



**Janet Finch-Saunders MS|AS**  
Aelod Senedd Cymru dros Aberconwy  
Member of the Welsh Parliament for Aberconwy



Lynne Neagle MS,  
Deputy Minister for Mental Health and  
Wellbeing,  
Welsh Government,  
*By Email*  
16 August 2021  
**Re: Mental Health**

Office of Janet Finch-Saunders MS,  
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The Welsh Parliament,  
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Dear Deputy Minister, Lynne,

I hope that this letter finds you well. It was with considerable interest that I read your press release in relation to how funding to improve support for people presenting in mental health crisis is making a difference.

Like yourself, I want to see all individuals empowered to access the appropriate support service for them, when and where they need it. Whilst I welcome the positive experience you recently had during a visit to an out-of-hours sanctuary service, a mental health community admissions service, and the 111 mental health crisis helpline team at Swansea Bay University Health Board, I hope that you will agree that the mental health crisis is a long way from being addressed across Wales.

The severity of the situation is apparent from the Public Health Wales (PHW) publication *COVID-19 in Wales: The impact on levels of health care use and mental health of the clinically extremely vulnerable*. This is the first quantitative study exploring the mental health outcomes amongst the clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) population in Wales. The findings suggest that from March to September 2020, 1 in 50 of the CEV population had a clinical record of depression and/or anxiety, and of them nearly 1 in 5 had no previous history of mental ill health. Whilst it is noted that further insights into the impact of the pandemic on both the general population and the CEV population are needed to help inform the support available to those at greatest risk of exacerbation of past mental ill health or new onset, it is highlighted that early identification, support and management is essential to prevent an increasing longer-term burden of poor mental health.

PHW are correct: early identification, support and management are essential. According to Part 1, Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010, there is a duty to carry out a mental health assessment. Whilst I welcome this, the percentage of LPMHSS assessments undertaken within 28 days of referral

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are only at 72.4% across Wales, and with rates as low as 13.3% at Cardiff and Vale University Local Health Board. In fact, the only other health board under the national percentage average is Betsi Cadwaladr, so I would be grateful if you could outline what action you are taking to ensure that there is parity in the standards of service being provided, because the evidence is clear that at present residents in Cardiff and North Wales have to wait longer for assessments than should they live within other health board areas.

Analysis undertaken at the Wales Governance Centre has revealed that the share of people experiencing severe mental health issues increased from 11.7% during the period immediately before the pandemic to 28.1% by April 2020. Whilst I have already outlined the problem of individuals accessing assessments, the situation is even more severe. I am aware of cases where individuals have been assessed but then have encountered extreme difficulties in liaising with a Community Mental Health Team, and seen progress stalled through inconsistency with staff. It follows that it would be appreciated if you could outline what actions are being taken to support individuals delivering mental health services so that they are more likely to remain in post.

Finally, as I have made clear in Plenary previously, I support the calls of the Royal College of GPs in Wales for a dedicated mental health worker at each GP practice across Wales. I would be pleased if you could explore the proposal further because by improving access we could help ensure that patients are provided with a balanced discussion to allow for a review into what support is wanted and what assistance is available.

Yours sincerely

**Janet Finch-Saunders MS/AS**