

# Make Wales Accessible

## Top Lines

All too frequently, society places barriers in the way of disabled people, that stop or hinder access. According to research conducted for our 'Get on Board' campaign, 21% of rail stations in Wales do not have step-free access, and at the current rate stations will not be accessible till 2070.<sup>1</sup>

The COVID-19 lockdown has given everyone a sense of what it is like to be a disabled person without access to public transport. Good quality, accessible public transport can be the difference between a disabled person:

- feeling isolated and excluded from community life; or
- being able to physically get out to work and socialise.

In 2014, our **Home truths** campaign highlighted the hidden housing crisis in Wales: many homes are not adaptable to the needs of disabled people. And even where homes are adaptable, all too rarely do local authorities have effective accessible housing registers that enable best use to be made of adapted social housing stock, often resulting in adaptations wastefully being ripped out of housing because they do not meet the needs of non-disabled people.

**Sports and social activities** play a critical role in everyone's mental health and wellbeing, improving fitness and providing a vital sense of community. But all too often, disabled people are excluded from accessing facilities. Sometimes this is due to a lack of physical gym equipment. Sometimes this is due to environmental factors (for example loud music can be challenging for some people with Autism Spectrum Disorder). Sometimes this is due to a lack of understanding about the needs of disabled people, and the very fact that disabled people want to engage in sports and social activities.

Disabled people should also have as much right to access **public houses** as any other person.

A lack of inclusive **play and safe spaces** for disabled children and their older counterparts can result in disabled children being inactive. A lack of social spaces that cater to the accessibility needs of disabled people is also of great concern.

## Key Asks

We are calling for all political parties to commit to:

- put in place a legally binding duty upon the Welsh Government to take all reasonable steps to ensure that all train journeys in Wales are fully accessible by 2030;
- ensure all active travel routes include dropped kerbs provided at least every 100 meters to prevent wheelchair users having to take lengthy detours to cross the road;

<sup>1</sup> Leonard Cheshire. Trains for All Campaign, 2019. Leonard Cheshire has undertaken data analysis of the provision of step-free access in train stations in Great Britain. This data was compiled using information on the National Rail website as of October 2019. The stations were mapped by region using the ONS National Statistics Postcode Lookup database which can be accessed at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/geographicalproducts/postcodeproducts>

- reassess transport systems (buses, taxis, measurements used for wheelchair parking spaces) with the intention of removing restrictions for disabled people in Wales;
- ensure every new home in Wales is built to fully meet all Lifetime Home Standards;
- review the use of accessible housing registers to ensure that there is an effective and efficient system for matching the needs of disabled people to adapted housing;
- ensure at least ten percent of all new homes are built to full wheelchair accessibility standards;
- require all local authority-owned leisure facilities to undertake an audit of their accessibility for disabled people;
- require all local authority-owned gyms to include a minimum of three pieces of equipment that have been adapted for the use of disabled people (for example, an adapted cycling-machine);
- require all local authority-owned gyms to have at least one 'quiet hour' per day, in which loud music is not being played;
- require all local authority-owned swimming pools to be fully accessible with hoists and changing beds;
- feature disabled-people in any public awareness campaigns related to active travel, use of local authority leisure centres;
- require all local authority staff operating leisure facilities to undertake disability confident training;
- work with pubs and restaurants to improve all aspects of access for disabled people;
- ensure that the development of any new public play space will include an accessible play survey, performed with a disability liaison or accessibility expert present; and
- prioritise funding for accessible play spaces in local communities.

## Stats

- Over half of disabled adults in the UK say they have experienced negative consequences as a result of public transport that did not accommodate their disability.<sup>2</sup>
- A third (33%) of disabled adults in the UK travelling by train reported having experienced problems as a result of their disability not being accommodated.
- Almost one in five (19%) who have not used a train say this is because it wasn't accessible for someone with their disability or health condition.
- 21% of stations in Wales do not have step-free access<sup>3</sup>
- A single trip to hospital (for someone who slips on the stairs because they can't install a stair-lift or a grab rail) costs an average of almost £1,800.<sup>4</sup>
- Every hip fracture costs the NHS over £28,000.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 51%, Comres (2018).

<sup>3</sup> Leonard Cheshire has undertaken data analysis of the provision of step-free access in train stations in Great Britain. This data was compiled using information on the National Rail website as of October 2019. The stations were mapped by region using the ONS National Statistics Postcode Lookup database which can be accessed at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/geographicalproducts/postcodeproducts>.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Cabinet Office unit cost database (2011/12)

<sup>5</sup> Better outcomes, lower costs: Implications for health and social care budgets of investment in housing adaptations, improvements and equipment: a review of the evidence

- People who are physically active have up to a 50% reduced risk of developing the major chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers
- People who are physically active have a 20-30% reduced risk of premature death.
- It has been estimated that the cost of physical inactivity to Wales is about £650 million per year.<sup>6</sup>
- Building a new home to lifetime-home standards typically costs £1100 or less.<sup>7</sup>
- Disabled people in 2019 were less likely to own their own home, with just 42.4% owning their own home, compared with 53.2% of non-disabled people.<sup>8</sup>
- Participants in workshops run by Leonard Cheshire in 2019 frequently identifying that gyms either lacked equipment adapted to the needs of disabled people altogether, or only had a single item of equipment (which meant no more than one disabled person could effectively be at a gym at any one time)
- 24% (507) of respondents with a disability or health condition said they had trouble accessing a service or venue in the last year because it wasn't accessible for someone with their disability or health condition.<sup>9</sup>
- There are approximately 770,000 disabled children living in the UK,<sup>10</sup>
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission's 2018 report, *Is Wales Fairer*, detailed the health gap between disabled children (62.0%) and those without disabilities (87.4%).<sup>11</sup>

