

PRESS RELEASE

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Health watchdog says too many people in Wales are still waiting too long to get the eye care services they need

Community Health Councils (CHCs) in Wales are concerned that too many people in Wales are still at risk of “irreversible harm or significant adverse outcome” because they are waiting too long for an eye care appointment.

CHCs are an independent watchdog of NHS services within Wales. They encourage and enable members of the public to be actively involved in decisions affecting the design, development and delivery of healthcare for their families and local communities.

In 2016 CHCs in Wales published a national report raising concerns about long waits for people needing a first or follow up appointment for eye care services. Since then health boards across Wales have taken a range of actions to address long waits, and have shown a real commitment to improving eye care services for people living in their areas.

Some of the actions taken by health boards have clear benefits for people. For example, the introduction of community-led services means people can get to their appointment closer to home. Extending the roles of some eye-care professionals is also appearing to help release consultant capacity.

The Welsh Government has introduced new measures so that performance can be better monitored and improvement actions targeted at those most at risk of permanent harm.

These actions have not yet led to a better service for far too many people.

John Pearce, Chair of the Board of Community Health Councils in Wales, said:

“Too many people are still waiting too long to access the eye care services they need. According to the Welsh Government’s new measures this means that, in August 2019, over 40,000 people in Wales were at risk of “irreversible harm or significant adverse outcome” as a result.

This is simply not good enough. More clearly needs to be done so that people across Wales get the eye care treatment they need where and when they need it.

Learning from the progress that has been made in some areas, the Welsh Government and the NHS in Wales need to do more. In particular, further action is needed to:

- reduce the current backlog of people waiting for appointments
- make sure longer term plans are capable of providing an equitable service that meets the increasing demand for eye care services across Wales”.

The CHCs say that they will continue to monitor how things are going in their areas.

ENDS

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NOTE TO EDITORS

The Board of CHCs represents the collective voice of the 7 CHCs in Wales.

CHCs are the independent watch-dog of NHS services within Wales. They encourage and enable members of the public to be actively involved in decisions affecting the design, development and delivery of healthcare for their families and local communities.

Acting on behalf of their local population, CHCs routinely monitor the performance of NHS services in their area as well as respond to service developments and changes.

CHCs maintain a continuous dialogue with the public through a wide range of community networks, direct contact with patients, families and carers through enquiries, a Complaints Advocacy Service, visiting activities and through public and Patient surveys.

Each of the 7 CHCs in Wales represents the "Patient voice" within their respective geographical areas.