
RCPCH

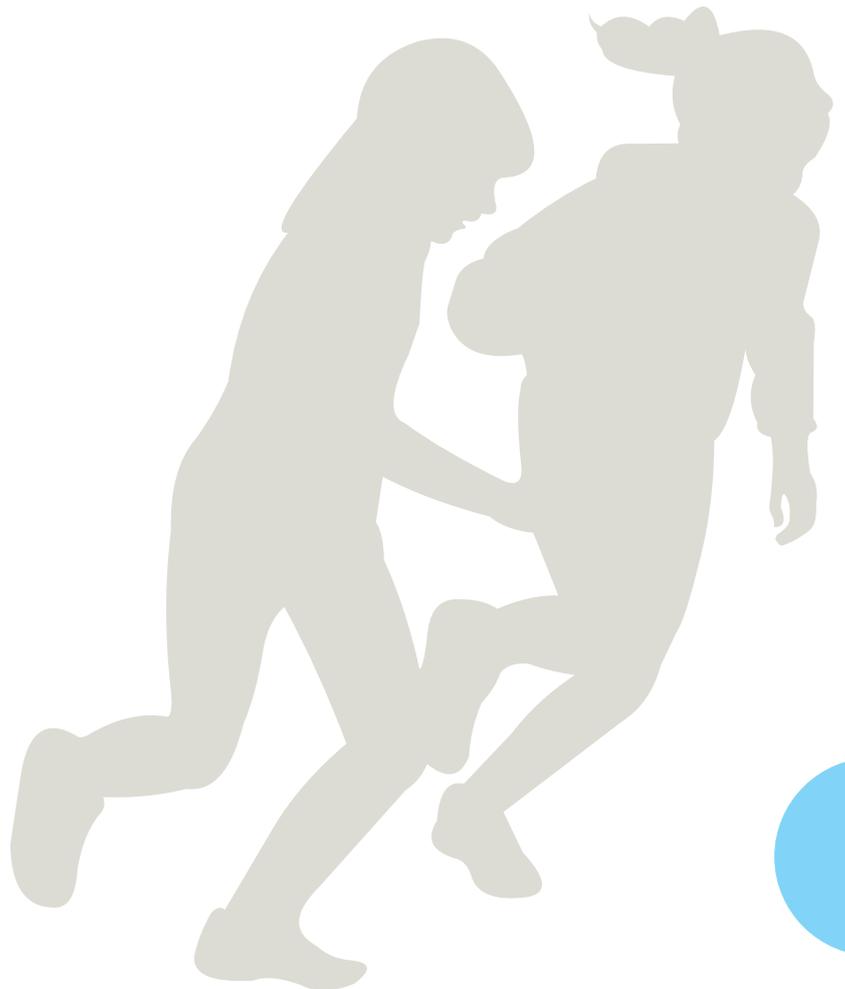
Royal College of
Paediatrics and Child Health
Wales

Coleg Brenhinol
Pediatreg a Iechyd Plant
Cymru

Leading the way in Children's Health

Child health matters

A vision for 2016 in Wales





Why we need to improve children and young people's health

Despite having one of the most advanced health systems in the world, child health outcomes across the UK are among the poorest in western Europe.

Wales continues to have the worst rates for childhood obesity and for smoking during pregnancy in the UK and child death rates in the most deprived parts of Wales are much higher than the least deprived.

At the same time healthcare services are under severe pressure. Specialist mental health support for children has seen a doubling in demand over the past four years in Wales.

Healthcare professionals clearly have a key role to play in tackling these challenges and improving child health. However, political will and leadership are also needed. There are great opportunities in Wales to use the devolved powers available to introduce evidence-based measures to promote child health and to take concerted action to make health outcomes for children and young people among the best in the world.

