



Cymorth i Ferched Cymru
Welsh Women's Aid

State of the Sector 2021

A strategy for
sustainable support

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Introduction

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) impacts on budgets across health, social services, housing, education, criminal justice, community services and the economy as a whole. Government departments, local authorities, health boards, police forces and the criminal justice system are all spending considerable money on the impacts of VAWDASV.

A sustainable funding model for specialist services would see a portion of budgets from across relevant agencies aligning to meet preventative duties and work towards ending VAWDASV in Wales. Over time, resources needed to respond to the long-term negative effects of VAWDASV would be drastically reduced.

A lot has happened in the past year. Wales has established a new Senedd, we are still responding to the developing situation surrounding COVID-19, and Welsh Government is about to produce a new national VAWDASV strategy. In a wider context, the UK Domestic Abuse Bill has been passed into an Act and statutory guidance is currently being consulted on.¹ UK Government has also recently published its VAWG national strategy.²

Throughout this period of change, survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence have still needed safety and support, and throughout this period of change specialist services have been working beyond their capacities to make sure that support is available. One thing remains the same – the uncertainty that is felt across the sector on whether this level of support can continue to be provided with the resources available.

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/domestic-abuse-act-statutory-guidance>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy>

In 2020 we published our State of the Sector report Time to Act on Sustainability,³ which referenced the ‘why’s and how’s’ of a sustainable funding model for the sector. With an upcoming UK spending review, the next Welsh Government budget being drafted and implementation of a new national VAWDASV strategy on the horizon, now is the right time to think about the long-term safety and support of survivors in Wales and commit to a sustainable funding model for services delivering specialist VAWDASV support.

A refresher of what a sustainable funding model should look like and how it can be achieved from our State of the Sector 2020 is available [here](#).

Support for survivors

Support needs, background and current access is different for each individual survivor. The support on offer should reflect this. VAWDASV is a cause and consequence of inequality between women and men, which intersects with factors such as race, ethnicity, age, class, sexual orientation and disability, to impact on experiences of abuse and routes to recovery.⁴

There is widespread recognition among experts and key stakeholders that all forms of VAWDASV are preventable. Tackling the norms, practices and structures associated with gender inequality which serve to legitimise or condone VAWDASV requires a multi-level strategic response – one which recognises the intersection of factors occurring at the societal, community, relationship and individual levels which increase the likelihood of VAWDASV.⁵

A sustainable funding model for specialist services, is the foundation for ending all forms of VAWDASV. Funding services to run sustainably would not only enable the VAWDASV specialist sector to support women and children in both an immediate sense and living with long term trauma, but also enables the sector to work collaboratively with communities to tackle the root, systemic causes of VAWDASV. This can be achieved by rolling out and embedding effective policy and practice in preventing it from happening in the first place. Alignment of policy, practice and funding is the most effective way to bring about real change that lasts.

³ <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/State-of-the-sector-2020-PDFdesign.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Annual-Membership-Report-2018-19-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.humanconsultancy.com/assets/understanding-perpetration/bin/Review%20of%20Research.pdf>

The pillar stones of a sustainable funding model

As highlighted in the 2020 report, the pillar stones of this must include:

- A focus on prevention and early intervention⁶
- Sustainable funding which supports children and young people⁷
- Equal weighting given to Sexual Violence services
- A continued commitment to refuge and accommodation-based support
- An increase in 'By and For' service provision
- A Welsh solution to supporting survivors with no recourse to public funds
- An acknowledgment that sexual exploitation must sit within the framework of ending VAWDASV
- Accredited perpetrator interventions, including early intervention

A sustainable funding model would give specialist services the opportunity to act flexibly and meet the needs of every survivor seeking support.

⁶ <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/A-Blueprint-for-the-Prevention-of-VAWDASV27918.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Children-and-Young-People-participation-report-FINAL.pdf>

What do survivors say?

Welsh Women's Aid's survivor network regularly informs our work. Across projects, conferences, and media interviews are themes of sustainability and training and how this impacts the support received by survivors. These are a summary of feedback received from survivors over the last year:

Access to support:

Difficulties in accessing support before the pandemic were heightened. During the pandemic survivors were left feeling more isolated and disempowered because of limited support mechanisms in place to access services. Survivors have raised that this time was particularly difficult to be a person with a disability or from a marginalised group for whom already limited provision became more apparent when accessing services during the pandemic. Issues such as language barriers became heightened due to digital poverty and lack of effective communication.



