



Whole Health, Whole Lives, Whole Picture

Improving Physical Health Outcomes for People with
Mental Health and Substance Use Challenges

End of Campaign Report 2024



www.adferiad.org

Adferiad Recovery is a charitable
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Introduction

Did you know that individuals with serious mental health conditions live up to 15 - 20 years less than the general population?



This alarming gap isn't due to mental health challenges alone. It's largely because of preventable physical illnesses like **heart disease, diabetes, and cancer** - conditions too often neglected in vulnerable communities.

In response, Adferiad's 'Let's Get Physical' campaign is tackling these inequalities head-on, **empowering individuals to take charge of their physical health**. Building on our past successes, we've expanded our focus to include those affected by substance use and addiction - who face similar risks. Through free health checks, engaging community events, and partnerships with key organisations, we're **dismantling barriers to preventive healthcare, promoting regular screenings, and inspiring lasting lifestyle changes**.

Despite the progress made, **there is still much to be done**: individuals with serious mental illnesses face significantly higher rates of serious conditions like heart disease and diabetes, many of which go undiagnosed due to the considerable challenges they face in accessing healthcare. Our 'Let's Get Physical' campaign is about more than simply raising awareness - **it's about taking concrete action to confront these health inequalities, making preventive healthcare accessible to all, and ultimately improving the quality of life for people in these underserved communities**.

We envision a future where people with mental illness live as long as those without, with equal access to preventive healthcare.

Where it all began...

In 2014, we launched the 'Let's Get Physical!' campaign - **a bold initiative aimed at improving the physical health of people living with serious mental illnesses** across all 22 counties of Wales.



Supported by esteemed organisations such as **Adferiad** (formerly known as **Hafal**), **Bipolar UK**, the **Mental Health Foundation**, and **Diverse Cymru**, we united to bridge the gap between physical and mental health.

We empowered our service users and carers to take control of their well-being through physical activity, healthy eating, and proactive engagement with healthcare professionals. Our campaign also urged healthcare providers to include physical health management in mental health care - ensuring regular health checks, addressing medication side effects, and providing opportunities for physical exercise as part of treatment.

At our events, we **offered health checks, accredited training courses, interactive cooking demonstrations, invigorating physical activities, and personalised health advice.**

Through this collaborative effort, we sparked a **real change** in our communities.



The campaign had a **lasting impact** that led to more complete care plans that incorporated physical health goals and better equipped services to provide holistic support to individuals.

Feedback from attendees was **overwhelmingly positive**, with many noting significant improvements in their physical well-being:



94%

...of people felt the campaign had **encouraged** them to become more **physically active**.



89%

...felt the campaign had **helped** them to improve their **diet**.



84%

...felt the campaign had informed them on how to get the **right support** to stay **physically well**.



...so, where are we now?

Our Campaign 2024

Building on the success of our 2014 'Let's Get Physical!' campaign, we are **renewing our commitment** to improving physical health for all.



Physical health, exercise, and nutrition are powerful tools for improving mental health conditions and overall quality of life. Yet, for individuals facing mental health or substance use challenges, **maintaining these healthy habits can feel like an impossible task.**

On the flip side, **untreated physical health problems can worsen mental health struggles** and even increase the risk of substance misuse.

Our campaign aimed to raise awareness of these issues, **helping people understand their own physical health, and guiding people to a pathway to treatment.** At all of our events across Wales we be offered physical health checks to give people an overview of their health, actions they could take to improve their health, as well as specific test results they could take to their GP for further investigation or treatment.

...but more on that later



DID YOU KNOW...

Adferiad aims to help people in all areas of their lives, including physical health, as part of our whole person approach to supporting people.

The Health Landscape in Wales

The state of healthcare in Wales

- Over **760,000 patient pathways** are currently waiting to start NHS treatment. This is the sixth consecutive increase and the highest figure on record.
- The Welsh Government estimates that physical inactivity costs Wales approximately **£650 million** each year.
- Total NHS expenditure on heart and circulatory diseases (CVD) in Wales each year is estimated at **£770 million**.

