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Health Education and
Improvement Wales (HEIW)



Special Edition: Primary Care Workforce Bulletin April 2023

Developing a strategic workforce plan for primary care

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) and the Strategic Programme for Primary Care (SPPC) are working jointly to develop a Strategic Workforce Plan for Primary Care. The plan covers general medical services, general dental services, optometry and the delivery of pharmaceutical services in primary and community care. It includes services being provided across the 24/7 period and developing workforce models to reduce health inequalities and improve population health.

Welcome to this special edition of our primary care bulletin where we share the work that we are doing to develop a Strategic Workforce Plan for Primary Care (SWPPC). This plan will help to ensure that we are focusing on the workforce needed, not just to deliver care now but to ensure a sustainable workforce into the future. Primary Care has always been adaptable, and it has continually evolved to respond to changes in demographics, advances in technology and new approaches to healthcare delivery, particularly over the last decade.

The NHS is under greater pressure than ever in its 75-year history and this impacts on both quality and access to care, as well as affecting the health and wellbeing of our workforce.

We are inviting you to help us shape the future workforce plan for primary care, which will look at the opportunities over the short, medium and long term to address some of the workforce deficits, to embrace new approaches and to put the health and wellbeing of the workforce centre-stage.

This bulletin sets out how you can get involved and share your views and help us create a new plan that will develop a sustainable workforce model for primary care.

Alex Howells
Chief Executive HEIW

Sue Morgan
National Director SPPC

Dr Chris O'Connor
On behalf of directors of primary care

Why are we developing a Strategic Workforce Plan for Primary Care?

First and foremost, we are developing this plan because we know that there are significant workforce challenges across primary care. The recent [National Workforce Implementation Plan](#) published at the end of January 2023 referenced the World Health Organisation (WHO) report, 'Health and care workforce in Europe: time to act' reflecting that these challenges are being experienced in many countries. Services delivered by GPs and their teams, in dental practices, within community pharmacy and optometry are facing challenges in being able to meet demand and rising expectations from citizens.

In Wales, we have an ageing population which will bring significant challenges to our health and care system over the next 15-20 years. We are already experiencing the impact of this on the health and care system and these challenges will grow as the 'baby boomer' generation ages.

Whilst the workforce working in primary care has grown over the last decade, demand has also increased and this has resulted in workforce gaps with challenges in recruiting and retaining the staff we need. It has also created challenges in the provision of primary care services on a sustainable basis. Advances in healthcare through new technology and science are also factors that will change primary care in the future and we need to explore what this means for the workforce.

This plan is an opportunity to examine the factors that affect both the demand for workers and the supply of our workforce. We need to take a holistic and realistic view about the workforce needed within primary care over the next 5-10 years.

The plan however is not just about numbers. If we only focus on the numbers, we will fail to grasp the potential to deliver sustainable workforce models. Workforce wellbeing, leadership, education and training and other factors are also critical. We know that people want to have fulfilling and rewarding careers and to work in an environment where they feel valued and supported. The pandemic has, for many people accelerated the shift towards new ways of working. As a result of this, we need to ensure that we consider these factors in developing a workforce plan that takes a more 'humanistic' approach.

Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care

This development of a workforce plan aligns with the 10 year [Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care](#) that was developed in 2020. The strategy sets out our ambition which is that by 2030: we want to have a motivated, engaged and valued health and social care workforce with the capacity, competence and confidence to meet the needs of the people of Wales.

The strategy has seven key themes plus a focus on workforce wellbeing, inclusion and Welsh language.

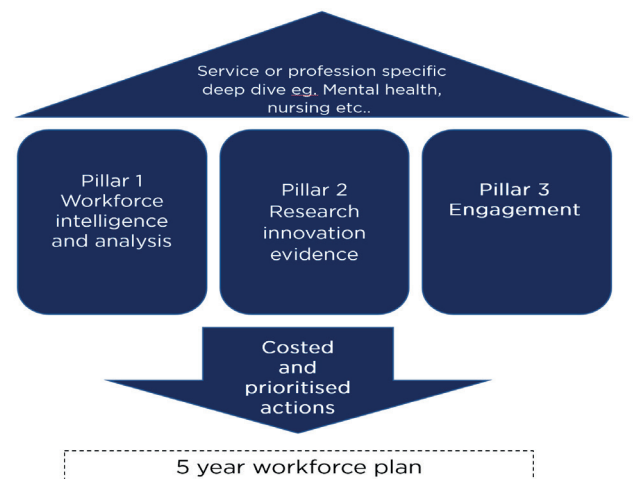


How are we developing the plan?

We are building the plan based on three key pillars; engagement, workforce intelligence and analysis and research, innovation and evidence.

These are not necessarily sequential tasks but should be viewed as a framework to shape discussions on the plan through engagement, by building consensus on the direction and key actions.

