

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Cyllid](#) ar [Cyllideb Ddrafft Llywodraeth Cymru 2025-26](#).

This response was submitted to the [Finance Committee](#) consultation on the [Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025-26](#).

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This document provides a translation of correspondence received from the Royal College of Psychiatrists.



Evidence from the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Wales to the Finance Committee's consultation on the Welsh Government's Draft Budget 2025-26

About RCPsych in Wales

The Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych) is the professional medical body responsible for supporting psychiatrists throughout their careers and setting and raising the standards of psychiatry. The aim of the College is to improve outcomes for people with mental illness and intellectual disabilities and to improve the mental health of individuals, their families and their communities. RCPsych Wales represents more than 600 consultant and trainee psychiatrists working in Wales.

We are pleased to submit this written evidence as part of the Finance Committee's consultation on the Welsh Government's Draft Budget for 2025-26. These are general comments that highlight areas that we believe the government should prioritise when setting the budget for next year.

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Prioritising Mental Health

RCPsych Wales welcomes the Welsh Government's historic focus on promoting mental health, particularly in light of recent financial constraints. However, continued and increased investment is needed now more than ever.

From improving the wellbeing of the population to promoting preventative expenditure, from increasing access to services to workforce recruitment and retention, the case for prioritising mental health within the 2025-26 budget is clear.

Reflecting this, mental health was a key issue highlighted in a Finance Committee [report](#) following public engagement sessions earlier this year:

*“Further views were expressed in relation to mental health, describing the **current provision as being a “postcode lottery”** ... It was also suggested that there was a gap between the support offered by schools and services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) – and that **this needed to be addressed.***

*“Participants felt more should be done to offer preventative approaches to poor mental health either through community or cultural projects. Therapy services were described as **insufficient due to long wait times** to access them or only being able to access them for a limited period of time.*

*“Key services for vulnerable pupils, particularly relating to mental health and additional learning needs (ALN) support, are **needed more than ever** but often these are the services that have been cut or are seen as ‘nice to haves’. **Further cuts in this area could be catastrophic** for pupils’ learning outcomes and the mental health and wellbeing of young people.”*

Mental Health Funding

Funding Mental Health Services

The Welsh Government should commit again to earmarking the budget for mental health services in 2025-26, as it has done in previous years.

The total allocation has increased year on year recently, from £760.885 million in 2022-23, to £773.639 million in 2023-24, to £799.782 million in 2024-25. Similar progress should be made in 2025-26 to continue to support health boards to meet the inevitable growth in costs and demand for mental health services.

The Welsh Government should monitor this allocation carefully to ensure that health boards achieve measurable, sustained improvements and stronger performance in mental health services.

The Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) [Annual Report 2023-24](#) warns of "committed and determined staff ... clearly under pressure from a shortage of mental health beds". In relation to CAMHS, "concerns about waiting times for young people awaiting a first appointment, and any following support or treatment", as well as "challenges where children transition from child to adult

services". HIW summarizes that "delayed access to mental health services had become all too common and this was placing additional pressure on staff and patients". It is therefore unsurprising that mental health emerged as one of HIW's main concerns during the reporting period.

The Welsh Government should listen to these warnings and prioritise its budget to support the safety and wellbeing of the mental health workforce and patients.

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategies

The Welsh Government has recently consulted on its 10-year draft strategies on Mental Health and Mental Wellbeing and Suicide and Self Harm Prevention. This comes at a time when the welfare of the population is under stress.

The [latest results](#) of the National Survey for Wales reveal that only 13% of the population have high mental wellbeing. This compares to 32% and 55% who say they have low and medium mental wellbeing respectively. In addition, almost half (44%) of respondents to a [recent Public Health Wales survey](#) said that the rising cost of living has had a negative impact on their mental health. There is therefore an urgent need to improve mental health outcomes.

We welcome the fact that a costed Delivery Plan will accompany the final versions of both strategies. **In setting its budget for 2025-26, it is essential that the Welsh Government prioritises these Delivery Plans and gives them sufficient resources to turn each vision statement and objective into a reality.**

We look forward to scrutinising the Delivery Plans when they are published early in the new year.

Workforce

Investing in the health workforce is essential to strengthening Wales' mental health care infrastructure, increasing access to services, and tackling waiting times.

Moving forward, the Welsh Government must continue to prioritise investment in the Strategic Mental Health Workforce Plan and the associated Action Plan, learning from the evaluation of year 1 that has been commissioned and through direct engagement with professional bodies, such as the Royal Colleges.

We welcome efforts by Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) to secure an increase of 8 core psychiatry places each year from 2022-25. However, workforce challenges remain and there is room for greater ambition. The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) consultant psychiatrists working for NHS Wales in June 2023 (193.1) was down 9.8% from September 2013 (214.0).

Without a stronger and better supported mental health workforce, fewer people with mental illness will get the care and support they need. This will be detrimental to all patients, especially those with severe mental illness.

Specialised Capacity

At present, too many people with a serious mental illness are sent out of their local area for treatment. This practice can harm patients by adding to their distress, separating them from their friends and family, and slowing their recovery. **It is also costly.**

On 1 March 2024, for example, 48 acute mental health patients in the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board area were being treated outside that area, at a daily cost of £35,589.76.

We know that treating patients close to their homes speeds recovery, reduces the risk of suicide and shortens hospital stays. **Increasing the number of local inpatient beds is therefore essential to improving outcomes for people with severe mental illness, and the money spent on settings outside the area should be reallocated accordingly.**

Increased and expanded specialist capacity must also extend to the community setting, where **more investment is needed in local rehabilitation and recovery services.** This reflects the importance of other social factors,

such as supported housing, education and employment opportunities, for recovery in people with severe mental illness.

Prevention and Research

In 2022, the Institute of Mental Health and the London School of Economics (LSE) gave a conservative [estimate](#) that mental health problems cost Wales at least £4.8 billion a year.

Given that most mental illnesses begin before adulthood, improving mental health early in life would help to reduce inequalities, improve physical health, reduce health risk behaviors and increase life expectancy, economic productivity, and quality of life.

Therefore, more investment in prevention and early intervention programmes should be a key priority for the Welsh Government in looking ahead to the 2025-26 budget.

Alongside this, more capital funding should be allocated to health boards and universities for research and development in mental health, including for the prevention agenda. Such additional funding could facilitate the development of innovative interventions and evidence-based practices and improve treatment approaches.

Mental health research is underfunded compared to the burden of illness. In 2018, [research analysis](#) by the UK Clinical Research Collaboration showed that mental health research accounted for only 6.1% of the total UK health research budget.

Improvements in Data

Unlike [the UK Government in England](#), the Welsh Government does not collect statistics centrally on the prevalence or profile of serious mental illness in Wales.

The Welsh Government has estimated that serious mental illness affects 1 in 50 people in Wales - which equates to 2% of the population, or 62,150 people.

However, [more recent research](#) by Cardiff University's Welsh Governance Centre noted that the proportion of people in Wales experiencing serious mental health problems more than doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is therefore clear that more accurate and routine data collection is needed to properly understand and meet the needs of the severely mentally ill population in Wales.

RCPsych Wales believes that the Welsh Government should commission and fund a National Audit of serious mental illness. This would establish an evidence base that would be the basis for developing better support and service provision, informed by lived experience.