

Petitions Committee
Senedd Cymru
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN

9th September 2024

Dear Members of the Petitions Committee,

I would like to express our thanks for the opportunity to contribute to your upcoming discussion on Targeted Lung Cancer Screening.

In light of the Cabinet Secretary's letter, the attached has been submitted to help inform this work.

If you would like anymore information, please do not hesitate to contact myself in the first instance.

Yours sincerely,



Simon Scheeres

Public Affairs Manager (Wales)

Cancer Research UK

What are your thoughts on the attached document?

Background to the petition

Last year, our petition was created by a coalition of charities. This was launched due to the lack of clarity around how the implementation of this screening programme was to progress in Wales. The petition followed on from an open letter to the previous Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, found [here](#). We are delighted that the petition secured over 5,000 signatures, and was able to contribute towards advancing this screening in Wales.

Since the petition, the Welsh Government has launched a welcomed scoping exercise (outlined in the document). Cancer Research UK (CRUK) and Tenovus Cancer Care represent the third sector at this forum, and also reflect the public/patient perspective. CRUK sits on similar groups across the UK, and we are impressed with the project management of this exercise. The group is well-chaired, well-attended, and holds informed progress reports that effectively map developments.

We believe this group puts into practice the Welsh Government's commitment to '[engage](#)' with a range of stakeholders to inform this screening in Wales. We would like to see this engagement continue.

The challenge

Despite the above, we know that launching a national Targeted Lung Cancer Screening programme (TLCS) will present challenges. These challenges will likely include: workforce issues, diagnostic equipment shortages, lack of accurate smoking data, and the impact of stage shift in diagnosis ¹. Wales has the benefit of taking learnings from other nations who are further along in scoping and delivering this screening in their respective health systems (chiefly England). In light of this, we encourage the Welsh Government to be proactive in taking learnings from the UK task group, to mitigate potential barriers for this screening in Wales.

While we mark the urgency of rolling out this screening in Wales, we also recognise the need to ensure that planning is robust. This should staple patient safety, efficiency, value for money; and should ultimately meet the needs of a new screening programme for Wales. Striking the right balance will be key.

Implementing this screening for Wales

Due to our population size, health system structure, and our national smoking cessation services (already embedded within Welsh health boards), Wales has the opportunity to lead in this area of screening. This foundation provides a great opportunity to launch this screening across Wales, following the completion of the scoping work in Autumn 2025.

Since the petition, it is worth noting there has been a positive shift in the Welsh Government's communications around this screening. Initially, the Welsh Government only agreed to this screening '[in principle](#)'. In light of this, it has been positive to see this principle turn into reality via the scoping exercise.

¹ A shift towards diagnosis at stage I & II of lung cancer through screening will likely have a knock-on effect on the health system, potentially changing the types of treatments which might be used.

Does it adequately address the issues that you raised?

While it is positive to see in the document that the Welsh Government is committed to following the UK National Screening Committee's guidance; it would be helpful to hear if this translates to a firm policy commitment towards this screening in Wales. The document outlines positive steps taken, which is encouraging, but a ministerial policy decision is not included. The need for a policy decision on this screening was marked within the current Cancer Improvement Plan for Wales (and was expected in March 2023)².

Do you have further questions in response?

It would be helpful if the Petitions Committee could ask the following questions to the Welsh Government. We are committed to supporting the Welsh Government navigate the below (in terms of providing evidence, policy guidance, and health system insights).

- What outstanding barriers or unanswered questions remain that need to be addressed in order for the Welsh Government to produce a ministerial policy commitment towards a national TLCS programme?
- If a national TLCS programme is launched, will the Welsh Government set itself the ambition for a full rollout to all those who are eligible in Wales (in line with the UK NSC's recommendations)? Or is this to be decided after the scoping exercise?
- How are the Welsh Government planning to understand and ultimately address broader issues that are out of the control of a lung screening programme and its accompanying scoping exercise – e.g. workforce capacity, and IT infrastructure?

Is there anything additional that you would like the Committee to know at this stage, either in response to this document or as an update to the Committee?

UK Progress

While the previous Cabinet Secretary is correct in highlighting that 'none of the UK nations has implemented a lung screening programme as yet', this does not mean that other nations are not making considerable headway towards this screening (chiefly England).

In June 2023, the then UK Government's Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Steve Barclay, announced the [rollout of a new targeted lung cancer screening programme](#) in England.

