



Dai Lloyd MS  
Chair, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

24 February 2021

Dear Dai,

Thank you for your letter of 3 February, in which you asked me to provide the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee with an update on Welsh Government policy on managing Long COVID to inform the inquiry into the impact of the pandemic.

I am happy to build on my latest update set out in my Written Statement of 20 January 2021. <https://gov.wales/written-statement-longer-term-effects-covid-19>

COVID-19 infection is now a global topic of research, and as the pandemic continues, we are understanding more about the disease process and its longer term impact on patient health. Whilst initially it was thought that symptoms could last a few weeks and, once they subsided, the individual could return to their previous lifestyle, it is now becoming apparent that some people experience much longer term effects.

Wales is taking part in the UK study called The Post-Hospitalisation COVID-19 Study (PHOSP COVID), funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and MRC UK Research and Innovation and led by the NIHR Leicester Biomedical Research Centre. This Urgent Public Health study has been established to assess the long-term effects of COVID-19 on patient health and recovery in 10,000 participants.

A UK-wide joint research call with funding up to £20 million has been launched by the NIHR and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). The call is for research proposals into the longer term physical and mental effects of COVID-19 in non-hospitalised individuals. Projects are expected to start early in the year and may be funded for up to 3 years.

Increasing evidence and testimony from people's experiences shows that a small, but significant number of people who contract COVID-19 are experiencing effects of weeks and even months after initially falling ill. Some estimates suggest that approximately 1 in 5 people affected by COVID-19 may still experience different groups of symptoms more than three weeks after infection; and 1 in 10 people could still be affected at three months, or longer, after initial infection.

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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.

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) has published a paper on 3 February entitled '[Long Covid - what do we know and what do we need to know?](#)'. This pulls together latest UK and international evidence and research to support policy and local action.

The paper identifies further important research questions to understand and monitor the impact of long COVID on individuals and services in Wales, and develop effective care pathways. These will require continual review as evidence needs are fulfilled through ongoing and future research studies, and as new areas of need emerge.

I turn now to your specific questions. I will answer questions 1 to 3 together and do likewise for questions 5 and 6.

**1. Whether the Welsh Government has any plans to offer long COVID sufferers help at specialist centres, similar to the approach taken by NHS England;**

**2. How the Welsh Government intends to implement NICE guidance on managing the long term effects of COVID-19;**

**3. How the Welsh Government is working with health professionals to help assess, diagnose and treat sufferers, including those experiencing the mental health effects of COVID-19;**

In Wales, our approach to Long COVID is based on *A Healthier Wales* and, therefore, founded on avoiding harm, promoting and supporting self management and value based, seamless care from the right health and care professionals or service, at or as close to home as possible and agreeing care tailored to each person's specific needs.

On 20 January 2021, I announced the launch of the NHS Wales COVID Recovery app, which provides tips and aids for monitoring progress. In addition to this app, health board websites and NHS Wales Direct/111 website offer and signpost people to a range of self-help and information resources.

To complement the NICE clinical guidelines on identifying, assessing and managing the long-term effects of COVID-19, the Welsh Government and NHS Wales have collaborated on an all Wales Community Pathway for Long COVID. This recognises some people with severe effects, such as organ damage may need more specialist advice from secondary care professionals.

Each health board is using these resources to shape and inform their local pathway. This involves bringing together GP practices and multi professional community services to put systems in place, making best use of the expertise of different health and care professionals and other resources, such as the new NHS Wales Covid Recovery app, to provide seamless care for assessment, investigation, treatment and rehabilitation support. Services and access to these may be organised and communicated according to local needs and circumstances.

**4. What funding will be available for long COVID services;**

We are investing in research into the impact of COVID 19 including its longer term effects. In terms of services to support people with Long COVID, our current expectation is that the majority of people's needs can be met from the NHS Wales COVID Recovery app and existing community services with some people requiring specialised services from secondary care. The Welsh Government has provided additional funding of £10 million to Regional Partnership Boards to facilitate timely discharge from hospital into community services offering rehabilitation support, including people recovering from COVID 19. We also recognise the increased need across Wales for easy access to tier 0/1 support for low

level mental health issues experienced by people affected directly and indirectly by the pandemic and have invested £9.9 million.