Health issues in Wales

- There are an estimated **340,000 people** currently living with heart and circulatory diseases, and both the ageing and growing population will likely see these numbers rise in the future.
- Each month, around **800 people** in Wales die from a heart or circulatory disease.
- More than **220,000 adults** in Wales have been diagnosed with diabetes, and around **90%** of those are living with type 2 diabetes.
- **Over one in four** adults in Wales were reported to be living with obesity in 2021/22. The prevalence of obesity is especially pronounced among those aged 45 to 64, with 31% affected.

The relationship between mental and physical health

- People with serious mental health problems have a **2 - 3 times** higher average mortality rate compared to the general population, which translates to a **15 – 20 year** reduction in life expectancy.
- Most deaths amongst people with serious mental illnesses are attributable to physical health conditions.

Lifestyle Factors

- **45%** of adults in Wales do not meet physical activity recommendations (at least 150 minutes per week).
- Only **29%** of adults in Wales eat the recommended 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day.
- **13%** of adults in Wales smoke cigarettes.
- **17%** of adults in Wales drink more than the weekly recommended alcohol intake.

Our Events

Our 9 campaign events were open to everyone and were designed to **encourage individuals across the whole of Wales to improve their health and wellbeing**. We wanted to make it easy for everyone to get useful health information, check their health status, and share their thoughts about local services. We're pleased to report that our events successfully met their aims and provided valuable services to attendees. Here's an overview of what we accomplished:



Offer free health checks:

At all of our events, we provided free, physical health checks conducted by our trained staff and overseen by qualified professionals. These checks gave attendees insight into their current health status, advice on specific actions they could take to improve their health, as well as specific test results they could take to their GP for further investigation or treatment.

Provide health information:

Our events featured a wide range of information on key health topics. We covered areas such as nutrition, physical activity, smoking cessation, and general healthy living practices. Importantly, we also shared information about local and regional support services available to our community members.



Connect with others:

Our events created a space for service users, staff, healthcare professionals, and the general public to meet and interact with others who have similar experiences. We also facilitated connections between community members and local health service providers, fostering a sense of community and support.

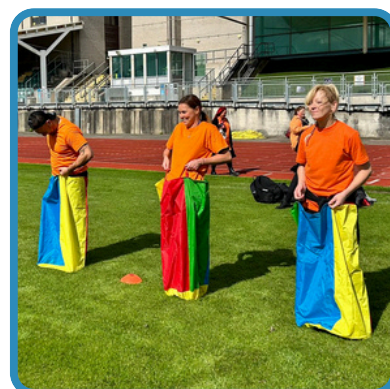


Gather useful feedback:

We offered service users and carers the opportunity to share their thoughts on current health services. This feedback is crucial for understanding what's working well and identifying areas for improvement and the insights gathered will help inform future service developments.

Have fun and get active:

To ensure the events were both informative and engaging, we included a variety of fun physical activities and relaxing wellbeing sessions. These activities were designed to cater to different abilities and interests, ensuring there was something for everyone!



Our Impact in Numbers



We held
9
campaign events
across Wales...

...which were
attended by
1,000+
individuals...

10
of whom were Welsh
MPs, members of the
Senedd, and councillors



2
special guest appearances from
BBCs 'The Traitors' Andrew
Jenkins, and Lee Trundle,
Ambassador for Swansea City FC

We partnered with
12
fantastic
organisations...

...and had
25
exciting event
exhibitions



We conducted

350

health checks in total,
which included...

- Measuring height and weight
- Blood pressure
- Blood glucose levels
- And general health information questions



Our attendees cycled

117

miles...



...and rowed

62

miles over the course of our
campaign...

...racking up an impressive

179

miles overall!

