



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

POLICY AND STRATEGY, DOCUMENT

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence: national advisers annual plan 2024 to 2025

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

First published: 4 June 2024

Last updated: 4 June 2024

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

Contents

[Introduction](#)

[UK and Welsh policy context](#)

[Challenges](#)

[Our aim and priorities](#)

[Conclusion](#)

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

Introduction

As National Advisers for the Welsh Ministers, our plan is delivered in line with the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. Section 22 of the Act requires us to prepare an annual plan setting out our ambition and priorities for the period 2024 to 2025.

As part of our role as the National Advisers for Wales, this annual plan serves to guide our efforts in addressing violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence (VAWDASV) in Wales. By aligning with the objectives of the VAWDASV Act 2015 and the [2022 to 2026 VAWDASV strategy](#), we aim to implement evidence-based interventions and initiatives that prioritise prevention, protection, and support for survivors.

Through continued stakeholder engagement over the last year, and during our preparation for the development of this annual plan, we have striven to ensure the voices of those who most need access to support and services are heard. Our plan integrates the work of the VAWDASV Blueprint Delivery Model to effectively address the complex issues of violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence and aligns with the National VAWDASV Strategy to achieve our overarching aim.

The prevalence of VAWDASV and the devastating impact to lives is extreme: in the 2023 [Domestic Abuse Commissioner's report - A Patchwork of Provision](#) it is estimated this affects 2.4 million adults every year. One in 5 homicides is a domestic homicide. And it is at a high cost for all of society. [UK Government research](#) estimated the social and economic costs of domestic abuse for the financial year ending in March 2017 to be in £66 billion per year. Today, with inflationary costs this would be in the region of £74 billion. The [Welsh Women's Aid State of the Sector Report 2023 to 2024](#) published in March 2024 reported that specialist services in Wales showed a 28% increase in reports of financial abuse from survivors accessing community-based services

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

between 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023.

Foremost to the development of our plan we must recognise the challenges faced by victims and survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence in Wales are multifaceted and deeply entrenched. In recent years, the convergence of various socio-economic factors, coupled with increased awareness and reporting, has exacerbated these challenges, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive intervention and support mechanisms.

Our specialist providers in Wales bring perspective and insight to our National Expert Reference Group, through their work committed to supporting victims and survivors of abuse. We recognise they are facing unprecedented strain with many finding it necessary to draw on reserves as they grapple with the increasing demand for their services. Our annual plan must be considerate of the impact this is having on the “third emergency sector” who provide the much needed to support to an increasingly high caseload also with higher levels of complexity and risks.

As National Advisers, we chair the National Survivor Voice and Scrutiny Panel, bringing survivor experiences into policy making and strategic planning. This informs the work of the Blueprint and its workstreams. Survivor panel members provide real and accurate reflections on what matters to survivors. This input is provided directly into the National Partnership Board and Blueprint workstreams. Where relevant, feedback may also be provided to Ministers and other appropriate fora. Panel members often raise issues with ‘the system’ and have provide insight and challenge on what needs to change.

We must also recognise considerable efforts are ongoing to prevent violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence (VAWDASV) in Wales through comprehensive prevention initiatives. These efforts encompass a range of strategies aimed at challenging societal attitudes, promoting gender equality, and fostering respectful relationships from an early age. While significant

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

progress has been made, the work to prevent violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence remains an ongoing priority requiring sustained investment, collaboration, and commitment from all sectors of society.

To provide a positive example, the recent Sound campaign, which is targeted at young men in Wales, encouraging them to learn about gender-based violence and ‘sound out’ their relationships, behaviours and thoughts with each other. With engaging and informative content around healthy relationships across social media, podcasts, TV and streaming channels the aim to counteract a narrative. The campaign focuses on early intervention, which is one of the priorities in the current Violence against women, Domestic abuse and Sexual violence [strategy](#).

We know that ensuring our public services in Wales are able to prevent and intervene as early as possible is critical. They are often the most common place for a survivor to seek support. [The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's report – A Patchwork of Provision](#) found that survivors in Wales were most likely to disclose first to the police (48%), followed by health services (44%). We must ensure that pathways are available to further support including specialist services once a disclosure has been made. Schemes such as the IRIS programme based within GPs along with dedicated specialist advocates are essential to ensuring that we can provide survivors with the often quoted ‘no wrong front door’. Sustainable funding of such pathways continues to be challenging and we are concerned at the continued risk of these not being continued. We will be working with the funding model to explore ways in which the long-term impact of IRIS is recognised and lessons can be learnt and integrated for future sustainable whole systems approach and change.

