

“Closing the gap”

Addressing cancer inequalities in Wales



Wales Cancer Alliance 2016 manifesto call:

Wales has to act to close the gap between the best and the rest

In a country the size of Wales, there is no excuse for inconsistent, patchy, unequal cancer care. The Wales Cancer Alliance wants to see all the political parties place priority on tackling inequalities in how we diagnose, treat, support and help people living with cancer.

Closing the gap between the best and the rest

Cancer is one of the biggest causes of premature death in Wales and the UK. Cancer has accounted for nearly a third (29%) of all deaths registered in 2013 and was also the most common broad cause of death in 2012 (29% of all deaths)¹. However, the lives of people living with cancer have changed dramatically over the last decade with more people living with cancer as a chronic condition than ever before. Around 19,000 people are diagnosed with cancer each year here in Wales.

The Welsh Government acknowledges that **“we need to drive down variation between Local Health Boards and Trust across Wales as well as the variation between the experiences of people with different types of cancer”²**.

Figures published by the Wales Cancer Surveillance and Intelligence Unit in 2015 found that alarmingly, the variation has increased:

“The incidence rate [of cancer] in the most deprived areas [of Wales] was 16.3 per cent higher than in the least deprived areas for 2002 – 2006 and increased to 22.5 per cent higher in 2009 – 2013”³

During 2013, the combined mortality rate across all cancer’s decreased in all deprivation areas. The greatest decrease being in the least deprived areas, which has led to an increased gap in variation, resulting in cancer mortality still being almost 50 per cent higher in the most deprived areas of Wales compared to the least deprived.”⁴

Inequalities still exist in incidence, outcomes and experience, from prevention through to treatment and living with and beyond cancer. This must be tackled as a priority.

Examples of inequalities

With regard to prevention, **we know that smoking is more prevalent among more deprived groups** and this means that these people are more likely to develop smoking-related diseases, such as cancer.

¹ Office of National Statistics (2013)

² Welsh Government (2014) [Wales Cancer Patient Experience Survey 2013](#), Wales: Welsh Government / Macmillan / Quality Health: p5

³ Wales Cancer Surveillance and Intelligence Unit (2015) cancer in Wales 2013: p14

⁴ Wales Cancer Surveillance and Intelligence Unit (2015) cancer in Wales 2013: p14

We also know that there are inequalities in access to cancer treatments. A 2007 study in the British Journal of Cancer found that **older women were less likely to receive standard treatment for breast cancer than younger women.** Furthermore, this trend increased with age so that the oldest women fared least well.

There are many other groups that experience a whole range of inequalities in cancer and these can be complex. For example, people from the most affluent areas are more likely to develop skin cancer; however, they have better survival rates than those from the more deprived areas.

To close the gap between the best and the rest the Wales Cancer Alliance wants to see:

Full implementation of the Cancer Delivery Plan

We want to see all actions in the Cancer Delivery Plan delivered. This includes all stages of the cancer pathway from prevention, early detection through treatment and beyond to living with cancer and survivorship.

More consistency of delivery

It is important that service improvement and cancer care is driven by robust evidence and data. More needs to be done to use existing data to inform better and more consistent service delivery, to identify gaps in services and performance, and where improvements can and must be made.

Close the gap between the best and the rest

Ultimately, by 2021 at the end of the next Assembly term, the Wales Cancer Alliance wants to see a reduction in the variation of cancer incidence and outcomes across Wales.

Please see our policy priorities document for more details on what needs to be done in Wales to improve these areas.

For further information please contact;
Susan Morris, Chair, Wales Cancer Alliance
SMorris@macmillan.org.uk
Tel: 01656 867974

Wales Cancer Alliance

Breast Cancer Care, Cancer Research Wales, Cancer Research UK, Clic Sergeant, Teenage Cancer Trust, Hospices Cymru, Macmillan Cancer Support, Prostate Cancer UK, Maggie's, Marie Curie, Myeloma UK and Tenovus. <http://www.walescanceralliance.org.uk/>