Through our fundraising
activities, we achieved our
goal of covering the entire
circumference of Wales...

1,840 miles!



Let's Get Physical!

Our campaign has seen incredible individuals pushing their limits, supporting each other, and discovering the profound impact of physical activity on both body and mind. Here are just a few of the inspiring tales from our community of wellness warriors.

.....

Iron Will: Dave's Ironman Journey

At 54, Dave, one of our dedicated staff members, is proving that age is just a number when it comes to pursuing your passions. Training for an Ironman race, Dave contributed the full 1,840 miles through runs, swims and bike rides towards our campaign goal of covering the border and coastline of Wales - an absolutely amazing achievement!



Dave's journey began in 2012 when he caught the "triathlon bug" after years of running. Despite facing health challenges and the setbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic, Dave's determination never wavered;

"Finally, at the start of this year, I had the conversation with the consultant about the possibility of doing another Ironman. They could not see why not as there had been such a big improvement in my health!"

Dave's story is one of resilience and the transformative power of exercise. Through his incredible efforts, Dave is not just improving his own wellbeing but inspiring others to take those first steps towards a healthier lifestyle;

"What I am doing can be very frightening for many, but starting off small can do wonders for one's mental health."

Scaling New Heights: Pen-y-Fan Wellbeing Walk



It's not just individual efforts making a difference. Recently, 12 of our clients and staff from our Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire projects came together for a Wellbeing Walk up Pen-y-Fan. With all attendees making it to the top, everyone felt a huge sense of achievement, so much so that the group decided to make the

trip an annual event! It's great to see the different ways our clients and staff are prioritising their health during our Let's Get Physical campaign, and giving their mental health a boost as a result!

Every step, every mile, every summit reached is a testament to the strength and resilience of our community. Remember, every journey begins with a single step, and together, we're covering the distance of an entire nation – in more ways than one.



Our Partners

As part of our campaign, we wanted to provide a comprehensive range of **information and advice** at our events. Our focus areas included diet and nutrition, physical activity, smoking cessation, healthy living, and information about available support services across the region from both third sector and statutory sector partners.

To achieve this goal, we partnered with other leading organisations in their respective fields who **share our commitment to improving public health and wellbeing**. These partners were carefully chosen for their expertise, reputation, and alignment with our campaign goals and each brought their own **unique insights and expertise**, allowing us to offer a **holistic approach to health and wellbeing**.

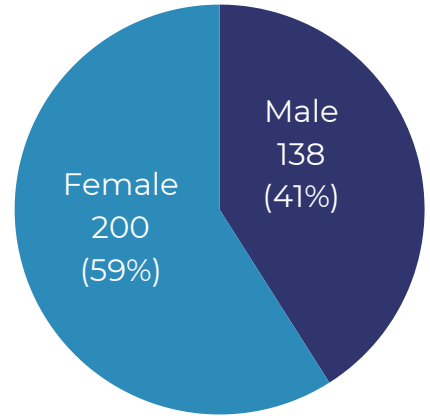
We are immensely grateful to the following organisations for their support at our campaign events:



Our Health Check Findings


Who took part?

