

# **Draft HIV Action Plan for Wales**

## **A consultation response on behalf of Cardiff Council**

Cardiff Council welcomes the draft HIV Action Plan for Wales and would like to acknowledge the hard work and commitment from all concerned in its development. We are very grateful for the opportunity to provide comments on the draft plan and would also like to applaud the leadership that Welsh Government have shown in setting out their aspiration of developing the plan within the Programme for Government and delivering on that promise through the publication of this draft.

Cardiff Council has worked for some while with our partners within Fast Track Cardiff & Vale who are passionately committed to making a difference to people living with HIV and achieving the goal of zero new infections by 2030. The Council would like to personally thank Dr Marion Lyons and the members of the HIV Action Plan Task and Finish Group for their work on the Action Plan.

Cardiff Council commends the ambition of the plan and is very happy to become a key partner in the delivery of the commitments detailed within it. Cardiff Council welcomes the five overarching priority areas outlined within the action plan which provide focus and a clear way forward towards a Wales free of new transmissions of HIV and a country where people living with HIV are supported to live well and free of stigma.

Cardiff Council also welcomes the 3 core principles of the action plan;

- A zero tolerance approach to stigma.
- A focus on co-creation in partnership with people living with HIV from all backgrounds, cultures, sexuality, ages, genders and geographical areas
- A commitment to robust monitoring and evaluation are principles that we can all support.

### **1. Do you agree with the five overarching actions identified within this plan? Are there other overarching actions that should be included?**

Cardiff Council welcomes and agrees with the five overarching actions identified within the action plan. Please see below for further comment:-

#### **Establishing Wales as a Fast Track Nation**

Cardiff welcomes the establishment of a Fast Track Cities Cymru as this gives the opportunity to establish a body to drive progress, roll out good practice, foster smarter working, knowledge sharing and efficiency of resources as well as ensuring the avoidance of duplication and the ability to capitalise on local expertise. We also welcome the Working together in Wales to deliver a co-ordinated approach. It is Cardiff's belief that this will support the achievement of the ambition of the plan. This approach will also facilitate the

management of co-ordinated roll out of initiatives across the country which may potentially be significant in the avoidance of systems becoming overwhelmed.

### **Involvement of voluntary and community groups**

The effectiveness of public services collaborating with colleagues in the third sector is apparent through a rich history of partnership programmes, expansion of community engagement and increased support for those in need. Further capitalising on this partnership to deliver the outcomes detailed within the plan will clearly contribute towards the achievement of the vision. It is evident that the ongoing involvement and steer of the Terence Higgins Trust (THT) Cymru and Pride Cymru amongst other HIV voluntary and community groups will be vital as we unite in the achievement of the ambition of this plan.

### **Funding and development of an all-Wales sexual health case management system**

The funding and development of an all-Wales sexual health case management system is a very positive step. Cardiff Council would echo the comments relating to the ownership and oversight of these systems lying with Public Health Wales. It is clear from the work that has been undertaken thus far that the expertise and leadership of Public Health Wales should govern the development of a robust surveillance system for Wales.

### **Establishment of an Action Plan Oversight Group**

The establishment of the HIV Action Plan Oversight group with the aim of ensuring effective scrutiny and driving progress against all the actions listed within the plan is key. The reporting of evaluation and monitoring of progress as well as highlighting specific challenges to Ministers will demonstrate credibility and ownership of each workstream. Additionally, this approach has the potential to send a clear message to those living with HIV in Wales that Welsh Government is committed to progressing the commitments of the plan.

## **2. Do you agree with the proposed list of actions? Are there any that you would add or remove from the 26 currently identified?**

Cardiff Council welcomes all 26 actions listed throughout the action plan and appreciate the extensive work that has taken place to arrive at the draft detail. Any suggestions relating to the detail of any specific actions are made as positive suggestions to complement the draft plan.