[Click here to visit the HEIW website to view the Plan on a Page \(PoP\), timeline and governance slide.](#)



What will the plan cover?

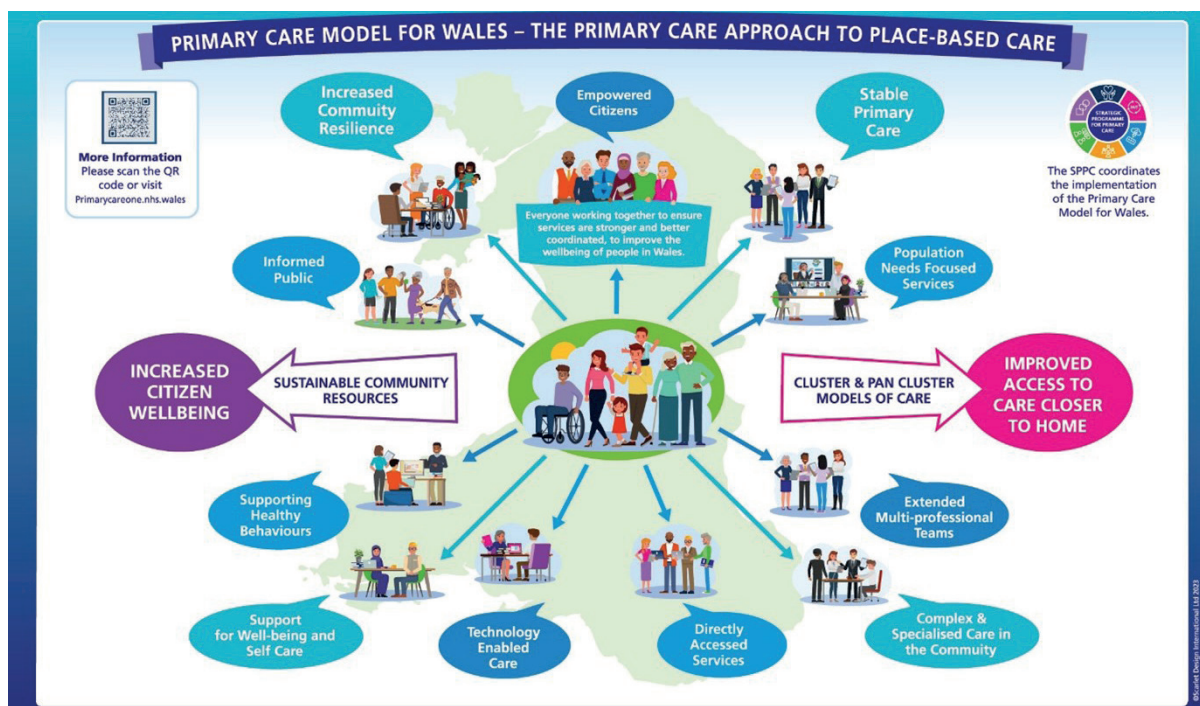
We spent some time over the winter, refining the scope of the plan in discussion with key stakeholders. Ultimately, we want to address the question of ‘How do we develop a sustainable workforce to deliver the Primary Care Model for Wales?’.

A broad definition of primary care which includes all the services that are delivered in people’s homes and through social care would be a complex question to address, so we have scoped this work to ensure that we focus on three main areas:

- Delivery of primary care services at a practice, cluster or other geographical footprint (independent contractors/managed practices/HB employed models). In this plan, we are covering general medical services, general dental services, optometry and community pharmacy
- The workforce needed to deliver primary care to Health Inclusion Groups (including those in prisons and where citizens experience different challenges in accessing primary care)
- The workforce needed to deliver urgent primary care (GP Out Of Hours and first contact clinical services such as 111)

‘A Healthier Wales’ and the ‘Primary Care Model for Wales’

The ambition of our long term plan, ‘A Healthier Wales’ is to deliver more care closer to home and this relies on a strong and effective foundation of primary care services. The Primary Care Model for Wales (PCMW) describes how care will be delivered locally as part of a whole system approach. One of the key components of this is ‘primary care stability’. The development of a workforce plan for primary care is needed to ensure that we have the workforce needed to provide a foundation for the other elements of the model.



Engagement - Key themes

We have reviewed information from a wide range of sources including professional bodies, 'think tanks', key policy and strategic reviews. From this, we have tried to distil the key issues, which are presented within the themes set out in the workforce strategy. Our [resource pack](#) sets out these themes and poses a series of questions. The list of all documents reviewed will also be included on our website shortly and we will continue to keep this updated over the next few months as and when new material is available. We have also used [PageTiger](#) to provide a more interactive format to support the engagement process which you may find easier to use.

The following sections provide a brief overview of the key themes, please [click here](#) to access further detail.

Seamless
workforce
models

Theme 1: Seamless workforce models

The evidence indicates that multi-professional working should be at the heart of our model and we need to start from the perspective of what skills are needed in primary care and how best to use and deploy these effectively to meet the needs of local people. This applies to all four contractor professions as multi-professional working is embedded across primary care.