As part of its annual plan for 2021-22, each health board will need to identify their workforce and service plans to support people with Long COVID as we continue to learn more.

**5. *Whether the Welsh Government has undertaken any assessment of the potential implications of long COVID on the demand for social care services;***

**6. *What consideration is the Welsh Government giving to the management of long COVID in social care settings (for example, the impact on staff returning to work, impact on unpaid carers);***

Throughout the pandemic, officials and Ministers have continued to keep in close contact with representative organisations of service users, unpaid carers, staff, providers, and local government in order to understand the impacts of COVID, including long COVID.

Going forward, as part of the development of a plan for stabilisation and reconstruction, the Welsh Government intends to work in close collaboration with the social care sector to ensure that the experience of people receiving care and support, unpaid carers and staff is central to our recovery planning.

This will be particularly important to recognise the experiences of those groups who have been most affected by the pandemic, especially the social care needs of those who are impacted by long COVID, but also those who provide care and support for them, whether paid or unpaid.

**7. *Whether the Welsh Government has commissioned any research into long COVID, including details of the role and remit of the Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre;***

Welsh Government have not directly commissioned any research into long-COVID, however Wales is taking part in the UK study called The Post-Hospitalisation COVID-19 Study (PHOSP COVID), funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and MRC UK Research and Innovation and led by the NIHR Leicester Biomedical Research Centre. This Urgent Public Health study has been established to assess the long-term effects of COVID-19 on patient health and recovery in 10,000 participants.

Studies from a recently closed UK-wide funding call will focus on non-hospitalised patients and longer-term effects of COVID-19, and an Office for National Statistics study underway will quantify and characterise post-acute physical and mental health complications of COVID-19.

The COVID pandemic has illustrated the centrality of research and evidence to health and care in Wales, and their importance to decision making at every level in the health and care system.

The Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre is a 24 month investment of £3M and will provide a Welsh-specific programme of research, evidence synthesis and knowledge mobilisation to meet priorities and urgent needs arising from the coronavirus pandemic. It is planned that the Centre, led by Professor Adrian Edwards of Cardiff University and on behalf of Welsh Government will be operational from 1 March.

The Centre will respond rapidly to urgent questions to which Ministers, senior officials, and NHS and social care leaders need answers, such as the long-term effects of the pandemic and investigating challenges such as infection control and social distancing, the consequences of isolation and the health effects of the economic disruption. Research

evidence is needed to help us understand these impacts and what measures might be used to mitigate adverse impacts.

The Centre will focus of welsh evidence need, where there is a clear current gap in the research knowledge landscape in order to make a distinctive contribution to health, wellbeing and care.

The Centre will work closely with the Covid-19 Technical Advisory Group to ensure that it addresses the most pertinent and pressing issues for policy, practice and the public.

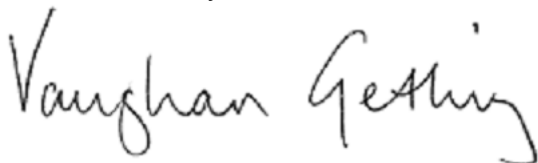
***8. Whether the Welsh Government is aware of any work being undertaken by health boards to manage the long term effects of COVID-19, and what role will the Welsh Government play in promoting learning or sharing of best practice between health boards.***

Last autumn, as we began to learn that some people experience long term effects from the COVID-19, Dr Andrew Goodall, NHS Wales Chief Executive, wrote to health boards asking them to start developing and implementing local pathways and protocols for assessing and responding to Long COVID. Dr Goodall requested each Director of Therapies and health Sciences to take the lead in co-ordinating these plans and for updating the Welsh Government on progress.

The Directors of Therapies and Health Sciences have a well-established peer group which is facilitating the sharing of learning about services for Long COVID and is overseeing action best done 'once for Wales'. This includes training and education resources and a national 'landing page' with links to a wide range of resources. My officials liaise closely with this peer group on a fortnightly basis and with the peer group of Associate Medical Directors on a weekly basis.

I trust this letter provides a clear picture of action being taken on Long COVID including research to inform future and continuous review of our approach.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vaughan Gething". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Vaughan Gething AS/MS**

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol  
Minister for Health and Social Services