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

UK and Welsh policy context

Victim's and Prisoners Bill

A draft Victims Bill was published in May 2022 and is currently in the Report Stage. The Victims and Prisoners Bill was created to provide support to victims of crime, including survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence. Key measures include:

- sending a clear signal about what victims can and should expect from the criminal justice system
- strengthening local and national transparency and oversight of how relevant criminal justice bodies treat victims at local and national level so we can identify problems and drive-up standards
- improve support for victims to cope, build resilience to move forward with daily life, and feel able to engage and remain engaged with the criminal justice system
- statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State regarding the role of Independent Domestic Violence Advocates and Independent Sexual Violence Advocates. This will need further consideration should this clause not be agreed to be adopted in Wales to ensure parity for survivors and providers

The Act takes a zero-tolerance approach to protecting children and makes sure social media platforms are held responsible for the content they host. If they do not act rapidly to prevent and remove illegal content and stop children seeing material that is harmful to them, such as bullying, they will face significant fines that could reach billions of pounds. In some cases, their bosses may even face prison. The Act include new powers to decisively tackle online fraud and violence against women and girls.

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

Online Safety Act 2023

Through this legislation, it will be easier to convict someone who shares intimate images without consent and new laws will further criminalise the non-consensual sharing of intimate deepfakes. The change in laws will make it easier to charge abusers who share intimate images and put more offenders behind bars and better protect the public. Those found guilty of this base offence have a maximum penalty of 6 months in custody.

We will look to monitor the implementation of this Act, including through the Gender Based Violence in All Public Spaces Workstream.

The Istanbul Convention

The ratification of the Istanbul Convention sets out the vital steps the UK needs to take to prevent women from all forms of violence, protect women experiencing violence, and prosecute perpetrators, while protecting specialist services. Whilst ratification demonstrates the government's commitment to ensuring women and children are safe, we must continue to be concerned that the UK does not provide sufficient support for migrant victims. The Istanbul Convention has specific provisions for refugee and migrant women and girls and requires the equal protection of all survivors regardless of their immigration status. The UK government did not give migrant survivors access to full and equal support in the Domestic Abuse Act, and the Nationality and Borders Act creates further difficulties for women and girls subject to abuse. We continue to advocate the rights of migrant women affected by domestic abuse and provide advice to the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's stakeholder group representing Welsh context.

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

Senedd Cymru Equalities and Social Justice Committee Inquiry

The Equality and Social Justice Committee was set up by the Senedd to look at policy and legislation and to hold the Welsh Government to account in specific areas, including VAWDASV. Observing this purpose, the Equality and Social Justice Committee undertook an inquiry into the public health approach to preventing gender-based violence. The inquiry explored how effective the implementation of a public health approach to preventing gender-based violence has been, and what more could be done. The Committee published the report [How we must all play our part: a public health approach to halting the epidemic in gender-based violence](#) in January 2024. The Committee made 12 recommendations in the report including the promotion of Gender Equality, addressing intersectionality including ensuring support for migrant survivors, fast tracking therapeutic services for children and young people and reviewing perpetrator programmes. The Welsh Government accepted or accepted in principle all 12 of the recommendations. We will monitor the effective implementation of all of the Committee's recommendations over the coming year.

Action plans and evidence units

Recognising the need for an informed intersectional approach, the National action plans for Race Equality, LGBTQ+ and Disability are critical areas of work. These are also supported by evidence units. As noted in the Equalities and Social Justice Committee report, the need for an evidence-based approach is essential, as is the evidence units' contribution to "policy development and evaluation" with not only the blueprint delivery model but also across the wider VAWDASV landscape.

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

Challenges

Financial pressures

Specialist services dedicated to supporting victims and survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence are facing unprecedented strain with many finding it necessary to draw on reserves as grapple with the increasing demand for their services. With limited funding and resources, these organisations are struggling to meet the growing needs of individuals seeking support, while their staff members are increasingly filling the gaps left by overstretched public services.

Specialist services often operate on tight budgets, relying on limited funding from grants, donations, and government contracts. However, the economic crisis, exacerbated by global events in the last few years, has led to funding cuts, reduced donations, and increased competition for available resources. As a result, many specialist services find themselves operating on reserves, depleting their financial cushion and impacting on their long-term sustainability. We established a Recruitment and Retention Task and Finish Group jointly with the members of the Expert Reference Group. We have raised with the former Minister for Social Justice the magnitude of the issues facing the sector where the lack of inflationary increases in budgets have resulted in low pay, recruitment and retention issues and charities needing to use reserves to supplement contract budgets.