At the same time, we need to focus on our senior decision-makers and to make best use of their skills in managing complexity. This needs to be balanced to ensure that roles are rewarding and attractive. There is a risk that continual 'top of license' working has the potential to cause burn-out and make roles unattractive if we don't accept that professionals need a balance in their workload. The difference between **delegation** (whereby the risk is held by the senior decision-maker) and **distribution** (where senior decision makers are supported by a team of people working independently within their own area of competence) is a subtle but important distinction.

For all professionals, learning to lead and manage multi-professional teams should be a key element of our education and training programmes. We also need to build in time to supervise and also to educate and train the future workforce, recognising that this is not just a skill but also something that needs to be included within job roles.



Workforce
supply
and shape

Theme 2: Workforce supply and shape

This section considers the issues around the future shape and supply of our workforce. As part of the work that we are doing we will need to consider how we ensure that our workforce supply better meets the demand for care, taking into account future population needs. The number of people who train through UK further and higher education routes is one component but these pipelines can be long (eg. 10 years to train for a GP; 5 years for a pharmacist and 3 years for a nurse and most allied health professions). We need to focus on ways in which we can better support our current workforce to retain the skills we have. Our future workforce is likely to have different aspirations for their careers and we need to understand how this will impact on the future supply of the workforce.



Attraction
and
recruitment

Theme 3: Attraction and recruitment

The employment arrangements for most staff working in primary care differ from the rest of the NHS. People working in GP practices, dental surgeries, community pharmacies and optometric practices are usually employed by an independent contractor which means that they may not have the same terms and conditions as staff employed by health boards and trusts. There is generally a lack of understanding about the roles available in primary care and a lack of structured career pathways. We need to do more to promote primary care as a great place to work and to help people understand the choice of careers in the sector.



Excellent
education
and
training

Theme 4: Excellent education and training

We need to ensure that we deliver excellent education and training across primary care, in the right numbers and with the right skills. This means investing in educators and increasing the exposure to primary care for more students and trainees as part of their training journey. To meet future demand, we need to enhance our work-based learning offer for all staff. HEIW has invested in the development of a multi-professional education and training framework for primary and community care which includes academies across all seven health boards in Wales. Our central multi-professional unit work alongside the existing medical, dental and pharmacy deaneries and our optometry team to develop programmes that are specifically designed around the needs of those working in primary care.

Theme 5: Leadership and succession

The literature highlighted a strong need for strong leadership in primary care, particularly as models have changed rapidly over the last few years. There are opportunities to enhance the leadership development programmes and ensure that we are supporting team development within primary care. This includes needing to prepare people to lead multi-professional teams that support new workforce models.

The NHS Wales model for compassionate and collective leadership is based on evidence that leaders who demonstrate compassion and foster a collective culture have a positive impact on their employees, organisation and society as a whole. This can lead to benefits such as improved employee well-being increased productivity, better decision-making, enhanced innovation and stronger relationships.

Theme 6: Building a digitally-ready workforce

The research indicates that new and emerging technologies are rapidly increasing. Artificial intelligence and precision medicine (genomics) are likely to play an increasing role in how we deliver care in the future. Used in the right way, technology also has the potential to improve ways of working, including quality and effectiveness. The literature identifies that technology could play an important role in freeing up time from routine tasks, giving people more time to care. People will need to have the right skills and competencies to gain most from these available technological advances and we may need different types of workers in future.

Theme 7: An engaged, healthy and motivated workforce

Focusing on workforce wellbeing is critical to the future sustainability of primary care services. We know that chronic excessive workload can lead to negative consequences, such as burnout, stress and exhaustion. These factors contribute to decreased job satisfaction and can also cause physical and mental health problems. Excessive workload ultimately creates challenges in both recruiting and retaining staff. This can include administrative and bureaucratic burdens as well as patient care and service delivery pressures. The increased demands within primary care are cited as a common reason for people exiting the workforce earlier than otherwise considered (alongside other factors).

How can you get involved?

We want to engage with people working in primary care and other stakeholders as part of the development of this plan. We want to understand the key challenges and issues that are impacting on people working in primary care and to look ahead and explore the key drivers for change and their impact on the future workforce requirements. This will enable us to create a set of actions that support us to deliver sustainable primary care in future.

We are now entering our engagement phase which will run from April until July 2023. We will be holding a series of events including a workshop within each health board area as well as national events (remote and face to face). Details are available on our website:

[How to get involved - HEIW \(nhs.wales\).](#)

Your experience and opinion is vital to the development of this plan and we encourage you to get involved. Keep an eye on our website for upcoming and new events.

For further information, please visit our website: [Strategic Workforce Plan for Primary Care](#) or email us via HEIW.PrimaryCareWFP@wales.nhs.uk

