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Integration of health and social care funding

Top Line
The social care sector has warned that greater emphasis needs to be placed upon creating a holistic and cohesive service, that puts the person at the heart of their care plan. Uniting the health and social care funding streams will lead to improved wellbeing in the community; minimised competition between the two sectors for adequate funding;[1] fewer delayed hospital discharges; fewer inappropriate care assessments and packages; and streamlined services that prioritise patients' wellbeing alongside their health.

Key Asks
We are calling for all political parties to commit to integrating health and social care funding,incorporating:

- streamlined funding between health and social care, to minimise the need for competition or incompatible practices; and

- better information and technology for health and social care to allow for sharing of information and reduce incompatibility between partner services.

Stats
- In February 2020, 448 people experienced delays in transfers of care in Wales, with approximately half of these delays spanning 3 weeks or above (with 59 of these transfers delayed by 13-26 weeks)

Context
An integrated health and social care service has been on the political agenda for some time,[2] providing for improved workforce retention, reduced delayed hospital discharges, and reduced incorrect care packages. The social care sector has warned that greater emphasis needs to be placed upon creating a holistic and cohesive service, that puts the person at the heart of their care plan.

Background information
The NHS Confederation's recent paper, *Cross-sector partnership working to support the response to COVID 19 in Wales*,[3] demonstrated the benefits of a co-ordinated and streamlined approach to health and social care. The report outlined how community initiatives, voluntary services and the care sector have united with healthcare to provide necessary provisions during the crisis and have been proactive in their response. The lessons that have been learnt throughout the pandemic to date can and should be applied to the future running of Wales' health and social care services.

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[1] Welsh Government and Swansea University: A Realistic Evaluation of integrated health and social care for older people in Wales, to promote independence and wellbeing: Interim report. 2013. Link: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-07/131015-evaluation-integrated-health-social-care-older-people-interim-report-en.pdf

[2] Plaid Cymru. 'Wales, it's us: Manifesto 2019' Link: http://downloads2.dodsmonitoring.com/downloads/Misc_Files/Plaid%20 Cymru%20Maniffesto%202019_ENGLISH_DIGITAL.pdf

[3] The Welsh NHS Confederation. 'Cross-sector partnership working to support the response to COVID-19 in Wales' 2020. Link: https://www.nhsconfed.org/-/media/Confederation/Files/Wales-Confed/Welsh-NHS-Confederation-Crosssector-partnership-working-to-support-the-response-to-COVID19-in-Wales.pdf

Health and social care services in Wales do not always communicate effectively, with barriers to such including inflexible systems for data collection and codes of practice. In February 2020 alone, 448 people experienced delays in transfers of care in Wales, with approximately half of these delays spanning 3 weeks or above[4] (59 of these transfers were delayed by 13-26 weeks). This is not uncommon, and a number of people we support have identified issues with delayed transfers and care.

Anecdotally, individuals have also told us that if they develop a health condition whilst in receipt of care, they are concerned that they will lose their social care hours. This is concerning as this reduces their ability to socialise with others, leading to loneliness and isolation. A system that inspires integration will allow healthcare and social care to have a mutually beneficial relationship, and share resources.

Other devolved nations such as Scotland have already recognised the benefits of integrating health and social care, and progress has already been seen in terms of streamlined funding and quality improvement.[5]

 Integration would improve wellbeing within communities in Wales by prioritising and improving upon person-centred care, and previous research has suggested that uniting health and social care funding streams will improve wellbeing in the community, and also minimise competition between the two sectors for adequate funding[6]. Integrated health and social care funding would lead to fewer delayed hospital discharges, fewer inappropriate care assessments and packages, and more streamlined services that prioritise patients' wellbeing alongside their health.

[4] Stats Wales. 2020. Duration of delayed transfers of care by LA. Link: https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/NHS-Performance/Delayed-Transfers-of-Care/delaylength-by-organisation-delayband

[5] Scottish Government: Health and Social Care Integration. Link: https://www.gov.scot/policies/social-care/health-and-social-care-integration/

[6] Welsh Government and Swansea University: A Realistic Evaluation of integrated health and social care for older people in Wales, to promote independence and wellbeing: Interim report. 2013. Link: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-07/131015-evaluation-integrated-health-social-care-older-people-interim-report-en.pdf