We conducted
350
 health checks in total



Attendees ages ranged from
16 - 87
 with an average age of
48 years

27%
 of attendees were
 Welsh speakers

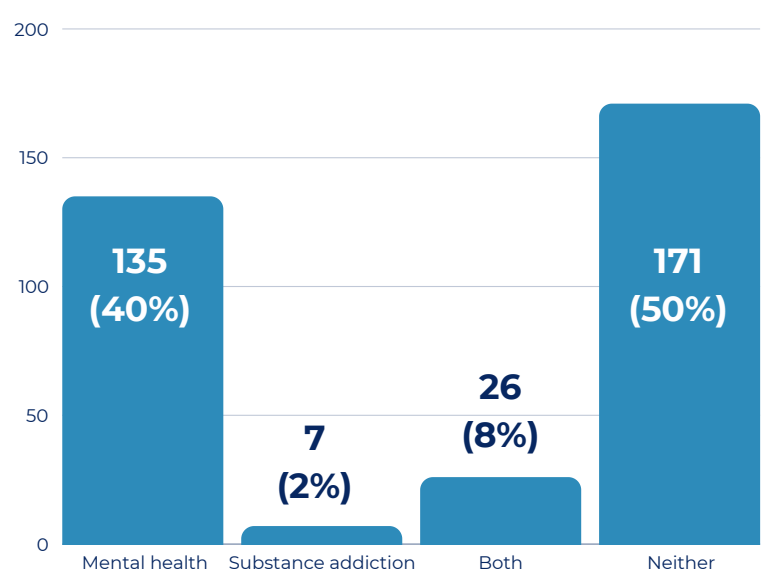


60%
 of attendees drank alcohol and..

28%
 of people smoked

40% of people had personal experience of a **mental health problem**, compared to just **2%** who had experienced a **substance addiction**.

Half of the people who attended a health check had neither a mental health problem or substance addiction.



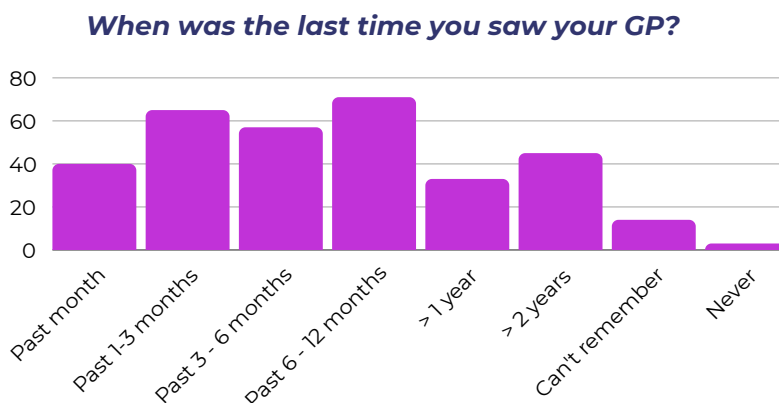
**Please note that not all individuals answered every question and therefore totals may not sum to 350 (100%)*

**In our survey, participants were given the option to self-identify their gender in a way that best reflects their identity.*

Accessing Healthcare

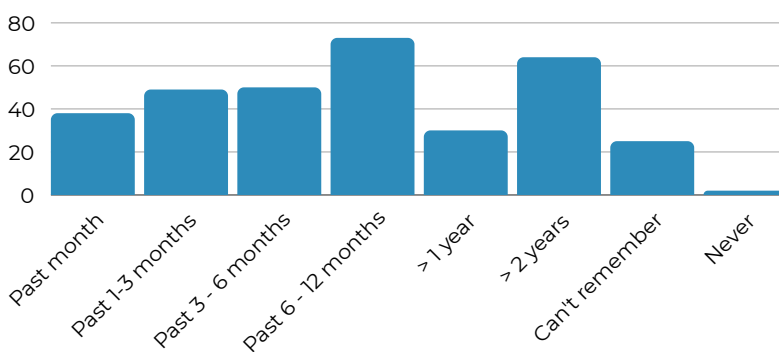
Next, we asked people about their experiences of accessing health services. We found:

98%
of attendees were registered with a GP



The majority of people (**n = 71, 22%**), reported that they had seen their GP within the past 6 - 12 months. However, **78 (24%)** people said that they had not seen a GP for either over 1 year or over 2 years. Worryingly, some people who answered this question had never been to see a GP.

73%
of attendees were registered with a dentist



Most people (**n = 73, 22%**), reported that they had seen their dentist within the past 6 - 12 months. However, nearly **one fifth** of respondents said that they had not been to see their dentist in over 2 years.