Within the above, the UK Government highlighted its progress of the initial pilot phase of this screening in England (lung health check programme). It marked:

*'During the initial phase, almost **900,000 people were invited for checks, 375,000 risk assessments made and 200,000 scans were carried out.** More than 2,000 people were detected as having cancer, 76% at an earlier stage compared to 29% in 2019 outside of the programme ³.*

² NHS Wales. 2023. Cancer Improvement Plan for Wales. Available here: executive.nhs.wales/functions/networks-and-planning/cancer/cancer-improvement-plan-docs/full-plan/

³ UK Government. 2023. New lung cancer screening roll out to detect cancer sooner. Available from: [New lung cancer screening roll out to detect cancer sooner.](#)

The above translates to almost a million ever-smokers being invited to lung health checks in England, with over 200,000 scans conducted, and a significant number of cancers already found. The above programme is available in many parts of England and lays the foundations for a national screening programme (within England's current phased approach/launch of this screening). NHS England will be [rolling out the programme](#) with a focus on reaching 40% of the eligible population by 2025, and plans to reach 100% coverage by March 2030.

In addition, NHS Scotland are carrying out additional pilots for this screening in Scotland.

We would like to draw the Committee's attention to the progress above, and ask that they consider this in their discussion; and correspondence with the Welsh Government.

In light of the above, it would also be beneficial to consider whether the Welsh Government should swiftly implement this screening once the scoping exercise concludes in Autumn 2025.

Equity of access

We are acutely aware of the disparity in patient access to this screening across the UK. Currently, this screening is only available in certain areas of the UK (predominantly England). With the exception of the operational pilot currently underway in Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB, this screening is not available in Wales.

Why is this screening important?

Lung cancer takes more lives than any other type of cancer in Wales.

A key driver behind this is late diagnosis, as 72% of Welsh lung cancer patients with a known stage at diagnosis are diagnosed at the latest stage (stages 3 & 4) ⁴. But when lung cancer is caught early there is a better chance of survival, as **87%** of people diagnosed with lung cancer at the earliest stage survive their disease for one year or more. In comparison, only **17%** of those diagnosed at the latest stage survive their disease for one year or more⁵. We have the opportunity to help change this.

Interventions such as targeted lung cancer screening are proven to support earlier diagnosis: when there are more treatment options and outcomes are improved.

UK pilots of this screening have seen 76% of lung cancers diagnosed at an early stage ⁶. Larger international trials have also reported that this screening can diagnose more lung cancers at an earlier stage and can reduce deaths from lung cancer ⁷.

Addressing health inequalities caused by smoking

Lung cancer disproportionately affects people from more deprived communities in Wales. Tobacco is a key driver for this, as in Wales smoking rates are more than three times higher in our most

⁴ Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit (WCISU). Cancer Incidence in Wales (2019 data). Available from: <https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/welsh-cancer-intelligence-and-surveillance-unit-wcisu/>

⁵ Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit (WCISU). Cancer Survival in Wales (2016-2020 data). Available from: <https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/welsh-cancer-intelligence-and-surveillance-unit-wcisu/cancer-reporting-tool-official-statistics/cancer-survival/>

⁶ UK Government.2023. New Lung Cancer Screening roll out to detect cancer sooner. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-lung-cancer-screening-roll-out-to-detect-cancer-sooner>

⁷ National Lung Screening Trial Research Team. 2011. Reduced lung-cancer mortality with low-dose computed tomographic screening. N Engl J Med. ;365(5):395-409. doi: 10.1056/NEJMoa1102873. Epub 2011 Jun 29. PMID: 21714641; PMCID: PMC4356534. Available from: <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/nejmoa1102873>

deprived communities compared to our least (2022-2023)⁸. This translates to higher rates of smoking-related disease amongst lower socio-economic groups (lung cancer).

This screening would target people with a history of smoking within the UK NSC's screening age bracket (55-74), and would not only signpost to stop smoking services (prevention), but would also invite this cohort to a lung health check (screening).

In implementing the above, we can address long-standing health disparities experienced by certain groups at the highest risk of smoking-related harm in Wales. This is outlined as a priority within the Welsh Government's Smokefree Wales strategy⁹.

⁸ Welsh Government.2022. Adult lifestyles by area deprivation, 2020-21 onwards. Available from: [Adult lifestyles by area deprivation, 2020-21 onwards \(gov.wales\)](#)

⁹ Welsh Government. 2021. A Smokefree Wales. Available from: [A smoke-free Wales: Our long-term tobacco control strategy \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)