RCPCH Wales calls on the Welsh Government – and all political parties – to ensure child health matters by:

- 1 Preventing children and young people from becoming unwell, acting early and intervening at the right time**
- 2 Tackling child health inequalities**
- 3 Reducing the number of child deaths**
- 4 Involving children and young people in decision making**
- 5 Delivering effective healthcare for children and young people**

Foreword

1 in 3 children in Wales lives below the poverty line. The next Welsh Government – regardless of the political party or parties involved – will surely miss the 2020 target to eradicate child poverty. And child mortality rates in the most deprived parts of Wales are almost twice as high as the least deprived parts. This is why RCPCH Wales says that child health matters to us all.

Child deaths are just the tip of the iceberg. Across Wales there is variation in child health outcomes. Wales is also struggling to get to grips with public health challenges and is in the unenviable position of having the worst rates for childhood obesity, diabetes, and smoking in pregnancy of all the UK's nations. In common with other UK nations Wales also has to tackle NHS funding shortages and deliver a world-class health service.

Over the years there has been focus on the health and social care needs of older people. With the UK's highest proportion of people in this age group living in Wales this is understandable. But with more than a quarter of people in Wales under 25 years old there is an urgent need to tackle child health challenges too.

Inaction on child health means considerable human and financial costs. We know that 5 of the top 10 risk factors for the total burden of disease are started or shaped at adolescent age.

Devolution has given Wales control over at least some of the methods to promote child health. Further legislative powers and the anticipated transfer of tax and borrowing powers to Cardiff Bay will see this control increase. **Child health matters** is a collection of RCPCH Wales' recommendations for how to use these powers to benefit child health by:

- Supporting early intervention and prevention outside the health service.
- Tackling health inequalities across society.
- Reducing child deaths through targeted action.
- Designing services and forming policy **with** children and young people rather than **for** children and young people.
- Delivering effective healthcare services.

The elections in 2016 will give the public a once in a five year chance to pass judgment on the performance of Welsh politicians on their success. The year will be, therefore, a crucial one for child health and we anticipate this manifesto will provide food for thought – and debate – in 2016 and beyond.

RCPCH Officer for Wales, Dr Mair Parry



5 ways you can help us improve child health outcomes



Prevent children and young people from becoming unwell, act early and intervene at the right time

Early intervention and prevention for children's mental and physical health are crucial if we are to prevent the serious results of illness.

This approach means children grow up to be resilient adults and enjoy better health and wellbeing now. In turn this means reduced pressure on not only the health service but all public services that children and families use.

More than half of all adults with mental health problems are diagnosed in childhood, but less than half are treated in the best way. More than a quarter of children in Wales at reception age are overweight and obese. So, a new approach is needed.

There are also limits to what the NHS can do alone to tackle these child health challenges. All public services will be directly affected if Wales does not improve child health outcomes.



Recommendations

- 1 Use tax powers being devolved to Wales to introduce levies on food and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt.
- 2 Ensure local authority planning decisions include a public health impact assessment to consider the public health impact of planning decisions, e.g. on physical activity and obesity.
- 3 Introduce evidence-based personal and social education (PSE) programmes across primary and secondary schools that foster children's social and emotional health and wellbeing. These programmes should look to cover social inclusion, bullying, drug and alcohol use, mental health, and healthy relationships.
- 4 Encourage local authorities to introduce 20mph speed limits in all built-up areas to create safer environments for children to walk, cycle and play.
- 5 Offer basic mental health support training to all people who work closely with children and make early identification of potential mental health difficulties a core capacity of all health, social care and education professionals who work with children and young people.



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Tackle child health inequalities

