



Adferiad's 'Let's Get Physical' Health Care Campaign 2024

Background

People living with a mental illness and people with substance use, addiction, and/or other complex conditions have a lower life expectancy than the rest of the population. People are dying earlier from heart disease, stroke, cancer, and other preventable conditions, largely due to inequalities in health and social care outcomes experienced by these often neglected and marginalised groups of people. In addition, risk factors for these conditions are not being managed as well as they are in the wider population.

Cardiovascular disease is the single biggest and potentially preventable cause of premature mortality among people living with a severe mental illness (Brown et al; 2010), with other major causes due to a higher burden of cancer and liver disease. The prevalence of type 2 diabetes is two to three times higher for people who have a severe mental illness and rates of undiagnosed diabetes are up to 70% for people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia compared to around 25% in the wider population.

People affected by addiction and/or drug or alcohol use may neglect proper nutrition and become unhealthy. Poor dietary habits and lack of self-care can contribute to physical health problems and reduce life expectancy. Regular use of substances can compromise the immune system, making individuals more susceptible to infections and illnesses. This weakened immune response can contribute to overall health deterioration.

People with mental health and/or substance use problems often face challenges in accessing quality healthcare, leading to delayed or inadequate treatment for physical health issues.

Healthcare disparities contribute to poorer health outcomes and lower life expectancy. People are also less likely to be involved in screening and prevention programmes for disease such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, and are less likely to use preventative medication such as statins, etc.

Smoking is a proven and well-known risk factor for cancer, respiratory disease, and circulatory disease which are all major causes for premature mortality among people with mental health and/or substance use problems. Smoking rates are significantly higher, particularly among people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia, than for the wider population.

Diagnostic overshadowing can result in a lack of treatment for physical health conditions in people living with a mental illness. This is where a healthcare professional's judgment is biased or overshadowed by a patient's existing mental health condition, leading to the misattribution of physical symptoms to mental illness and potentially resulting in misdiagnosis or inadequate treatment of physical health issues.

Ten years ago, Adferiad ran its first 'Let's Get Physical' healthcare campaign. It was supported by the then First Minister, Carwyn Jones, and launched in May 2014 by then Health Minister Mark Drakeford and reached its climax on World Mental Health Day 2014 when Mark and Kevin Brennan MP attended and spoke at the final campaign event held in St Fagan's, Cardiff.

The 2014 campaign saw over 300 people receiving a physical health check in Adferiad's mobile health clinic that travelled across Wales. These health checks found that:

- 18% of people had above threshold blood pressure
- 47% of people had above threshold blood glucose levels
- 10% of people had both above threshold blood pressure and blood glucose levels

People who were found to have above threshold blood pressure or blood glucose levels were advised and supported to make an early appointment with their GP, and further support was provided through each of Adferiad's local services.

Adferiad's 2024 campaign will also offer people the opportunity to have a ten-minute healthcare check at each of the seven campaign events taking place across Wales between May and September (see dates below). This will involve blood pressure monitoring, blood sugar monitoring, checking height and weight, asking about smoking status, diet, etc. and we will publish anonymised results of these health care checks at the end of the campaign.

Campaign Aims

There are many factors that contribute to the high disparity in life expectancy, including socioeconomic status, access to quality healthcare, environmental conditions, lifestyle choices, genetic predispositions, and the prevalence of chronic diseases. This campaign will highlight these factors and make proposals for reducing the health and social care inequalities faced by these highly marginalised groups of people.

The campaign will also involve working with people who use mental health services and people who access substance use and addiction services, as well as working alongside partner organisations. These collaborations aim to support people becoming empowered to actively advocate for their own physical health care needs, assist people in establishing their personal health objectives, and taking proactive steps to enhance their physical well-being by:

- Increasing awareness about the relationship between mental and physical health, emphasising that one significantly impacts the other
- Highlighting the positive impact of addressing physical health on mental health and substance use treatment outcomes.
- Promoting physical healthcare as a preventive measure, emphasising the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle to mitigate the risk of mental health challenges
- Encouraging and supporting people in ensuring all aspects of physical health care are included in their care plans, including actions to address diet, smoking, physical activity, etc. as well as including management of the side effects of medication
- Encouraging and supporting people to have regular health checks from their GP and making sure all identified issues are being addressed
- Utilising social media platforms and online communities to share information, resources, and success stories

Campaign Action

Each campaign event will:

- Include the opportunity for people to have a physical health check carried out by trained staff and have access to an Interactive Health Check tool
- Have a range of information and advice available relating to diet and nutrition, physical activity, how to reduce or quit smoking, healthy living, what help, advice, and support is available across the region from third sector and statutory sector partners

- Provide an opportunity to meet with other people who use services, as well as local/regional third sector and statutory service providers
- Give service users and carers the opportunity to say how well they think services are being provided and get people's ideas on what is working well and what needs to be improved
- Be fun and give everyone the opportunity to engage in physical activities or attend wellbeing sessions

Campaign Partners

Adferiad will work with a range of partner organisations to highlight, promote, and encourage a greater emphasis on physical healthcare.

Our partners are:

- Alcohol Change
- Bipolar UK
- Carers Wales
- Diabetes UK
- Diverse Cymru
- Macmillan Cancer Support
- Royal College of GPs
- RCS
- St Giles Trust
- Thrombosis UK
- Unison



Campaign Timescale

17.5.24: Carmarthen - Halliwell Centre - Launch event

12.6.24: Wrexham - Queensway Stadium

02.7.24: Pontypridd – University of South Wales

23.7.24: Powys - Royal Welsh Show

23.8.24: Cwmbran – Congress Theatre

30.8.24: Cardiff – Cardiff Metropolitan University

12.9.24: Swansea - Swansea University Sports Centre

What are we asking to be done?

- We ask Health Boards to ensure that people with mental health and/or substance use problems receive regular health screenings to monitor for physical health conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, obesity, etc.
- We ask Health Boards to ensure that all staff working within primary care services are made aware of a patient's mental health and/or substance use problem, and make appropriate provision for any specific needs that person may have
- We ask Health Boards to ensure that Care and Treatment Plans (for people using secondary mental health services) and Care Plans for others, include outcomes relating to people's physical health care needs
- We ask Health Boards to ensure that reviews of Care and Treatment Plans or Care Plans include the monitoring of medication side effects and their impact on physical health to ensure that medication is adjusted as needed to minimise adverse effects on physical health and promote medication adherence
- We ask local authorities to ensure that Carers' Assessments routinely include an assessment of the physical health care needs of carers
- We ask local authorities to ensure that carers are routinely provided with advice and information on engaging with leisure and community facilities and informed about what services are available, e.g., counselling, support groups, dieticians, third sector support, etc.
- We ask Health Boards and local authorities to support and facilitate peer support groups and community-based services that promote physical activity, healthy eating, and overall wellness for people with mental health and/or substance use problems

Campaign Products

At the end of the campaign, Adferiad will share the campaign findings widely and leave a legacy of good advice and practice. Specifically, we will:

- Publish and distribute a report on the campaign's findings
- Publish a guide for service users and carers on physical health care and wellbeing
- Provide further information and advice on our website on how to maintain good physical health care

Contact and further information

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Adferiad

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Adferiad Recovery is
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