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NHS Chairs

20 December 2024

Dear colleagues,

Working together to transform services - NHS Wales Planning Framework 2025-2028

As we work together to transform health and care services in Wales, I am delighted to be presenting my first NHS Wales Planning Framework. It is an opportunity for me to set out my high-level ambition for our health and care system that I know you will share.

There has been a period of considerable uncertainty since the onset of the pandemic in 2020 and recovery of health and care services is clearly still not where it needs to be for patients in Wales. I want to see a speeding up of improvements in delivery, drawing on innovative as well as familiar approaches. Quality, safety and the improvement of outcomes must be at the forefront of all the choices and decisions we make in all parts of our NHS.

Delivery and Performance

This Framework sets out the strategic priorities that must be delivered by all health boards, and (where relevant) other NHS organisations over the next three years. They are in areas which have been consistently raised through the First Minister's conversations and engagement with the public and staff since the summer. They are important to Welsh citizens. The areas of focus are broadly:

- Timely Access to Care
- Population Health and Prevention
- Building Community Capacity
- Mental Health Access
- Women's Health

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

More specifically, the delivery expectations which are required in each of these strategic priority areas are set out in Annex 1.

I want to see a concerted focus on these in your plans in order to make early and sustainable gains for the population of Wales. Delivering these should be at the centre of how you plan resources and capacity in order to see greater pace and purpose. Progress in some of these areas will require you to prioritise partnerships with social care. Delivering on these expectations will help achieve the improvements in performance and outcomes that we would all wish to see in year 1 of your plans (2025-26). I expect to see continual and consistent improvement towards delivery across all the strategic priority areas over the three years.

To support you to deliver against these expectations, we are setting out a number of enabling actions (attached as Annex 2) which we are mandating on the basis of “adopt or justify”. Each has an evidence base to demonstrate improved efficiency and/or outcomes, without driving additional cost. They are the product of work underway through the National Strategic Programmes, the Strategic Clinical Networks and the Value and Sustainability Board. They are already required, but implementation across Wales is inconsistent. We need to see more consistent application and implementation – this is good for patients and good for value and sustainability. Progress against the mandated enabling actions, along with an assessment of the associated productivity, efficiency and/or financial gains must also be reflected in your plans.

Although this Framework is clear about the national priorities that your plans need to most focus on, NHS organisations need of course to commission and/or provide a wide range of services to improve the health of their populations and to meet the strategic objectives of A Healthier Wales, within the resources available to them. I trust that your Boards will keep this balance in mind when making decisions and choices in other areas.

Local health boards are best placed to identify the needs of their local populations, so whilst setting out my expectations for delivery against the 3-year national strategic priorities, Year 1 delivery expectations and enabling actions, I recognise that this means greater flexibility in delivering on other areas.

I look forward to an ongoing dialogue with you on this – your suggestions about how we can identify areas to consider for de-prioritisation would be welcome. In fact, several of the enabling actions relate to activity which *must* be deprioritised and stopped where there is evidence of waste, harm or variation resulting in no (or low) clinical value or effectiveness.

I also want to explore with you how we can streamline the working relationship between the Welsh Government and NHS health boards and organisations, so that we can ensure that our data reporting, accountability and other systems are always proportionate, not over-complicated and reduce duplication. As a tangible example of this in the coming months, I expect that this will be the last year in which our planning framework is published separately and I have set an objective for the Welsh Government to integrate the quality, planning and performance frameworks to streamline our requirements in future.

To begin this process of alignment, this year’s NHS Wales Planning Framework is being issued at the same time as the NHS allocation framework for 2025/26 to ensure absolute clarity about the parameters within which your plans must be developed. Delivering financial improvement and sustainable financial positions, maximising the use of our resources, and increasing our productivity and efficiency, continue to be critical in delivering this agenda.

To support delivery and performance across our NHS, the Ministerial Advisory Group on Performance and Productivity will provide me with its findings and recommendations by the end of March. I will want to work collaboratively with you in responding to those recommendations to ensure that we can reap the benefits of the improvements that we wish to see across the system.

I am keen to ensure all parts of our NHS seek continuously to learn from best practice both from within the NHS in Wales and beyond, proactively working together to identify successful innovation – applying a principle of “adapt, adopt or justify”. This includes rapid progress on digital innovation and transformation, to strengthen the delivery of services.

I also want to understand how organisations are collaborating to create new regional ways of working to deliver quality, access and levels of care that often cannot be delivered by one organisation alone. It is imperative that health boards grasp the opportunities this can bring, in the interests of better patient outcomes and sustainable services.

All organisational planning and delivery must be built upon the domains of improving quality, safety, outcomes and value, supported in turn by robust enabling plans for capital, digital, collaborative working and the NHS workforce.

Workforce and Leadership

I am grateful for the dedication and commitment of our workforce across the NHS in Wales, who are at the heart of the experience and quality of services we deliver for our patients. Investment in building our workforce has increased year on year, and we must continue to focus, in social partnership, on ways to engage and empower our people to deliver safely, effectively and flexibly across the NHS in Wales.

Leading with compassion at all levels across the NHS in Wales will mean we properly listen to, understand, and empathise with our workforce so that we can help to remove the challenges and barriers they are experiencing which are getting in the way of delivering improved services for the people of Wales. Creating a safe and inclusive culture and collaborative leadership across the NHS is key to empowering people to deliver their best. This will value individuals' contributions and develop more effective teams who are confident to make effective decisions, for example about care, treatment and discharge. Effective leadership - regardless of hierarchy - is also crucial to fostering team, organisational, regional and system-level innovation by seizing opportunities to adapt and improve service delivery.

I expect to hear how organisations are developing their leadership and culture to ensure the safety, health and well-being of their workforce to enable them to deliver, optimise their team effectiveness and improve their services.

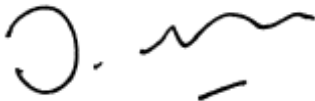
Outcomes that matter to people

In the coming months I intend to continue to talk with the public and the NHS workforce across Wales to hear about the challenges and opportunities across the health and care system. Some of the key issues which we are working on together, such as long waits for treatment, and discharge from hospital are of course already high on the agenda for the public, patients and health and care staff. It is imperative that we are clear about what must be done in the short term and what we need to do in the longer term, to live healthier lives through preventative approaches and avoid the need for hospital care where we can. There

are no simple solutions so I want to explore with the public what reforms and service developments can be set in train to support the NHS to adapt for the future.

We must act to balance better long-term outcomes with addressing the here and now issues that face our communities, our patients, our workforce and our health and social care system. I know that all of your staff working on the front line and delivering care in our communities, day in and day out, are at the heart of everything that needs to be done. With your support I am confident that we can together make the improvements we all want to see.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large 'J' followed by a series of wavy lines and a short horizontal stroke at the end.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care