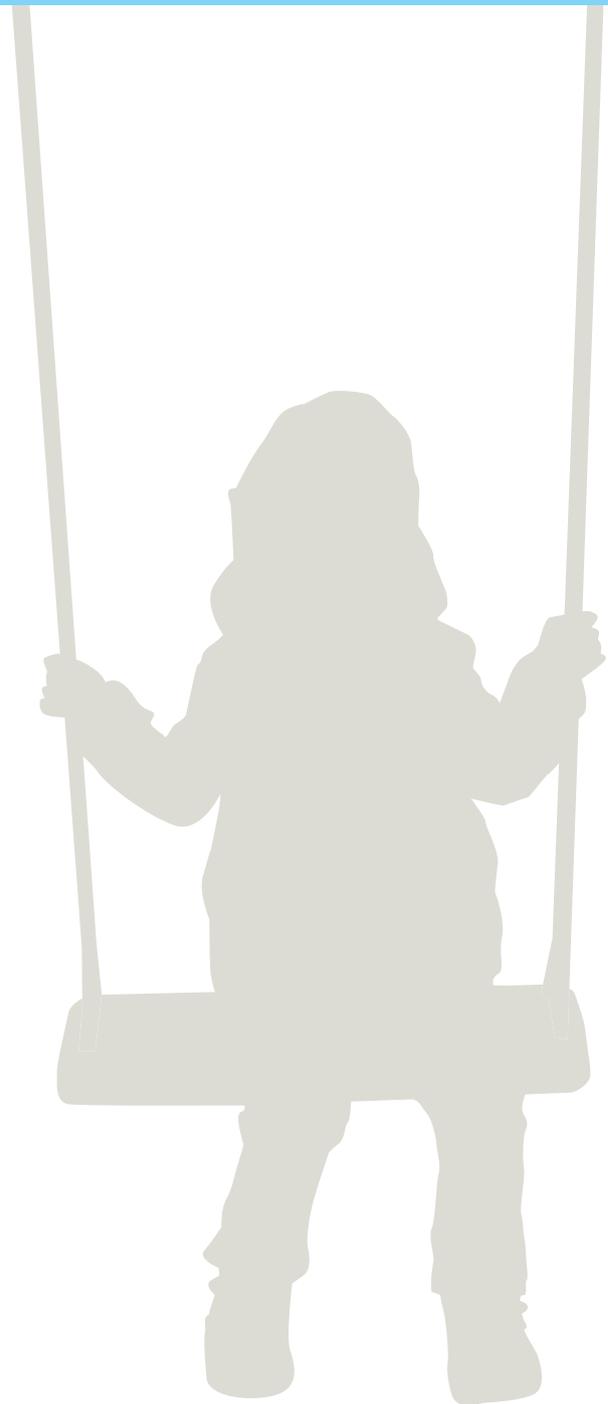
Poverty, inequality and where a family lives have a direct relationship with child health. In the worst cases these can be risk factors for premature death.

An estimated 1 in 3 children in Wales lives below the poverty line. The next Welsh Government is almost certainly going to fall far short of the target to eradicate child poverty in Wales in 2020.

This represents a collective failure that should refocus minds in Wales during the next Assembly term on the opportunities for reducing inequalities, which are strongly linked to poor child health.

Recommendations

- 1 Set and monitor new national and local targets for reducing smoking rates specifically across all stages of pregnancy and early childhood.
- 2 Introduce the Family Nurse Partnership initiative to support all first time mothers under 20 years of age and their families.
- 3 Prioritise access to health visiting services across Wales and roll-out of services in the early years (such as Flying Start) to ensure all families have access to services that can respond appropriately to their needs.
- 4 Promote parity of esteem for child mental and physical health.
- 5 Promote take-up of Vitamin D supplementation, especially by all pregnant and breastfeeding women; children under 5; and people at risk (e.g. those of Afro-Caribbean and South Asian ethnic origin and people with darker skin).



3

Reduce the number of child deaths

The UK as a whole has one of the worst child mortality rates in western Europe with an estimated 2,000 excess deaths a year compared with the best performing country. Child death rates in the most deprived parts of Wales are 70% higher than in the least deprived parts.

The shocking truth is that many of these deaths are preventable. Based on the extensive work of Public Health Wales' Child Death Review and RCPCH's research we know that the focus in the infant years should be on improving the health of mothers and preventing babies from being born early. For children in their mid-teens the focus should be on reducing suicides, self-harm and reducing accidents and injuries, especially those linked with alcohol abuse and road traffic incidents.



