

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#)  
ar [anhydraddoldebau iechyd meddwl](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care](#)  
[Committee](#) consultation on [mental health inequalities](#)

**MHI 16**

**Ymateb gan: | Response from: Rhwydwaith Cydraddoldeb Menywod**  
**Cymru | Womens Equality Network Wales**

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## Consultation on mental health inequalities by the Health and Social Care Committee

February 2022

WEN Wales campaigns for change in six key areas including tackling gender health inequalities. We believe that women's mental health should be a key priority for the Health and Social Care Committee, with a particular focus on the mental health of disabled women, Black, Asian and minority ethnic women and LGBTQ+ Women. Gendered health inequalities were already widening before the start of the pandemic<sup>1</sup> and they are at risk of becoming further entrenched. A holistic and intersectional approach is needed to identify and tackle the causes of poor mental health, the barriers to accessing support and the standard of service currently available.

### COVID-19 and the impact on women's mental health

COVID-19 had a significant and detrimental impact on the mental health of women in Wales, particularly disabled women, Black, Asian and minority ethnic women and LGBTQ+ Women:

- A Public Health Wales survey released in May 2021 revealed that women were more likely to report their mental health being worse than before the start of the pandemic<sup>2</sup>. On average, women in Wales experienced worse levels of mental health than men after the onset of the pandemic<sup>3</sup>, due to issues such as the uncertainty around work, managing childcare and home schooling, money, and the nature of the crisis itself<sup>4</sup>.
- Research by Mind Cymru in 2020 found that almost one in five people in Wales were unable to get the mental health support they needed during the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> Members of our network reported a huge reliance on third sector or volunteer support who stepped in to fill the gap in provisions but have not always been adequately trained.
- Data collected by the Fawcett Society on the impact of the pandemic on women's mental health revealed that disabled women were more likely to suffer from social isolation, feel more anxious and have difficulties with relationships at home than non-disabled women<sup>6</sup>. We know from our conversations with disabled women that the concept of "returning to normal" can cause anxiety, as "normal" wasn't working

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<sup>1</sup> ["While your back was turned: how mental health policymakers stopped paying attention to the specific needs of women and girls" – Mental Health Foundation - 2017](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Public Health Wales – May 2021](#)

<sup>3</sup> ["Covid-19 in Wales: the mental health and wellbeing impact" – Wales Fiscal Analysis – July 2021;](#)

<sup>4</sup> ["Covid-19 Women, Work and Wales" – Chwarae Teg – September 2020](#)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/almost-one-in-five-people-in-wales-unable-to-access-mental-health-support/>

<sup>6</sup> [Disabled women and Covid-19 - Research evidence – April 2020](#)

for them. Working from home has been a gamechanger for many disabled women, allowing for greater control over working hours, better management of caring responsibilities, reduced levels of fatigue and improved mental health.<sup>7</sup>

- Throughout the pandemic, women were more likely to be in frontline and keyworker roles. Women outnumber men 4:1 in the social care sector in Wales<sup>8</sup>, and women registered domiciliary care workers were more likely to experience mental health problems than men during the pandemic.<sup>9</sup>
- A report by FTWW concluded that worsening symptoms and lack of access to treatment were of major concern to women living with chronic or recurrent health conditions in Wales, alongside deteriorating mental health<sup>10</sup>.
- There is little Wales-specific evidence of the impact of the pandemic on LGBTQ+ women in Wales, but we know that LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to experience mental health problems generally. A DIVA survey revealed that 77% of LGBTQ+ women respondents reported worse mental health as a result of lockdowns implemented due to Covid-19. Over half said they had accessed mental health services in the past 12 months, with a further 12% saying their attempts to do so were unsuccessful.<sup>11</sup>
- While some of the pressures on women's mental health, such as homeschooling and social isolation, have reduced with the end of lockdown, other factors like financial insecurity and long treatment waiting list continue to have an impact. We urgently need further data to understand the longer-term mental health impact on women and groups with other protected characteristics and need to address the underlying inequalities that lead to preventable mental health problems in these groups.

## Recommendations:

- Welsh Government must **invest in mental health provisions** for those disproportionately affected by the pandemic, from front-line staff to the general population.
- **More robust data collection is needed** to fully understand the longer-term impact of the pandemic on the mental health of women in Wales. Analysis of data should take an intersectional and gendered approach.
- **The mental health inequalities experienced by women, especially disabled women, women from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and**

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<sup>7</sup> [“Disabled workers’ access to flexible working as a reasonable adjustment” – TUC – October 2021](#)

<sup>8</sup> [“Social Workers on the Register – 1 April 2021” – Welsh Government/Social Care Wales – April 2021](#)

<sup>9</sup> [“What are the risks for Domiciliary Care Workers in Wales from COVID-19?” – Centre for Trials Research, Cardiff University – December 2021](#)

<sup>10</sup> [“The Impact of Covid-19 in Wales: A Women’s Health Perspective” – FTWW – June 2020](#)

<sup>11</sup> [DIVA 2021](#)

**LGBTQ+ women, reflect the wider societal inequality and discrimination that these groups experience.** We know that poorer financial and mental health outcomes for women are directly linked to their role in unpaid and low paid care work for children and adults. Women make up around 80% of the paid workforce in education, childcare, health and social care and are overrepresented in the lowest paying roles in these sectors, especially women from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. Unpaid caring responsibilities often push women into poverty. We need to ensure that equality is at the heart of recovery plans from the pandemic, through a caring-focussed recovery that invests into the childcare and social care sector.

**About the Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales:** Our vision is of a Wales free from gender discrimination where all women and men have equal authority and opportunity to shape society and their own lives. We work with our vibrant coalition of organisational and individual members to transform society. Our work sits under three pillars. We will Connect, Campaign and Champion women so our vision is realised.

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*WEN Wales would like to thank the Senedd's Health and Social Care Committee for the opportunity to contribute to their inquiry into mental health inequalities.*

*If you have any further comments or queries, please get in touch.*