, voluntary organisations.

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The Social Services and Well-being Wales Act 2014 requires the establishment of seven Regional Partnership Boards on a health board area footprint. These Boards bring together health, social services, the third sector and other partners to take forward the effective delivery of integrated health and social care services in Wales. Their purpose is to improve the outcomes and well-being of people and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. The 2014 Act requires local authorities and health boards to jointly undertake an assessment of care and support needs, in partnership with the third and independent sectors, across each region and to produce an Area Plan setting out how they will respond to these over the next five years. Loneliness and social isolation was identified as a common theme in the assessments which have informed the development of Area Plans which also cover the period 2018-2023.

**We will facilitate the sharing of knowledge and learning across all RPBs and PSBs through workshops.** These will explore the extent to which loneliness and social isolation is considered to be a priority across Wales, share examples of good practice in terms of what factors are associated with successful programmes/ projects and consider barriers to action and how these can be overcome.

Building on this **we will develop guidance for RPBs, PSBs and their partners on combatting loneliness and social isolation which will include consideration of effective sharing of learning and good practice.**

**We will work with our partners to explore the availability of consistent, relevant and high-quality data, including that of relevance to loneliness and social isolation,** which can be shared with public bodies in carrying out well-being and population assessments.

Many public service and third sector partners are engaged in several partnerships (including PSBs and RPBs) covering a range of issues, priorities or themes. **We are undertaking a Review of Strategic Partnerships to look at the partnership landscape and to identify opportunities for rationalisation.** The benefits will be reduced complexity of partnership working and improved efficiency of policy delivery. This work is being taken forward jointly between Welsh Government, the WLGA and the Welsh NHS Confederation and is expected to report early in 2020.

## Cross-government action

Our work in developing this strategy has clearly demonstrated that all parts of Government have a role to play in tackling loneliness and social isolation. We want to strengthen our cross-government approach and take action to ensure that we embed these issues as a consideration across government policy making.

### In order to achieve this we will:

- Include loneliness and social isolation as a consideration in our integrated impact assessment process.
- Establish a cross-government loneliness and social isolation advisory group, which will also include external partners, to oversee implementation of the commitments within the strategy, progress the Welsh Government's work in this area and tackle emerging issues.
- Publish a report every two years on progress against delivering the commitments within the strategy and share further actions and any changes to our approach.

## Measuring Success

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires Welsh Ministers to publish national indicators to measure the achievement of the seven well-being goals for Wales contained in the Act. One of the 46 national indicators which is currently used to measure how Wales is progressing against the seven well-being goals is the percentage of people who are lonely. To date, the De Jong Gierveld loneliness scale has been used to measure the proportion (aged 16+) who report being lonely<sup>62</sup>.

This is monitored through questions in the National Survey for Wales, with the inclusion of other relevant questions enabling analysis of other aspects of people's lives relevant to loneliness and social isolation (e.g. age, household type and other demographic factors). The De Jong Gierveld scale asks respondents to say how they feel about the following statements relating to emotional and social loneliness:

### Social Loneliness

- There are plenty of people I can rely on when I have problems.
- There are many people I can trust completely.
- There are enough people I feel close to.

### Emotional Loneliness

- I experience a general sense of emptiness.
- I miss having people around.
- I often feel rejected.

<sup>62</sup> [mvd.a.info/sites/default/files/field/resources/De%20Jong%20Gierveld%20Loneliness%20Scale.pdf](https://mvd.a.info/sites/default/files/field/resources/De%20Jong%20Gierveld%20Loneliness%20Scale.pdf)

Social loneliness refers to the absence of an acceptable social network, that is, a wider circle of friends and acquaintances that can provide a sense of belonging, of companionship and of being a member of a community. Whilst this does not capture social isolation as defined earlier, it is possible to gain an indication of the proportion and circumstances of those people responding negatively, and to monitor this over time. In addition, **we will consider the feasibility of measuring social isolation, as defined in this strategy, through the National Survey.**

Data on the health and well-being of young people (aged 11-18) in Wales is currently provided through the Student Health and Well-being Survey. The survey incorporates the international World Health Organization supported Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey, in which Wales has played a key role for more than 30 years, as one of the founding countries<sup>63</sup>.

The survey is carried out through the School Health Research Network<sup>64,65</sup> (SHRN), a partnership between Welsh Government; Centre for the Development and Evaluation of Complex Interventions for Public Health Improvement (DECIPHer) at Cardiff University; Public Health Wales; Cancer Research UK; and the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD). Since 2017, all maintained, mainstream secondary schools in Wales have been part of the network and all are invited to participate in the survey. The large sample size allows analysis at varying levels, from school to national, as well as population sub-groups of interest, such as ethnicity, looked after status and whether the young person has caring responsibilities.

As well as asking about loneliness during the school holidays, we have taken action to ensure that the survey now includes a number of other loneliness related questions, including the UCLA three-item loneliness scale (slightly modified for young people) in the latest round of data collection for 2019/20<sup>66</sup>:

1. How often do you feel that you have no one to talk to?
2. How often do you feel left out?
3. How often do you feel alone?

**There are a number of other national indicators which previous National Surveys show have a direct correlation to the loneliness indicator. These include:**

- the percentage of people feeling safe at home, walking in the local area and when travelling
- the percentage of people satisfied with the local area as a place to live
- the percentage of people agreeing that they belong to the area, that people from different backgrounds get on well together, and that people treat each other with respect
- the percentage of people who volunteer
- the percentage of people who participate in sporting activities 3 or more times a year
- the mean mental well-being score.

In the longer term the success of the Welsh Government's approach and this strategy will be assessed against the loneliness indicator and these other national indicators, with a view to achieving a reduction in the prevalence of social and emotional loneliness. In the short term however, we might see an increase in those who report they are lonely as we raise awareness and people feel more able to recognise and talk about it.

## Developing the evidence base

We are committed to contributing to the evidence base to understand more the causes and impacts of loneliness and social isolation for different ages and different groups and identify effective ways to address and prevent them. We will therefore make an additional £1.4 million available over the next three years for a Loneliness and Social Isolation Fund to test out innovative approaches to tackling loneliness and social isolation and/or scale up promising approaches to reaching out to those who are already lonely and/or socially isolated.

We will use the projects supported by the Fund and data from the National Survey to help build our knowledge. We will continue to explore how we can contribute to evidence-building and sharing through our Loneliness and Social Isolation Advisory Group including what specific research is required.

## Assessment of evaluability

In order to assess this strategy's effectiveness in addressing loneliness and social isolation in a comprehensive manner, an evaluability assessment will be undertaken<sup>67</sup>. The use of this approach to informing evaluation has grown in recent years, providing a systematic and transparent account of how the proposed work will result in the desired goals, the methods that will be used to assess progress towards these goals and the data sources necessary to do so, including existing gaps. This assessment will be published and underpin future evaluation.

<sup>63</sup> [www.hbsc.org](http://www.hbsc.org)

<sup>64</sup> [www.shrn.org.uk/](http://www.shrn.org.uk/)

<sup>65</sup> [link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s1121-018-0969-3](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s1121-018-0969-3)

<sup>66</sup> [www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/compendium/nationalmeasurementofloneliness/2018/mappingthelonelinessmeasurementlandscape](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/compendium/nationalmeasurementofloneliness/2018/mappingthelonelinessmeasurementlandscape)

<sup>67</sup> [whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/evaluability-assessment-a-systematic-approach-to-deciding-whether-and-how-to-evaluate-programmes-and-policies/](https://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/evaluability-assessment-a-systematic-approach-to-deciding-whether-and-how-to-evaluate-programmes-and-policies/)