Recommendations

- 1 Develop a Welsh Government cross-departmental strategy for measures to address the known risk groups and factors to reduce child deaths across all ages.
- 2 Carry out an annual audit of measures taken in Local Health Boards to reduce teenage pregnancy rates and hold LHBs to account against progress.
- 3 Work with Public Health Wales to undertake a targeted awareness campaign to reduce unexpected sudden infant deaths, including the needs of more vulnerable families where multiple risk factors may be present, e.g. parental smoking, and to increase awareness of safe sleeping habits.



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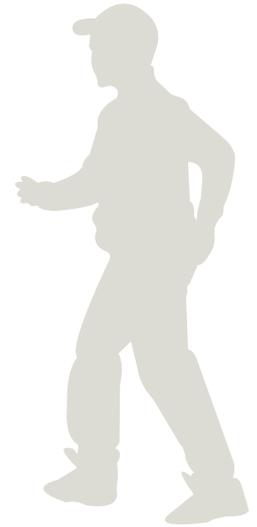
Involve children and young people in decision making in Wales

Despite early successes in children and young people's rights in Wales the past few years have seen a reduced voice for children. At present children and young people are invisible in many of the debates about the services that affect their health and wellbeing.

Children's services are not a 'bolt on' to adult services and should be co-produced with children and young people. While it is welcome that Welsh Ministers are now

required to give due regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children and young people have since lost funding for their youth parliament. This left Wales as the only nation in the UK and Europe with no independent youth assembly.

These measures will ensure there is Welsh Government accountability for delivery for children and to widen the evidence base for designing services for children.



Recommendations

- 1 Appoint a Welsh Minister for Children with lead responsibility for all policies affecting children, child rights and child health.
- 2 Introduce a cross-governmental child health strategy led by the Minister for Children.
- 3 Restore a Children's Committee in Welsh Government Cabinet with a specific remit for engaging with the views of children and young people across Wales and ensure they are included in decisions about their health and wellbeing.
- 4 Extend the National Survey for Wales and Welsh Health Survey to include children under 16 years old and to take survey responses directly from children.
- 5 Extend the duty of due regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the Rights of Children and Young Persons Measure 2011 to public services.
- 6 Provide clarity on the Children's Commissioner for Wales' role on the provision of health services for children and young people seeking asylum in the UK.





Delivering effective healthcare for children and young people



Children need a prudent healthcare approach: to access the right professional at the right place and at the right time. Integrating all care around the needs of children, young people and their families is crucial to improve health outcomes. Not only does integration mean better and more efficient services but also better experiences and outcomes.

Quite often children require input from a range of professionals, including GPs, nurses and paediatricians. All those working with children and young people should have the right knowledge and

skills - wherever they are in 'the system'. Working across professional and service boundaries should be the norm for all those who work with children and young people.

The paediatric workforce across Wales is facing considerable pressures in recruiting and retaining paediatricians and addressing shortfalls, especially in middle grade rotas. Dealing with these pressures will help child health services achieve the care standards set out by RCPCH and ensure safe and sustainable services for children across Wales.

Recommendations

- Work with the Wales Deanery, RCPCH, other stakeholders, and UK Government to develop a strategic workforce plan, which should include measures to address the child health and paediatric workforce.
- Improve support for children with medical needs in education settings and consider a duty on school governors to provide for medical needs in schools.
- Ensure protected time for NHS clinicians to contribute to and support child health research and work with UK Government and other stakeholders to establish a designated child health research fund and to increase the number of child health research posts.
- Achieve the Facing the Future: Together for Child Health standards to improve unscheduled care for children, reduce unnecessary emergency hospital attendances and increase community-provided care.
- Train every general practitioner and general practice nurse in child mental and physical health.
- Provide every child who has a long-term condition with a named doctor or health professional.



About the RCPCH

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) is responsible for training and examining paediatricians in the UK. The College has over 16,000 members in the UK (including around 650 in Wales) and abroad and sets standards for professional and postgraduate medical education. RCPCH Wales works on members' behalf to influence policy and legislation affecting paediatrics and child health.

Contact us

RCPCH is the first port of call for enquiries on child health and can provide briefings on request to policymakers and politicians.

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