

## Senedd Briefing:

# The Cancer Improvement Plan for Wales 2023 - 2026



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## Background

On the 31<sup>st</sup> January, the Tuesday before World Cancer Day (the 4<sup>th</sup> February), the Minister for Health and Social Services, Eluned Morgan MS will be giving a statement in the Senedd concerning the publication of the new Cancer Improvement Plan (the Plan).

The Plan will be the first all-Wales plan for Cancer Services since the previous two Cancer Delivery Plans (covering the periods 2012 – 2016<sup>i,ii</sup> and 2016 – 2020<sup>iii</sup>).

Since 2020 Wales has experienced the Covid19 pandemic, and the Welsh Government has moved away from a suite of condition-specific delivery plans to a suite of condition quality statements, including a cancer quality statement first published in 2021<sup>iv</sup>

## The Cancer Improvement Plan

The Plan aims to improve cancer patient outcomes and enhance patient experience. UK (including Wales) cancer patient outcomes are poor compared against comparable high income, developed world health systems<sup>vi</sup>, and patient experience has been affected by both the pandemic and workforce/service challenges that pre-date the pandemic.

The Plan focuses on preventing cancer, diagnosing it earlier and faster, treating patients with the most effective treatments and supporting them and their carers through and beyond the cancer pathway.

The Plan outlines how NHS Wales expects to reduce the unacceptably high national cancer waiting times for treatment. Welsh Government and NHS Wales expects to meet its 2023 – 2026 waiting time targets through quick one-stop diagnostic centres, delivering National Optimal Pathways for cancer (adhering to Welsh Government targets), the use of technology and innovations and collaborative working across health board boundaries.

The Plan describes what NHS Wales, and its partners will do to improve the delivery and accessibility of effective cancer treatments including surgery, radiotherapy, systemic anti-Cancer therapy and supportive care.

The Plan also outlines plans for national guidance for patients who are living with cancer that cannot be cured or who are dying from cancer, to ensure that they receive an improved standard of personalised, and where necessary end of life, care.

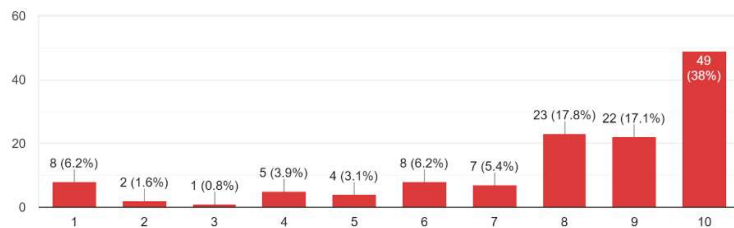
**Tenovus Cancer Care welcomes the Plan, alongside the Wales Cancer Alliance we have been calling for a separate delivery focused cancer plan/strategy since 2019.**

**The Plan recognises the scale of the challenges faced by cancer services across Wales. The people of Wales needs the Welsh Government, NHS Wales and Health Boards to rise and meet these challenges to improve poor cancer outcomes and enhance patient experience.**

## Meeting People's Needs

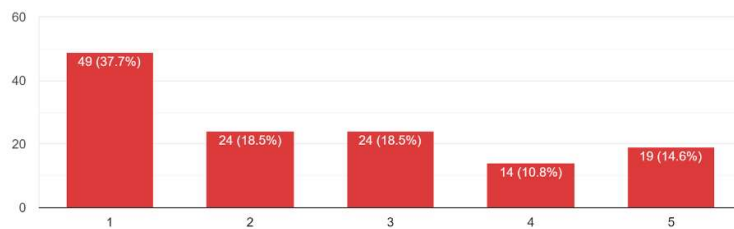
While developing its response to the draft plan the Wales Cancer Alliance surveyed 130 people with a cancer experience during December 2022. The survey helped paint a picture of what matters to Wales' cancer patients. The picture is mixed<sup>vii</sup>:

After your diagnosis, how well were your treatment options explained?  
129 responses



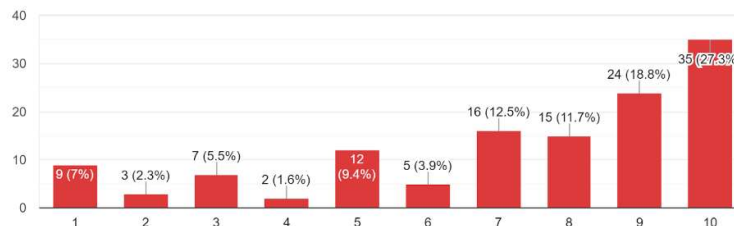
A large majority (84.5%) of those who responded held a positive view concerning the explanation of their treatment options following their cancer diagnosis - point 6 on the scale and above. 38% of respondents felt that their treatment options were explained exceptionally well. However, 12.5% of respondents, over 1 in 10 patients held a less positive view, with over 1 in 20 (6.2%) rating their experience as not very well, the lowest point on the scale.