## Context

Disabled people experience a range of negative consequences as a result of inaccessible **transport** including having to miss social engagements or a hospital appointment. Poor access to transport also has a negative impact on pursuing career and educational opportunities. Disabled people tell us this has resulted in them turning down job offers, missing interviews or not taking up an educational training course.<sup>12</sup>

Our nation's shortage of disabled-friendly **homes** is forcing thousands of people to live in Victorian conditions every day: to wash every day in their kitchen, to be unable to get to their child's bedroom to tuck them in, to use a toilet that has no privacy-door (because otherwise the door's frame is too narrow for wheelchair access). Anyone can become disabled, which means our homes need to be adaptable: so that at some point in the future they can include grab rails and wet rooms, stair lifts or hoists. But while some homes in Wales are fully accessible, or ready to be adapted, many more are simply not disabled-friendly. As a result of their homes not being disabled-friendly, far too many people are forced into care or hospital when they would rather continue to live at home. This has a severe impact both on individuals and Welsh taxpayers as a whole.

<sup>6</sup> Welsh Government, *Creating an Active Wales*, 2009

<sup>7</sup> Estimates vary. The CLG Housing Standards Review Consultation Impact Assessment estimated the average cost as £1,100. A previous CLG estimate put the average cost at £547. DCLG *The Future of the Code for Sustainable Homes*, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Office for National Statistics, *Disability and housing*, UK: 2019, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/bulletins/disabilityandhousinguk/2019>

<sup>9</sup> Respondents to a Leonard Cheshire sponsored YouGov survey in June 2020. Venues and services listed were: tourist attraction (e.g. amusement park, aquarium, zoo etc), a restaurant, pub/bar, GP surgery, concert venue, sports or exercise facility, cinema, nightclub, supermarket, local supermarket, sporting venue, other. <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/about-us/press-and-media/press-releases/disabled-people-doubt-equality-act-decade>

<sup>10</sup> *Improving the Life Chances of disabled People* (2005) Prime Minister's Strategy Unit. [www.strategy.gov.uk/work\\_areas/disability](http://www.strategy.gov.uk/work_areas/disability)

<sup>11</sup> EHRC *'Is Wales Fairer'* Report (2018)

<sup>12</sup> Findings from Leonard Cheshire's research conducted with ComRes in 2018. For more information: <https://www.comresglobal.com/polls/leonard-cheshire-disability-uk-disabled-adults-survey-hate-crime-section/>

**Sports and social activities** play a critical role in everyone's mental health and wellbeing, improving fitness and providing a vital sense of community. But all too often, disabled people are excluded from accessing facilities to enable such, with physiotherapy sessions sometimes the only activity that they can access. Sometimes this is due to a lack of physical gym equipment. Sometimes this can be due to environmental factors. For example, gyms and leisure centres typically use loud music, which may be challenging for some people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. And sometimes this can be due to a lack of understanding about the needs of disabled people, and the very fact that disabled people want to engage in sports and social activities. Frequently, disabled people are excluded from imagery around physical activity campaigns. Frequently, staff are unaware that their actions are effectively preventing disabled people from accessing sports and social activities.

Disabled people should have as much right to access **public houses** as any other person. But frequently pubs lack step-free access; have tables and chairs too close together to be navigated in a wheelchair; have bars that are physically too high for wheelchair users to comfortably access refreshments; have disabled toilets that are being used as storage facilities; or have staff that question whether disabled people are allowed an alcoholic drink, because they equate disability to immaturity.

**Social activities and play** are crucial for developing social skills, leadership qualities and interpersonal skills. Having safe spaces for disabled individuals to develop and interact with others are vital to the chemical and physical development of the brain,<sup>13</sup> as well as being beneficial for emotional wellbeing. The lack of inclusive play and safe spaces for disabled children and their older counterparts can result in disabled children being inactive. This problem is exacerbated by accessible play equipment and environments often only being offered at larger destination parks, meaning families have to drive considerable distances to allow their child time to play.

## Background information

### Transport

Trains in particular are often out of bounds for people with limited mobility and wheelchair users due to a lack of:

- accessible information when initially booking tickets or on-route;
- accessible routes to get to and from stations (with some dropped kerbs too steep or narrow to be safely negotiated in a wheelchair or mobility vehicle, some dropped kerbs compromised by parked vehicles in front of them and some not having a corresponding dropped kerb on the other side);
- step-free access to and from stations and trains;
- accessible toilets, which denies disabled people the basic dignity they are entitled to; and
- staff training (some disabled people have been repeatedly ignored by transport staff at rush hour, meaning that they get into work late, and then lose their job as a consequence).

### Housing

Whilst there has been some positive progress since our 2014 Home Truths campaign, there remains a significant absence of disability-adaptable housing. All too rarely do local authorities have effective accessible housing registers that enable best use to be made of adapted social housing stock, often resulting in adaptations wastefully being ripped out of housing because they do not meet the needs of non-disabled people.

<sup>13</sup> Croke, R. and Williams, J. (2015)

### **Play and safe spaces**

It is not just exclusion from play spaces that causes a disparity in opportunities, activities and social lives for disabled people in Wales. The lack of social spaces that cater to the accessibility needs of disabled people is also of great concern. Movement towards more active forms of travel and streamlined travel routes often leave out measures for disabled people. This causes disabled people to feel unsafe in certain spaces and have to seek alternative forms of social activity.