### **Priority 1: Prevention**

The “Ask me about PrEP” project, piloting the impact of training and supporting peer mobilisers in talking to their peers about PrEP has huge potential to be a powerful vehicle for achieving the goal of preventing the transmission of HIV. There is potential for local authorities to amplify the positive outcomes of the project. Within the context of Cardiff, the authority has Screening Champions that help promote Public Health Wales screening

programmes alongside their customer facing role. We would suggest that there is potential to develop communities focused PrEP 'Champions' within Cardiff and authorities across Wales.

It is apparent that wider awareness and use of PrEP within diverse communities is an important factor in the journey towards the elimination of HIV transmission within Wales. An area of consideration is local authorities engagement with service users across all demographics, including homeless services and those newly arrived within authorities. This offers a potential opportunity to diversifying access to information and provision of PrEP within Local Authorities in Wales.

## **Priority 2: Testing**

There are opportunities for local authorities to support the tackling of inequalities in relation to testing access and click and collect services. Local authorities provide free access to public computers with networked online access as well as free Wifi throughout a network of over 300 public libraries within Wales, as well as wider community venues. The provision of 'Click and Collect' could also be explored within these venues as well as targeted areas such as homeless services and other venues.

The ambition of ensuring no individual or community is left behind is of course vital. It is noted that local authorities are not listed as a partner in this objective. Local authorities deliver a wide range of services to all communities. There is potential for them to support the extensive community engagement and necessary widespread detailed communication programmes within Action 11.

It is clear from reviewing the evaluation report related to the highly successful 'Texting for Testing' pilot within Cardiff that this represents an opportunity to ensure that messaging is effectively communicated to communities in innovative ways. The evidence of the pilot shows that this has a positive effect on testing uptake and captures positive diagnoses including those in need of more immediate medical interventions. The extension of this scheme is to be welcomed and should be resourced effectively to ensure the supporting infrastructure meets the amplified demand.

Cardiff Council welcomes the opportunity to be an active partner in raising awareness and working towards amplifying key messaging across communities throughout HIV testing week. Digital and non-digital elements should be considered within the communication planning in order for those who may be digitally excluded by choice or otherwise, including older people, to be reached.

## **Priority 4: Living Well with HIV**

The national peer support programme for Wales will be commissioned by Welsh Government in the autumn of 2022, following the conclusion of research work carried out by Cardiff University on the potential principles and structures of such a programme. Cardiff Council acknowledges the significance of this development which is clearly key to ensuring the people living with HIV are supported.

This is a very positive step forward in supporting people living with HIV to live well within the community. It is understood that a stepped or diverse approach to peer support will be necessary, however local authority community venues including Hubs/Libraries should be

considered perhaps further along the pathway of those living with HIV. Cardiff Council would welcome being included in a timeline of the rollout of peer support as we work towards tolerant communities where people do not feel that they need to hide their diagnosis and can happily meet and connect in local community venues.

Cardiff Council would also welcome the opportunity to work together with Fast Track Cymru and the associated networks to establish effective ways of reaching all diverse communities. This represents an opportunity to deliver positive messaging, information provision and to work together collectively to remove barriers and engage positively with communities.

### **Priority 5: Tackling Stigma**

Cardiff Council welcomes the action around the provision of HIV awareness training to the social care sector and look forward to seeing the details of the delivery plan.

In addition to health care providers, social care workers and schools, Cardiff Council would like to see HIV awareness training extended further to include wider local authority staff. Many staff in local authorities outside of the sectors detailed within the plan provide front line services within the communities they serve. Cardiff Council is also one of the largest employers in Wales and is committed to providing dignity at work and promoting and supporting the health and wellbeing of our staff. We would welcome the opportunity to learn further how we could support any staff members who are living with HIV as well as embedding a zero-tolerance approach within our organisation.

It would be helpful if evidence-based teaching could be supported to ensure that the goals of increasing knowledge around prevention as well as tackling stigma can be achieved within schools. It is our understanding that there are Welsh Government plans to create a bank of Relationships and Sexuality Education code (RSE) resources on Hwb. Oversight and monitoring of the evidenced based approach by the HIV Action Plan oversight group is potentially key to ensure that young people are given the right information at the appropriate time.