The group agreed that a combination of increased demand, limited resources, and the emotional toll of supporting survivors in crisis has led to staff burnout and further added to retention challenges within specialist services. Staff members are working long hours, facing heavy caseloads, and confronting vicarious trauma as they bear witness to the suffering of survivors. Recognising that financial challenges are also an issue for public services and

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

commissioners, we are likely to see a reduction in critical services. We continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure that we work collaboratively through these challenges to ensure that victims and survivors in Wales receive the support that they need and the support they should receive if Wales is to fulfil on its ambitions.

Concurrently, there has been a marked increase in referrals and incidents of violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence. Most if not all the providers we engage with as part of the Expert Reference panel have reported an increase in referrals with one sexual violence provider reporting waiting lists for counselling have reached pre-pandemic levels. Heightened public awareness, coupled with enhanced reporting mechanisms and campaigns, has led to a surge in survivors seeking support and intervention. This surge has placed significant pressure on already stretched support services, highlighting the urgent need for additional resources and capacity-building initiatives to meet the growing demand.

In summary, the intersection of economic crisis, increased incidents of violence, and the significant cost to the economy underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and coordinated responses to support victims and survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence. Our priorities must consider how we can address some of the systematic issues and improve the design of our commissioning landscape to ensure we provide sustainable services to victims and survivors. This should be in a way that ensure our small specialist providers can continue to contribute services and services that best meet the needs of survivors with their representation on decision making bodies and scrutiny panels. It is important to consider existing survivor panels which can be independent or exist with specialist providers, to ensure the wider shaping of cross-government policy is reflective of the gaps in existing provision and to identify emerging trends and issues.

The Sustainable Whole System Approach Workstream for which we provide a co-chair role, has designed, and distributed a survey which will precede further

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

consultation with key stakeholders so we can identify the structural barriers for needs led provision and provide the system change for collaborative commissioning where required. Through our engagement with stakeholders, we must also raise the issues affecting specialist providers in respect of social procurement through VAWDASV commissioning, whereby constraints in existing contractual arrangements fail to meet the living wage or any annual increments.

Other challenges

Despite progress, there are persistent challenges in securing convictions and ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. More work is needed to improve the response of the criminal justice system and provide adequate support for survivors throughout the legal process. Through the work of the Domestic Abuse attrition work, a comprehensive approach which integrates survivor-centred practices, data-driven strategies and targeted interventions, stakeholders are learning from experiences of those impacted by domestic abuse. We hope to see the continuation of the important work being undertaken by criminal justice partners, the specialist sector and survivors to improve the experiences of survivors reporting domestic abuse and sexual violence crimes.

There are ongoing challenges in meeting the diverse needs of some survivors and victims, particularly those from ethnic minority communities. Work with the Disability Task Force Access to Justice group has highlighted specific barriers and survivor experiences which also outline the specific gaps in existing provision across Wales. It is imperative to address such challenges through the intersectionality framework and toolkit developed as a response to the VAWDASV Blueprint which will help embed intersectionality within its work. This approach will help refine approaches and make impactful recommendations for whole system change to respond to intersecting characteristics and provide a person-centered response to tackle violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence across Wales.

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

Our aim and priorities

As the National Advisers for Wales under the VAWDASV Act 2015, our plan outlines the aims and priorities for the 2024 to 2025 period. This collaborative effort underscores our commitment to the overarching objective of the VAWDASV Strategy and Blueprint, which emphasizes delivering a comprehensive whole-system approach to tackling violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence (VAWDASV) in Wales. To achieve this, we will continue to engage with key stakeholders in Wales and work with public bodies to improve and enhance the understanding of specific challenges facing survivors.

Our plan begins by identifying strategic priorities based on the objectives outlined in the VAWDASV Act 2015 and the National VAWDASV Strategy. These priorities include prevention, protection, provision of support services, and prosecution of perpetrators and build on the work within the Blueprint Delivery Model Integration. We integrate the work of the Blueprint Delivery Model and the wider landscape into our annual plan to ensure a coordinated and multi-agency approach to tackling VAWDASV.

In keeping with the long- term ambition our aim this year is:

“ To work with all stakeholders in Wales to improve understanding of and response to presentations of VAWDASV within their services and to enhance the pathways of support for survivors in a collaborative whole system approach. ”

To ensure the achievement of this aim, we have identified the following priorities:

- Work with all areas of government and public bodies to ensure a true whole government response to VAWDASV in Wales.