How content were you with the amount of information you were given to help you make choices about your treatment and care?  
130 responses



The scale inverted, 1 equaling content, and 5 not content, nearly three-quarters (74.7%) of respondents ranked themselves content or were neutral on the matter. Slightly over a quarter of respondents were less than content concerning the amount of information they were given to help make choices concerning their treatment and care.

How well do you feel were you supported through diagnosis and treatment for your cancer?  
128 responses

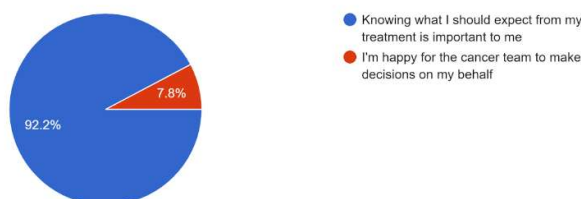


74.2% of respondents felt that they were supported through their diagnosis and treatment for their cancer. 9.4% gave a neutral response.

However, a concerning 16.4% gave a less than neutral response, possibly reflecting a substandard experience as a patient.

While a significant number of people receive top quality care and support following their cancer diagnosis too many people are not having their holistic needs met, their cancer experience is poor which is reflected in the survey results.

Is knowing what you should expect from your treatment important to you, or are you happy for your cancer team to make the decisions on your behalf?  
129 responses



People affected by cancer take an active interest in their care and want to engage with their clinicians during the course of their diagnosis and treatment.

92.2% of respondents wanted to know what to expect from their treatment, and therefore be involved in decision-making, rather than delegating decisions to their cancer team to make decisions on their behalf (7.8%).

It is vital that people living with a cancer diagnosis are supported to be as involved in their care and treatment as they would like to be, and for healthcare professionals to recognise that a person's involvement may fluctuate and, as such, a person's preferred level of inclusion should be subject to regular and ongoing review.

[Tenovus Cancer Care's All-Wales Cancer Community \(AWCC\)](#)<sup>viii</sup> consists of over 110 people with a cancer experience, who want to use that expertise to inform cancer policy and research in Wales. Expertise is the right word, because every person is an expert of their own experiences with cancer, what it made them feel, what support they wish was available and what they think of the information they were given. That sort of expertise is incredibly valuable.

Launched over the summer of 2022 people choose to be part of the AWCC, they are given regular updates of opportunities to take part in research, help shape political decisions and inform service providers about what they do or don't want to see. Over time, as long as decision makers and researchers reach out and use AWCC expertise we will start to see real life changes.

**Over the next three years the Plan must ensure people's cancer needs are met. This will be achieved through early, meaningful engagement with patients; improved, timely information about cancer, and cancer treatments and better signposting to financial and emotional support.**

**Tenovus Cancer Care would welcome the Welsh Government fully committing itself at the launch of the statement, both in principle and in practice to co-production and meaningful, early engagement with patients and patient representatives.**

**Tenovus Cancer Care will work with cancer service providers to support this work through the All-Wales Cancer Community and the Wales Cancer Alliance.**

## Less Survivable Cancers

While some cancers have seen remarkable progress in survivability, others are just as deadly as they were decades ago.

The Less Survivable Cancers Taskforce represents six less survivable common cancers: *cancers of the lungs, liver, brain, oesophagus, pancreas and stomach*. These have an average five-year survival rate in Wales of just 14%.

4,400 people are diagnosed with one of the less survivable cancers each year in Wales (out of 19,500 total). Less Survivable Cancers account for 40% of cancer deaths in Wales.

Tenovus Cancer Care is leading the work of the Taskforce in Wales since October 2022 we have chaired the Wales subgroup; raising awareness of the less survivable cancers across Wales and supporting a suite of activity to improve the poor outcomes for these cancers.

While the Plan is deliberately tumour agnostic<sup>ix</sup>, reference is made to the existence of less survivable cancers in the cancer challenge section, a welcome development. The Plan acknowledges that bespoke, targeted actions will need to take place over the course of the Plan to diagnose those cancers earlier – the Taskforce will support activity in this creative space.

### Actions might include:

- Specific commitments and targets for the less survivable cancers to drive forward the transformational changes we need in earlier diagnosis, treatments and care.