When asked when was the last time they had had their eyes tested, most people said 'more than 2 years ago' (**n = 87, 27%**).

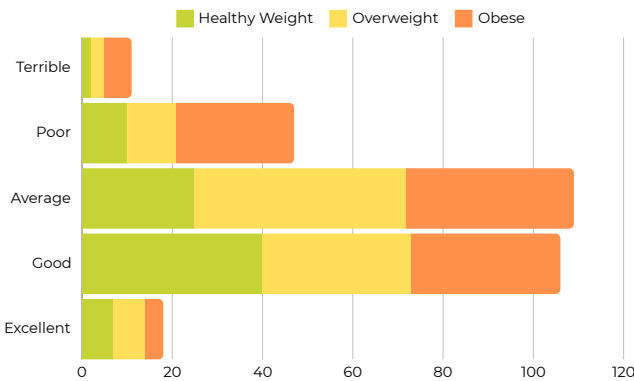
Key Health Factors

We asked attendees to rate their current **diet**, **level of exercise**, and **overall health** on a five-point scale from 'terrible' to 'excellent'. Overall:

39%
of people rated their diet as 'Average'

31%
rated their current level of exercise as 'Average'

43%
rated their overall level of health as 'Average'

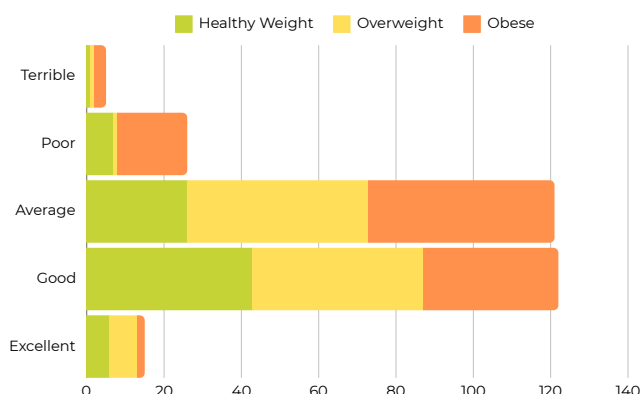
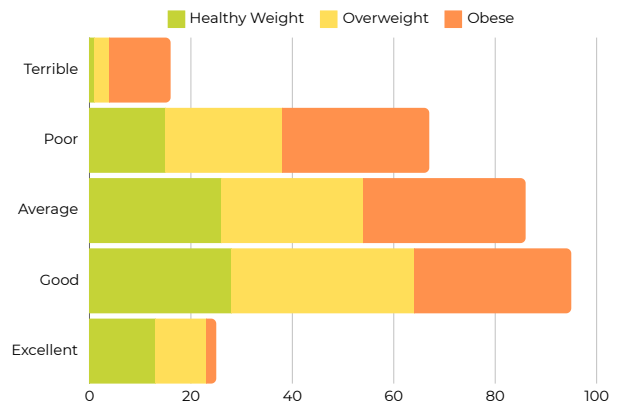


Diet

When taking into account attendees BMI scores, we found that the majority of attendees who were a healthy weight rated their diet as 'Good' (**48%**). Most individuals classed as either overweight or obese rated their diet as 'Average' (**47%** and **35%** respectively). People who reported having a 'Terrible' diet were most likely to be obese.

Exercise

Most attendees who were a healthy weight rated their current level of exercise as 'Good' (**34%**). The majority of people classed as overweight also rated their exercise levels as 'Good' (**36%**), whereas most people classed as obese rated their exercise levels as 'Average' (**30%**). Once again, people who reported having 'Terrible' levels of exercise were most likely to be obese.