I couldn't phone services, friends or families and certainly couldn't risk accessing any help because everything was being monitored. Being deaf had its own issues but I am aware that accessing services wouldn't have been able to meet my needs if I had managed to make a call, I wouldn't have been able to hear the response.



Adapting in the pandemic:

Specialist services, refuges and helplines continued to provide exemplary support throughout the pandemic, but COVID-19 restrictions such as rules around self-isolation left them with low staff numbers. Services found themselves under immense pressure to deliver with such a huge staff shortage. The services still maintained positive approaches, but restrictions inevitably impacted on how much could be offered at certain stages of the pandemic.

The lack of support for children and young people during the pandemic was significant. As education and school processes were forced to adapt, getting information to young people in schools was interrupted, and services were not able to get to many children and young people through digital means to provide specialist support. Young people have suggested feelings of being abandoned.

Digital Poverty:

Internet is a luxury some survivors have reported they could no longer afford, after losing jobs or being furloughed . A lack of internet connection left many survivors isolated from support systems and accessing help. Some survivors reported that the internet was being monitored by family and perpetrators, noting that at least when they were not locked down, they could go along to coffee shops and access advice there.

Limited funding for services:

Whilst survivors know that measures have been implemented to provide emergency funding, they also stated that they were aware of the cutting back of services or services having lost funding. Survivors noted the knock-on effect of limited funding creating backlogs of people needing help. Losing funding within critical services puts pressure on the whole system designed to protect everyone at their most vulnerable. Long waiting lists allow perpetrators the time to manipulate and harass victims, the results of this can be extreme including survivors withdrawing their complaints or reassuming their relationship with a perpetrator out of fear or perceived ease.



Why now? The case for sustainable evidence and context

Our annual membership data, 2020-21 shows:

- There was a 22% increase in the number of survivors who could not be supported by refuge due to the lack of capacity or resources, when compared with the previous financial year.
- Refuge-based support services supported 283 children per quarter, showing a continued high number of children in refuge during the pandemic with limited access to specialist child support workers.
- Community based services received a 23% increase in referrals from the previous financial year and a 12% increase in the number of survivors who could not be supported by community-based support services due to resource and capacity issues.

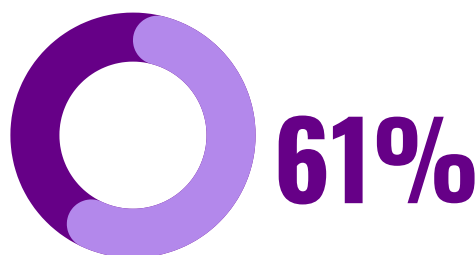
We were pleased that our membership surveys demonstrated that most services feel confident they are resourced to deliver their current level of services this year. However, the consistent feedback we get from our regular membership meetings is that funding provided covers only existing duties and leaves no surplus for emergencies, an unexpected rise in capacity or a need to be flexible in offering support.

As stated above, the current funding circumstances are not meeting the current level of need. Our annual data shows that there were increases in the number of survivors unable to be supported across services, due to a lack of capacity and resources. When examining current resources, specialist services are not equipped to support the increase in survivors facing multiple disadvantages who are seeking support.

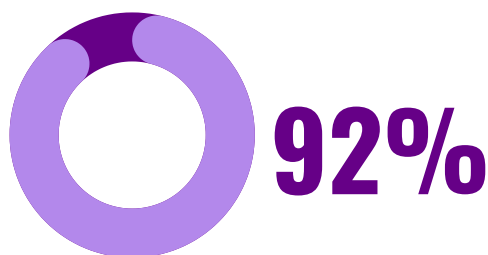
There was a significant increase in the following reasons for refusal from refuge over the previous financial year:



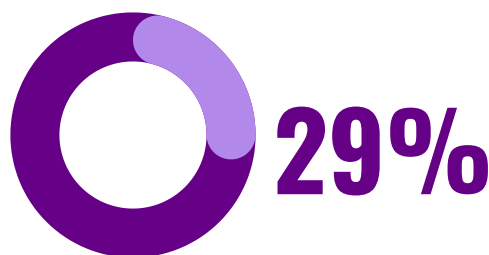
Unable to meet support needs (around drug and alcohol)



Unable to meet support needs (around mental health) (61%)



Unsafe (perpetrator knows the location of the survivor/ refuge)



No/ limited recourse to public funds

A total of 692 **survivors were unable to be supported in refuge due to capacity** and 312 **survivors remained on waiting lists for sexual violence services** at the end of financial year 2020-21. Members do not currently feel able to widen preventative work, or to increase capacity in order to provide support to more survivors.

