



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

POLICY AND STRATEGY

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence: national advisers annual plan 2021 to 2022

What we are doing to prevent violence and to support and protect people who have experienced violence.

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Introduction

The overarching objective of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 is to improve the public sector response in Wales to gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence. In accordance with section 22 of the Act, the National Adviser for Violence against Women and other forms of Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence is required to prepare an annual plan setting out how they propose to exercise the functions of the role during the following financial year. This plan needs to be submitted to the Welsh Ministers before 30 November in each financial year. Our plan for 2021 to 2022 is pursuant to our statutory responsibilities; in doing so we believe prevention remains the key to eliminating violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) and education is at its heart.

The Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 demonstrates the Welsh Government's commitment to tackling and eradicating all forms of violence against women experiencing, and at risk of domestic and sexual abuse and all forms of gender-based violence. It is five years since this legislation was passed and it remains the benchmark by which legislation on gender-based violence is measured across the United Kingdom. By recognising the overwhelmingly gendered nature of these harmful behaviours, it does not minimise the impact on male victims; however, women and girls are disproportionately the victims.

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In accordance with international obligations, the Welsh Government acknowledges that violence against women is a violation of human rights. All its policies and strategies explicitly define it according to those internationally held human rights. Additionally, the Government sees violence against women as a form of discrimination and a manifestation of historically unequal power relationships. It also recognises and seeks to address the multiple and intersecting forms of violence as a greater understanding develops of the nature of VAWDASV.

The pandemic this year has highlighted the dangers faced by victims and survivors and, if anything, exacerbated the risks faced by so many of our citizens. The extraordinary efforts of the Welsh Government to ensure that victims and those working to support them cannot go unmarked, but there remains much to do, particularly given the likely economic impact of the pandemic. It is well established that the most vulnerable suffer the most when the economy is struggling. It therefore requires a considered and sustainable response.

Our objectives are based on the challenges which exist to improve and support those at risk of harm; this includes better understanding of the risks posed to victims of vulnerability and the prevalence of abuse across all communities; irrespective of who they are and where they live.

From the outset, the plan for the next financial year beginning in April 2021 has to recognise that some of what we hoped would progress during 2020 has either failed to happen or failed to proceed at pace. The pandemic has stalled progress, but we intend to roll over some activities into the new year because they remain valuable initiatives. Consequently, new activities are going to be limited by resources, including time, and we have decided to focus on reinvigorating present activity. Our main objective in the last annual plan was to see whether a public health approach in VAWDASV could work and be embedded across Wales; it remains our main objective in the coming year.

In our annual report 2019 to 2020 placed before the Senedd this autumn we outlined progress against all streams of work up to April 2020 and we do not intend to rehearse that here. Suffice to say the pandemic has not permitted much progress since the focus has been on assisting the government and the

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third sector to continue their emergency initiatives in this testing time.

Survivors' voices and experiences remain the key focus of all of our objectives. We are committed to ensuring they remain central to developing policy and improving processes.

Objectives for 2021 to 2022

Objective 1: Embedding a public health approach

We will continue to engage with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales; the police forces and other partners as they test a public health approach to tackling VAWDASV. We will endeavour to identify best practice which can be disseminated throughout Wales with a view to embedding a public health approach. In doing so, we will engage with public health boards and the National Independent Safeguarding Board Wales to identify sustainable approaches at a local level.

In supporting a public health approach, we have recognised that VAWDASV is arguably a larger risk to health than such factors as blood pressure and obesity. We note other health impacts of VAWDASV that include homicide, suicide, multiple mental, physical, sexual and reproductive health outcomes and the huge economic costs and broader social costs including women's participation in education and workplace.

We define a public health approach by reference to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals which require evidence-based violence prevention such as during early years, parenting and control of behaviours. It includes primary prevention to address inequality, patriarchy, misogyny, and root causes; secondary prevention such as early intervention and de-escalation; and tertiary prevention such as mitigation and response.

Although the pandemic has presented challenges in all of the Welsh Government policy areas, the outbreak has also provided a real opportunity for testing cross-policy risk management and delivery. We anticipate many of the

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lessons learnt throughout this can help to shape better outcomes for victims at risk of harm through a public-health lens.

Objective 2: Exploring a blueprint approach (as used by Police and Crime Commissioners in Wales) for developing the next five-year VAWDASV National Strategy

We will work with the the Welsh Government in developing a new VAWDASV strategy for the next five years and engage with Police and Crime Commissioners and other partners to explore a blueprint for the whole system that aims to prevent violence, intervene early with vulnerable people, support victims, hold perpetrators accountable, and deliver evidence-based quality services to make victims and survivors safer and support their recovery. This approach will need to address both the root causes of violence and its consequences, as well as challenge attitudes and behaviours. This will require an intensive process of consultation with those impacted by these crimes and behaviours and those working to prevent this happening.

Objective 3: We will continue to explore with sexual violence service providers how capacity can be built and collaboration enhanced

We have long believed – and it has been evidenced by both feedback and data – that sexual violence services in Wales have not been given sufficient emphasis in spite of the enormous increase in referrals and reports since 2015. In that regard we commissioned a quick survey of services in the summer of 2020 which identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. We intend to use that survey and continuing engagement with the sector to identify initiatives that will improve the service to victims and survivors. We will host a seminar with sexual violence providers to feedback the findings and provide key priorities as part of our exit strategy.