Cardiff Council welcome the opportunity to be a collaborating organisation to ensure that awareness of stigma and the promotion of positive messages such as U=U and zero tolerance is a common and ongoing thread throughout all the actions that we make a commitment to. It is evident that this messaging is key to working towards the goals set out within the action plan.

An annual Wellbeing Survey of People Living with HIV to monitor whether change has been affected and is effective is incredibly important to ensure that the action plan is heading in the right direction or identifying areas that may need further work from the viewpoint of the most important stakeholder – those that are living with HIV. We would applaud this initiative.

**3. What are the challenges that could mean the commitment to eliminating HIV transmission by 2030 are not met? Are there any clear challenges relating to any specific actions you feel should be highlighted?**

- Sufficient resourcing of all action delivery plans
- Reaching underserved communities – it is vital that we all work together to achieve this aim
- Existing pressures on public services as well as the third sector – it is important that this capacity is built in to ensure the aspirations of the plan are achieved.
- Ensuring the right message reaches the right people – all forms of communication networking should be considered including dedicated social media.

**4. Are there any resources (this could include funding, staff time, training, access to support or services among other things) that are not referred to in our Plan, but will be necessary in achieving the aims and actions detailed within this Plan?**

The development of far reaching promotional and media campaigns focusing on key messages around prevention, tolerance, dispelling myths and testing across Wales would contribute to wider awareness and positive change. National resources could also include 101 leaflets that provide key messaging around prevention, myth busting and support. It would also be beneficial to work towards a catalogue of national resources that include communication tools specific to underserved communities. It would seem sensible to include a reasonable provision within the financial planning for this work.

**5. We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:**

In 2021, Welsh Government published 'Age Friendly Wales: Our Strategy for an Ageing Society', which commits Wales to the development of age-friendly cities and communities across the country. Cardiff is proud to have recently been successful in their application to join the World Health Organisation's Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities and will soon be joined by the other local authorities across Wales. This collective commitment is intended to drive positive changes and developments that benefit older people. With this focus in mind, as well as understanding that more people are living into older age with HIV, it would seem appropriate to have more focus within the plan specific to older people that acknowledge and work towards overcoming factors that risk their individual wellbeing. Key areas could include targeted age friendly preventative programmes, financial advice and support, tackling loneliness and isolation strategies and targeted clinical support.

The action plan outlines that the most important predictor of morbidity and premature mortality is late diagnosis, and that late diagnosis also increases the risk of onward HIV transmission. Our understanding is that older people are more likely to be diagnosed late; of

those diagnosed with HIV within the UK in 2019, 59% of people were aged 65 and older. Cardiff Council would welcome the opportunity to support the development and delivery of targeted efforts including promotional programmes to reduce the number of late diagnoses in older people, as well as support for those who have been diagnosed.

Cardiff Council can support those living with HIV to better self-manage their health by promoting and signposting the Positive Self Management Programme (PSMP) provided by EPP Cymru. In addition, we would advocate for the identification and provision of HIV specific resources including verified book resources which could be provided through the Hubs & Libraries collections. A successful Welsh Government funded scheme, in partnership with Society of Chief Librarians Cymru and The Reading Agency, called Reading Well - Books on Prescription has been rolled out throughout Welsh Public Libraries focusing on the topics of Dementia, Mental Health and Children's Mental Health. The books have been selected by expert panels of clinicians, 3rd sector organisations and those with lived experience of the conditions. This book stock is available free of charge and provides therapeutic support and help in book form. This could potentially be explored as another avenue to provide support to those living with HIV in Wales.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on the draft HIV Action Plan for Wales. Cardiff Council looks forward to the publication of the finalised action plan and the opportunity to work in partnership with Welsh Government, partners and stakeholders to prevent new cases and improve the lives of people living with HIV.