- A major focus on improving early diagnosis of these cancers to progress all early diagnosis options, e.g. targeted screening options / AI research into GP red-flags / investment in biomarkers such as saliva or blood tests.
- Dedicated research funding to support the early diagnosis groups and to make progress with tests / screening to help earlier diagnosis, and to improve treatment options.
- Significant workforce investment to ensure that every person with a less survivable cancer be assigned to a clinical nurse specialist with expertise in their cancer, and to ensure the full diagnostic and care pathway is sufficiently staffed to avoid delays and backlogs.

**Welcome steps are being taken now that will likely have a positive impact on the less survivable cancer outcomes of future generations. Healthier eating and improved well-being, alongside NHS developments such as Rapid Diagnostic Centres will have a positive impact in the future.**

Yet more needs to be done now to address poor less survivable cancer outcomes.

**Tenovus Cancer Care wants to see improved cancer symptom awareness by members of the public and GPs; and targeted lung health checks that could save over a hundred lives a year once it's rolled out across Wales.**

**Tenovus Cancer Care wants to understand what the Welsh Government is doing to support these activities. Over the lifetime of this Plan does the Welsh Government intend to implement the recommendation of the UK National Screening Committee and commit Public Health Wales to rolling out a targeted lung cancer screening programme?**

## **Scrutinising Delivery, Measuring Success**

The lack of a monitoring and evaluation framework hampered scrutiny of the former Cancer Delivery Plans. The new Plan presents a new opportunity

To effectively monitor and evaluate delivery of the Plan - over the next three years – the Wales Cancer Network needs to develop a performance framework that makes use of the new technology and opportunities offered by the new cancer informatics system.

Doing so will enable everyone involved in the delivery of cancer services – whether Wales Cancer Network, Health Boards and/or Trusts - to understand their own performance and associated outcomes. National and clinical leadership to identify areas of priority and regional collaboration and enhance transparency and accountability.

The governance of a new plan is of critical importance too. We understand that cancer improvement planning will be reflected in Integrated-Medium Term Plans and that the NHS Executive/Wales Cancer Network will support improvement through seeking improved collaboration and regional working.

While we understand that the Plan itself does not come with new funding, we hope that funding can be found to support new innovative, consistent, ways of delivering cancer services.

**Tenovus Cancer Care looks forward to better understanding the performance monitoring and accountability arrangements concerning the Plan. The reporting and accountability arrangements between local health boards/NHS Trusts, the Wales Cancer Network and the NHS Executive. The publication of guidance issued by the Welsh Government will be a positive start.**

## Working with the Third Sector

Cancer charities have always had a close working and supporting relationship with cancer services,

For instance, Tenovus Cancer Care's support for innovative development of mobile units has brought screening, treatment, and other NHS services closer to people – helping to meet the holistic needs of people with cancer, bringing them closer to communities across Wales.

The Plan presents many opportunities to continue to develop and co-ordinate new and existing support services.

However, it's also important to acknowledge that the third sector does not have access to the same levels of resources and workforce available to the NHS. Also, the financial challenges for charities that started around the time of the pandemic have been compounded and prolonged by the cost-of-living crisis.

**Tenovus Cancer Care works with [the Wales Cancer Alliance](#) – a coalition of 28 cancer charities, the Wales Cancer Network, and other stakeholders to increase awareness of the services it offers as well as developing others. The Plan recognises the importance of working with the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector, and we hope that this translates to closer working and involvement in areas of shared interest.**

**Thank you for your support.**

**Tenovus Cancer Care urges Members to contribute and respond to the statement.**

**For support, information about cancer, or a chat call Tenovus Cancer Care free on 08088081010, or visit our website [www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk/](http://www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk/)**

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-publication-cancer-delivery-plan>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk/media/5dpjpuvp/120613cancerplanen-2012-cancer-delivery-plan.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk/media/va3byns0/161114cancerplanen-2016-cancer-delivery-plan.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/quality-statement-cancer-html>

<sup>v</sup> Cancer Improvement Plan, Foreword (pg 2)

<sup>vi</sup> Public Health Wales (2022) Nearly four in ten cancer patients in Wales diagnosed in emergency settings <https://phw.nhs.wales/news/nearly-four-in-ten-cancer-patients-in-wales-diagnosed-in-emergency-settings/>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://walescanceralliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/What-matters-to-Wales-cancer-patients.-A-Wales-Cancer-Alliance-Report.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk/campaigning-and-influencing/all-wales-cancer-community>

<sup>ix</sup> Cancer Improvement Plan (pg7)