Objective 4: We will continue to chair the Sustainable

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Funding Group and work with the government and stakeholders to progress this work

The Sustainable Funding Group, which we chair, has agreed a set of funding principles and has debated the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) definition of sustainable funding, recognising the need to encourage organisations to diversify their funding sources to avoid over reliance on a single source.

The current landscape in Wales is vastly different from when the exercise was first undertaken by Welsh Women's Aid in 2017, and it is important that we have a current picture for Wales, both from the public sector commissioners and also directly from VAWDASV specialist services across the whole of Wales.

We must continue to provide strategic co-ordination for VAWDASV services across Wales, enabling a consistent approach to contracting for both commissioners and providers. To this effect, we will establish a VAWDASV commissioners group and ensure commitment to avoid duplication and enhance pooling of budgets, creating longer-term funding where possible.

One of the key remaining challenges is moving towards a sustainable funding model for VAWDASV provision. Welsh Government is fully committed to working in partnership with the Sustainable Funding Group to agree a sustainable funding model for Wales. We are working towards an agreed and final model by March 2021.

Objective 5: Work with Local Authorities, Local Health Boards, the Third Sector and SARC service providers to ensure the needs of victims and survivors are reflected within the local strategies

Local strategies that are informed by Welsh Government strategic priorities and the legislation will always be the best way of delivering services to where they are needed. We will provide specific feedback on what appears to be working and why, and through our analysis we will identify key priorities for improvement.

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Objective 6: To work with Welsh Government colleagues to improve communication with the UK Home Office and Ministry of Justice

Our ongoing work to ensure that UK Government initiatives align with those of Welsh Government will continue. The long-awaited Domestic Abuse Bill has already had significant input from us and stakeholders in Wales including at Select Committee meetings. We regularly meet with the designated Domestic Abuse Commissioner and her office and will continue to engage with UK Government colleagues.

As Chair of the Learning and Training task group, we feed into the ground-breaking work of the Single Unified Homicide Review Steering Group. The main focus of this group is to deliver a unified approach, which is agreed by all agencies, both devolved and non-devolved, to conducting safeguarding reviews, such as domestic homicide reviews, adult practice reviews and child practice reviews. We will adopt a shared learning approach with key stakeholders to inform, assist and test assumptions with our colleagues within UK Home Office and the Ministry of Justice.

Objective 7: Support the work of the All Wales Honour-based Abuse, Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation Leadership Group and act as the link between it and all other stakeholders. Ensure that all harmful practices are identified and that best practice is disseminated

The work of the all-Wales group provides leadership and co-ordination for key stakeholders to improve identification of abuse within communities affected and to increase understanding of support required for victims. It is evident through the work of this group there is a need for designated specialists to ensure those who need protection are safeguarded from the the risks associated with illegal harms.

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We are also very aware of the specific challenges refugee, migrant and asylum seeking women have experienced through the pandemic, as well as historically, and aim to work with key partners to find solutions to these inequalities.

We will disseminate good practice to Welsh Government departments and policy leads in respect of forced marriage, honour-based violence and female genital mutilation so that those at risk are protected and supported through education, health and social care.

Objective 8: Work with the Children’s Commissioner to review ongoing policy development to ensure the needs of children as victims and witnesses are considered and appropriately addressed

Children are victims of domestic abuse as it creates a distressing, stressful and harmful environment; yet the services for children are not as robust and as widely available as for other victims. The third sector organisations working in this field have immense experience of what works. We will support all our partners in identifying what works and ensuring it becomes embedded throughout Wales.

Objective 9: Host a national VAWDASV event which will bring together good practice and share lessons which demonstrate meaningful outcomes for victims of abuse

We will work with specialist partners to highlight gaps in existing provision and identify local, regional and national actions for service improvement.

We intended to host this “stocktake” conference last year but logistical reasons and then the pandemic made that impossible. Whether virtual or real world, we will ensure that it goes ahead. It will support the development of the next National Strategy and offer a platform for innovation and reform.

Objective 10: Supporting the Government in further

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awareness-raising campaigns

By any measure, the media and communication campaigns created by the Government, in partnership with the sector, have been highly successful in giving out clear, coherent and powerful messages. There will be more such campaigns to continue increasing public awareness and giving victims (and potential victims) confidence that they will be supported.

Conclusion

This, our final year as National Advisers, will be a year of taking stock, of consolidation and of embedding best practice. The Welsh Government can be immensely proud of its achievements and continuing commitment to dealing with the “pandemic” that is violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. There is much to do as the COVID pandemic has highlighted, but we sincerely believe that lessons are being learned, survivors are being heard and best practice is being disseminated.

There is commitment to improve outcomes through early intervention and co-ordination to support long lasting change and to build resilience. Working in partnership with Welsh Government colleagues and VAWDASV specialist providers has enabled key actions to inform this change. It is our firm belief this will continue to provide better outcomes for victims and those at risk of harm.

Within all of our objectives we are committed to ensuring survivors can access help, by equipping professionals with the tools and knowledge to act; and by improving awareness of VAWDASV and the support available. It is also important to recognise that different groups of women experience multiple inequalities which can intersect in ways that lead to further marginalisation.

From our perspective, greater awareness, increased specialism and expertise, multi-agency prevention work, building victim confidence and education to change attitudes are the key to reducing and thereby eventually eliminating the abuse that we have to deal with. Wales remains at the forefront of what can be achieved.

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