The COVID-19 pandemic has already resulted in an increase in contacts from survivors (22%) and concerned others (43%) to the Live Fear Free Helpline during 2020-21. The impact of COVID-19 restrictions on survivors' experiences of abuse and violence is likely to lead to increased long term support needs, including provision for children and young people.

Increased mental health needs are expected to increase as the long-term impact of COVID-19 and increased austerity affects people's health and wellbeing; it is likely that the demand for provision will only increase over time.

If another unexpected event such as the COVID-19 pandemic were to happen, then services would not have the means to facilitate the flexibility to adapt services and meet increased needs, especially not without compromised quality and staff burnout.

Valuing the specialist sector

Specialist VAWDASV staff are incredibly committed to ending VAWDASV, and it's important to recognise the physical and emotional impact that the role has on individuals in the sector. Staff supporting adult and child survivors of VAWDASV have ensured that essential, lifesaving and life-supporting services continue during the pandemic. However, the ongoing challenge for the sector is that organisations are hampered by relatively lower wages, short term contracts and jobs carrying high caseloads and work out of hours. Many organisations in the sector have had to manage these conditions along with the additional demands created by the pandemic such as: the need for staff to isolate, staff being off sick and home-schooling children. Difficulties with recruitment and retention of staff have affected the sector and increased instability and uncertainty at a time where people have needed it the most.

Staff retention is an extremely pertinent issue currently facing specialist services. As an example, our members are currently able to pay £20,541 for a support worker role, whilst local housing association pay between £24,000 - £26,000 for similar roles.

Even for equivalent roles, specialist services receive significantly lower funding to offer wages. For instance, an ISVA in a rape crisis centre has a wage of £27,444 but the statutory sector run SARC offers a wage of £35,000 within the same locality.

This inequality is particularly stark in specialist children and young people roles where an average local authority based role working with children pays 9.1% higher than those in the VAWDASV sector that require additional specialisms and skills. The specialist sector is working within tight budgets and has less flexibility than other organisations/ sectors to raise wages to attract appropriate staff when necessary.

Other challenges include:

- People not wanting to change jobs during the uncertainty of Covid-19
- Staff may feel undervalued seeing higher wages outside of the third sector
- Additional training and support costs put services at financial risk
- Capacity is taken away from service delivery to train new staff
- Creating roles around specific funding requirements set by government bodies, rather than meeting the needs of survivors.

Staff turnover, illness and difficulties recruiting have a financial and emotional cost. Delivering a trauma informed, needs- led service means having consistency and stability for survivors, particularly children and young people.



Keeping the same staff member is crucial in terms of building relationships with young people and with schools

- Specialist Service



At the core of delivering this work and achieving the ultimate goal of ending VAWDASV in Wales is the expertise of specialist services and survivors. Without a clear and dedicated focus on prevention and adequate resourcing which allows both services and survivors to properly engage, there is a slim chance of improvement on the current situation.

What do specialist services say?

As part of our annual membership survey, we asked services to comment on the sustainability of their services under the current funding situation.

Specialist services and expertise are in danger of being lost, particularly for children and young people, where a continued lack of funding commitment and postcode lottery over years has created a dearth of provision.



If long term funding is not gained, we will lose all our children's workers.



The impermanency of funding is making staff recruitment and retention hard, this creates a 'brain drain' from the sector and threatens the support provided to survivors.



We continue to be on the treadmill of looking for continuation funding for vital projects that between them provide direct support to 100 individuals (women and children) a year.

Where staff have moved on it has been in favour of permanent roles.



Specialist services have implemented wellbeing initiatives such as wellbeing hours, offering more clinical support, and resources. Even when funding is limited, specialist services have found innovative ways to keep staff morale high. However, when capacity is limited due to short-term funding, and the stress of increasing waiting lists, service demand and caseloads, there's an urgent shift needed to balance job satisfaction, capacity and salary.



For me, it's not just about wages, it's much more than that, the place, the venue, the culture is massive, how you look after your staff, how you reward them.



Where is the funding coming from?

VAWDASV specialist support services are currently funded through a patchwork of local, regional and national commissioning and grants as well as charitable funding pots - often with short contracts. Welsh Government continues to provide each local authority with grant funding to invest in VAWDASV, however, this grant represents a

very small part of the overall resources that will be invested across Welsh Government and the wider statutory sector. There remain differing funding levels and processes according to different local authorities, Health Boards and Police and Crime Commissioners.