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

- Attending forums and meetings that provide oversight of the delivery of the VAWDASV Strategy, Blueprint approach and workstreams along with any other relevant fora. We will continue to share advice and information with Welsh Government and Ministers and the Blueprint delivery team which can improve victim and survivor experience and highlight gaps and poor experience in services.
- Support the development of new and the recognition of existing good practice to encourage consistent provision across Wales. We will also respond to emerging themes and concerns, where necessary through the creation of new mechanisms. We will do this in collaboration with the specialist sector and champion maintaining high quality provision across Wales.
- Continue to advocate for the investment in prevention services for both potential victims and those perpetrating harm including for young people where there is a recognised increase in need and also the ability to significantly reduce harm. This should be a spectrum of intervention from campaigns and training aimed at the public as well as professionals to be direct interventions including education programmes and by-stander interventions.
- Keep informed of survivor experiences, promoting what works and advocating when systems and responses have not worked both through the National Survivor Voice and Scrutiny Panel and the many survivor networks across Wales. Ensuring that we adopt an intersectional approach by engaging and promoting with specific issues such as the needs of migrant women and specific barriers for disabled victims of abuse.
- Provide additional scrutiny to key deliverables within the Act, including local strategies and activity required to improve VAWDASV commissioning and procurement across Wales, working towards the ambition of delivering a sustainable whole system approach.
- Utilise powers as provided within the Act to request information from a relevant authority in order to properly scrutinise and advise on the delivery of the Act if require.

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

- Specifically advise Ministers and, where appropriate, public services and relevant stakeholders on the delivery of their responsibilities within the Act for the prevention, protection and support of victims and survivors.
- Support the specialist sector in their efforts to maintain effective and vital services for victims and survivors of VAWDASV and that they are present in local, regional and national planning.
- Support the development of National Indicators and the development of an accompanying evidence base to evidence the impact of the delivery of the Act.
- Continue to provide support and advice on the intersectional approach to delivering VAWDASV and that this commitment turns to action and delivery. The intersectional approach must sit within an improved understanding of all forms of VAWDASV so all survivors can be assured of appropriate and effective protections and support. This should be inclusive of age-appropriate interventions for children and young people and older people. We must recognise children and victims in their own right and provide the services that meet their needs and highlight the gaps which exist for the transitional period from children to adulthood, particularly to improve multi-agency responses for young people.
- Represent and influence to ensure the Welsh developments, perspectives and experience is included in UK stakeholder planning, UK government policy and decision making.

We anticipate that the aim and priorities for this plan will:

- enhance the availability, accessibility, and quality of support services for survivors of VAWDASV across Wales, ensuring that individuals receive timely and holistic support that meets their diverse needs. This necessitates an honest approach to the funding of existing provision and understanding of the gaps and challenges that need addressing at a local and national level
- enhance an understanding of the prevalence and presentation of all forms of VAWDASV, leading to an improved understanding of VAWDASV presentation and needs that recognises sexual violence and all forms of

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

violence against women, along with domestic abuse

- develop and implement evidence-based prevention approaches and interventions and early intervention strategies aimed at addressing the root causes of VAWDASV, promoting healthy relationships, and preventing future instances of violence
- empower survivors of VAWDASV to have a voice in decision-making processes, policy development, and service provision, ensuring that their experiences and perspectives are central to all efforts to address VAWDASV
- provide evidence of an intersectional approach in strategy, policy, commissioning and delivery
- ensure survivor voices are represented, amplified and heard throughout our work to tackle VAWDASV in Wales not least in the delivery of the Strategy and the Blueprint but also across our regional and local structures

These outcomes reflect our commitment to driving forward a comprehensive and coordinated response to VAWDASV in Wales, with a focus on prevention, protection, and support for survivors, as outlined in the VAWDASV Act 2015 and subsequent legislative and policy frameworks.

Conclusion

We remain committed to regular evaluation and review of our annual plan to assess its impact, identify lessons learned, and adapt our approach based on emerging trends and challenges. Our National Expert reference group provides a level of scrutiny and advice to the specific challenges by and for the experience of services in Wales. In addition, we engage with wider stakeholders, including survivors, service providers, and government departments, to gather feedback and ensure that our efforts are responsive to the needs of those affected by VAWDASV.

Through collaboration with the Welsh Government, specialist providers, key

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

stakeholders, and survivors we are committed to driving forward a whole-system approach to VAWDASV, ensuring that our efforts are coordinated, impactful, and responsive to the needs of those affected.

This document may not be fully accessible.

For more information refer to our [accessibility statement](#).

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-national-advisers-annual-plan-2024-2025.html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).