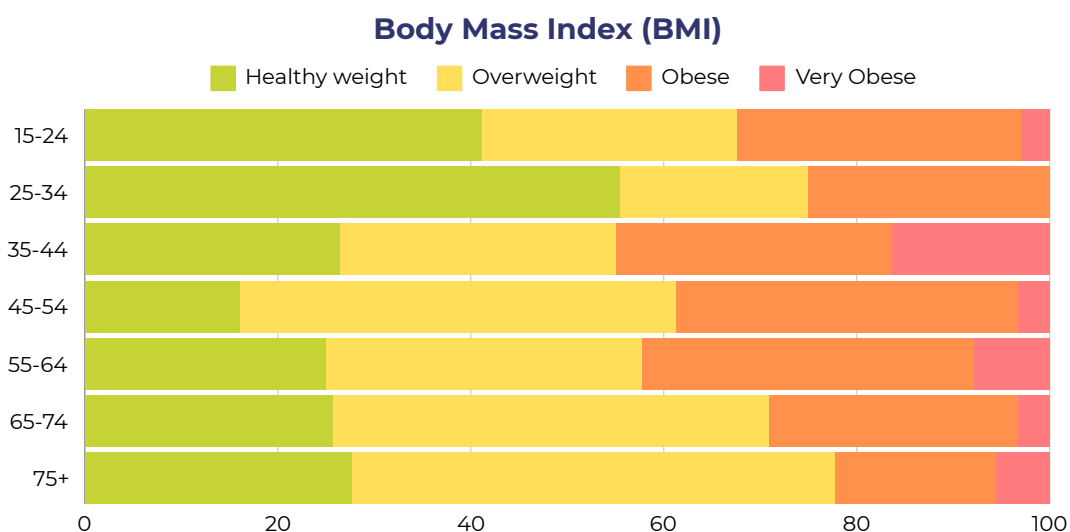


Overall Health

We found that most attendees who were a healthy weight rated their overall health as 'Good' (**52%**). Most individuals classed as either overweight or obese rated their overall health as 'Average' (**47%** and **45%** respectively). People who reported having a 'Terrible' overall health were most likely to be obese.

Measures of Health

We found that as age increased, so did the proportion of individuals who were found to be overweight or obese. While younger age groups had a higher percentage of people in the healthy weight category, the majority of those aged 35 and above fell into the overweight or obese categories, **with obesity becoming more common during midlife.**



Our health checks also uncovered a significant difference in BMI between individuals who reported having a mental health and/or substance use issue compared to those who didn't. We found:

- Attendees reporting these conditions had an **average BMI 2 points higher than those without.**

<p>Average BMI of people who did not report a mental health and/or substance use issue</p> <p style="font-size: 2em; color: yellow; font-weight: bold;">27.5</p>	<p>Average BMI of people who reported a mental health and/or substance use issue</p> <p style="font-size: 2em; color: orange; font-weight: bold;">29.9</p>
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While both averages fall into the 'overweight' category, those with mental health or substance use challenges **were on the verge of being classified as obese.** This finding underscores the heightened risk of physical health related problems in vulnerable populations and highlights the necessity for monitoring physical health alongside mental health and substance use.

Blood Pressure



- In 2014, **18%** of people were found to have above threshold blood pressure*. This increased to **32%** in 2024.
-

Blood Glucose



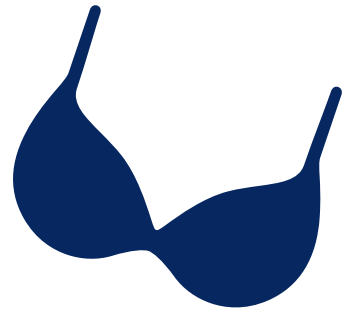
- In 2014, **47%** of people were found to have above threshold blood glucose levels*. This was lower in 2024 at **24%**.
-

At our 2024 campaign events, when our health checks revealed that participants had **elevated blood pressure or blood glucose levels**, we encouraged them to schedule an **appointment with their GP as soon as possible**. We provided each attendee with a convenient booklet containing their personal health information from the event. This allowed them to keep track of their results and discuss them with their GP at their next appointment, empowering them to **take control of their health journey**.