Significant areas of government—economic policy, health, education, employability, poverty, addressing serious violence, for example—have evidenced little commitment to investing in preventing or responding to VAWDASV to date. Others such as housing, social services, children and communities invest in responses relevant to VAWDASV but are not joined up to the strategic approach to VAWDASV, posing the danger of ineffective responses being funded, duplication and siloed approaches.

We make similar arguments for sustainability of funding year on year. The main issues continue to be:

Security for survivors.

The number one goal of all VAWDASV specialist services is to be there to offer safety and support for survivors. Membership surveys consistently show that due to funding circumstances, many services are unsure of how they will be operating the following year. Survivors deserve to know that support for them is consistent and will always be there for them if they need it.

Staff retention.

Over 50% of our members have told us (in the last 3 months) that recruitment continues to be a concern. Uncertain funding means an increase in short-term contracts, making it more difficult for services to recruit and retain their workforce. Specialist services require staff with specialist skills, meaning a lot of time and resource is invested in training and support. Having to retrain multiple new-starters due to difficulties in retaining workforce is unsustainable.

Competitive tendering.

Current tendering processes are pitting specialist services against each other as competitors rather than allies. Members constantly report wanting to share knowledge, skills and resources, and though this does occur services also have to consider how they will survive to continue vital work supporting survivors and staff when time comes to tender for contracts.

Postcode lottery.

Services are not funded consistently across Local Authorities and this lack of an overall view of how the specialist sector is funded makes it difficult to identify gaps in provision and think strategically on ending VAWDASV as a whole. The core aim of the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015 was to end postcode lottery in the prevention, protection and support for VAWDASV, that this continues nearly 7 years later highlights significant need to prioritise strategic leadership in the Acts implementation.

Firefighting and capacity for future planning.

Short funding cycles only allow services to focus on the crisis right in front of them, and leaves little room for strategic planning, prevention or wider work which would benefit survivors' experiences and enable long-term freedom from abuse.

Limited activities and bureaucracy.

Funding coming from an uncoordinated variety of sources means services must dedicate a lot of time and resources to writing applications and reporting to multiple outcomes frameworks. These different pots are also often for specific activities and limits wider strategic thinking.



Immediate actions

We have developed a list of strategic actions for delivering sustainable funding for VAWDASV that need to be considered by the Welsh Government in the creation of its budget and the delivery of its new national VAWDASV strategy in 2022.

- A strong Welsh Government commitment to continuing to develop and implement a sustainable funding model for the specialist VAWDASV sector, in the upcoming national VAWDASV strategy.
- Cross governmental approach to budgeting for VAWDASV to ensure that the investment is based on the prevalence of VAWDASV in populations and the evidence into social, financial and environmental costs of VAWDASV across portfolios of health, housing, education, social care, economy and employment.
- Create a national mechanism to have oversight of funding provision at national and local level. Monitoring and holding bodies to account for the adequate investment both geographically and across forms of VAWDASV based on effective needs assessment.
- Clear duties and expectations for local authorities and health boards, and collaboration with PCCs, in the national VAWDASV strategy delivery plan to invest in specialist service provision.

Immediate actions

- Clarify who is responsible and accountable for commissioning the full range of services to meet the various needs, and ensure every region has mechanisms in place to deliver and coordinate strategic collaboration commissioning for VAWDASV.
- Commissioners to agree contracts for a minimum of 3-5 years and to ensure contracts offer a living wage, to enable services to recruit and retain dedicated, qualified staff.
- Relevant authorities to ensure that the statutory commissioning guidance is adhered to and that a regional commissioning strategy is produced in consultation with specialist services and survivors.
- Space for VAWDASV specialist services and survivors to participate in local or regional commissioning processes to inform regional collaborative commissioning strategies and the needs analysis on health and wellbeing, children and young people, and housing.
- Ensure adequate and sustainable investment in support for children and young people specialist provision. Working with children and young people affected by VAWDASV aligns with work in ACEs and children in the care system; there must be alignment in investment.

This is our 5th annual State of the Sector report. We are disheartened in the reflection that each year we have raised variations of the points outlined in this document and yet the above actions have yet to be fruitfully implemented. The pandemic has now brought the lack of sustainability in the sector into stark relief and has impacted on the provision of support available to women, children and men. We implore the Welsh Government to review and implement the actions chapter, making sustainable funding for specialist services a reality, in the [2020 State of the Sector report](#).



**We cannot continue to
turn survivors away from
support.**

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