**Blood pressure and blood glucose was measured from attendees during health checks and not under clinical conditions. 'Above threshold' was determined based on guidelines at the time of measurement*

Screening Tests - Mammograms

- Results from our health checks found that of those eligible, **85%** of people had had a mammogram.
- However, **4%** of women who were eligible had never had a mammogram. Additionally, **11%** of women skipped this question, so the number of women eligible for a mammogram who have not had one may in fact be even higher.



Many people feel nervous about getting a mammogram. **It's normal to worry about discomfort, embarrassment, or fear of the results.** Some might put it off because they're scared of finding cancer or because the exam feels invasive. The machine can seem intimidating, and the idea of compressing your breast might sound painful. But it's crucial to remember that **mammograms save lives** by catching breast cancer early when it's most treatable.

To prepare for a mammogram:

- Wear a two-piece outfit for easy undressing above the waist.
- Avoid wearing deodorants or lotions on your breasts or underarms.
- Try to relax - tensing up can make the process more uncomfortable.
- Bring a friend or family member for support if you're feeling anxious.

Remember, the few minutes of discomfort are worth the peace of mind and potential life-saving benefits.



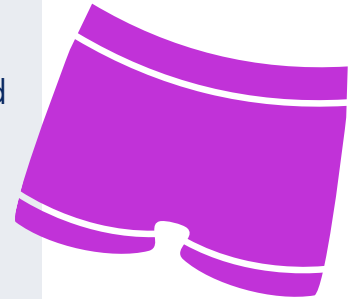
DID YOU KNOW...

You should receive an invitation for a breast screening or mammogram between the ages of 50 and 53. You will be invited for a screening every 3 years until you turn 71.

Source: NHS, 2021

Screening Tests - Prostate Exams

- Results from our health checks found that of those eligible, **42%** of men had had a prostate exam at some point.
- Worryingly, **39%** of eligible men reported that they had never been for a prostate exam. In addition, **18%** of eligible men did not answer this question, and therefore the number of men who should have had a prostate examination but who have not had one is likely to be even higher.



Screening for prostate conditions can be an uncomfortable topic for many men. The idea of this type of examination can be off-putting and embarrassing, and stigma or worries about masculinity might make men reluctant to discuss prostate health. It is important to know that **men over the age of 50 can request a PSA test** (a blood test to help check for prostate conditions such as prostate cancer or an enlarged prostate). As part of the PSA test, a health professional may also check your urine or offer to give you a rectal examination.

To prepare for a prostate exam:

- Try to relax and remember that doctors perform these exams routinely.
- You can ask questions beforehand to understand the process better and you can request a male doctor if you would like.
- Remember that the exam is quick, usually taking only a few minutes.
- If you are having a PSA blood test, avoid ejaculation for 48 hours before the test, as this can affect the results.



DID YOU KNOW...

Problems getting or maintaining an erection, peeing more than usual, having a sudden urge to pee, or blood in your pee can all be signs of prostate issues. If you are concerned about any of the above symptoms, contact your GP.

Source: NHS, 2024

Screening Tests - Smear Tests

- Results from our health checks found that of those eligible, **86%** of women had had a smear test at some point in their life.
- However, **4%** of women who were eligible had never had a smear test. Additionally, **10%** of women did not answer this question, so the number of women eligible for a smear test who have not had one may in fact be even higher.



Some might avoid it because the exam feels intrusive, or they're anxious about exposing private parts of their body. Others might put it off due to past negative experiences or cultural taboos. However, regular smear tests are **vital for detecting early signs of cervical cancer**, when it's most treatable.

To prepare for a smear test:

- Schedule the test for a time when you're not on your period.
- Wear comfortable, easy-to-remove clothing.
- Communicate with your healthcare provider about any concerns or past experiences.
- Remember you can ask the practitioner to stop at any time if you're too uncomfortable.



DID YOU KNOW...

Age

Under 25

25 to 49

50 to 64

65 or older

When you should be invited

Up to 6 months before you turn 25

Every 3 years

Every 5 years

Only if a recent test was abnormal

Source: NHS, 2023

Key Takeaways

Our 'Let's Get Physical' campaign events revealed key insights into the health and wellness of individuals with mental health and substance use challenges. Our findings highlighted several areas that require attention and action to improve health outcomes within communities across Wales.

Access to Healthcare

While 98% of attendees were registered with a GP, many were not engaging regularly with healthcare services.

- **24% hadn't seen their GP in over a year.**
- Nearly **20% hadn't visited a dentist in over two years.**

These numbers suggest there may be barriers preventing some people from accessing regular healthcare, emphasising the urgent need for improved awareness and support.

Health Screening

Our questions on health screening showed high participation among those women who were eligible for tests:

- **85% had undergone a mammogram.**
- **86% had undergone a smear test.**

However, the picture for men was quite different:

- **39% of eligible men had never had a prostate exam.**

While screening programmes for women show strong engagement, there is a clear need to boost prostate health awareness, education, and screening participation amongst men.

Health Checks

- **32% of attendees had above-threshold blood pressure readings**, a significant rise from 18% in 2014.
- Attendees who reported having mental health and/or substance use challenges had an **average BMI over 2 points higher** than those without.

Our health check findings suggest there is substantial room for enhancing health education and self-care practices, especially among those with mental health or substance use issues.

These findings underscore a pressing need to prioritise and promote physical health monitoring, particularly within vulnerable populations. By shining a light on these challenges, we aim to inspire others to take action in breaking down barriers to accessing healthcare services.

Recommendations

Informed by our health check findings, we propose **7 key ways** for all health professionals including health boards and local authorities to support vulnerable people across Wales with their physical health:

- 1) Health Boards should provide **regular health check-ups for people with mental health or substance use issues**. These check-ups should look for physical health problems like diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and obesity.
- 2) Health Boards should make sure **all primary care staff know about a patient's mental health or substance use issues**. They should also provide appropriate care for any specific needs these patients have.
- 3) Health Boards should **include physical health care needs in Care and Treatment Plans** for people using mental health services, as well as in Care Plans for others.
- 4) When reviewing Care and Treatment Plans or Care Plans, Health Boards should **check how medications affect physical health**. They should adjust medications as needed to reduce negative effects and help patients stick to their treatment.
- 5) Local authorities should **assess the physical health care needs of carers when conducting Carers' Assessments**.
- 6) Local authorities should **regularly inform carers about available services and facilities**. This includes counselling, support groups, dieticians, community services, and other helpful resources.
- 7) Health Boards and local authorities should **support community-based services and peer support groups**. These should promote physical activity, healthy eating, and overall well-being.

Resources

As a result of this campaign, we have come to understand how crucial it is for good physical health practices to extend **beyond our Health Boards and Local Authorities**. With our findings suggesting that there is a pressing need to prioritise and promote physical health monitoring, particularly within vulnerable populations, we aim to inspire others to do their bit to break down the barriers associated with accessing health care.

Our campaign has shown that key health checks can be completed **outside of clinical settings** and can be **accessible for anyone**, with basic checks able to provide valuable insight into physical health which individuals may otherwise go extended periods of time unaware of, delaying appropriate interventions.

See our list of health check essentials below to find out what you need to start delivering your own health checks.

Health Check Equipment

Weighing Scales
Height measurement
Blood glucose lancets
Blood glucose meter
Blood pressure monitor
Adferiad's Health Check Booklet (free download available at adferiad.org)

Trained staff conducted these checks (training is available at Adferiad) and overseen by a qualified Nurse.

SCAN BELOW
to access our health check booklet



or if you're viewing this report digitally
CLICK BELOW

<https://bit.ly/3Y7hJK7>