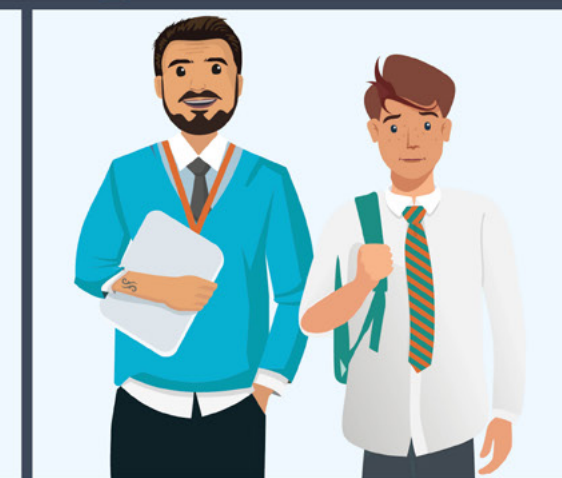
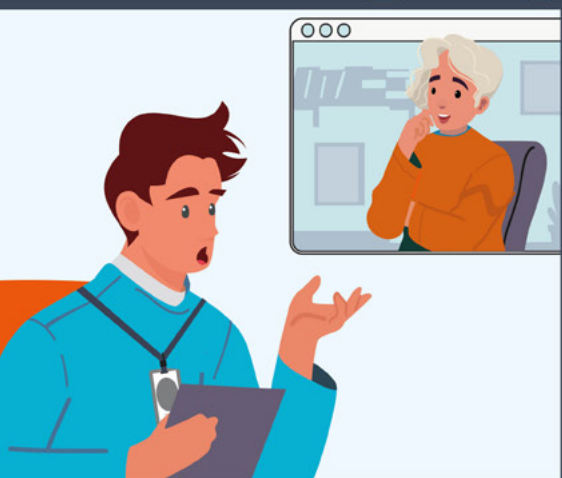
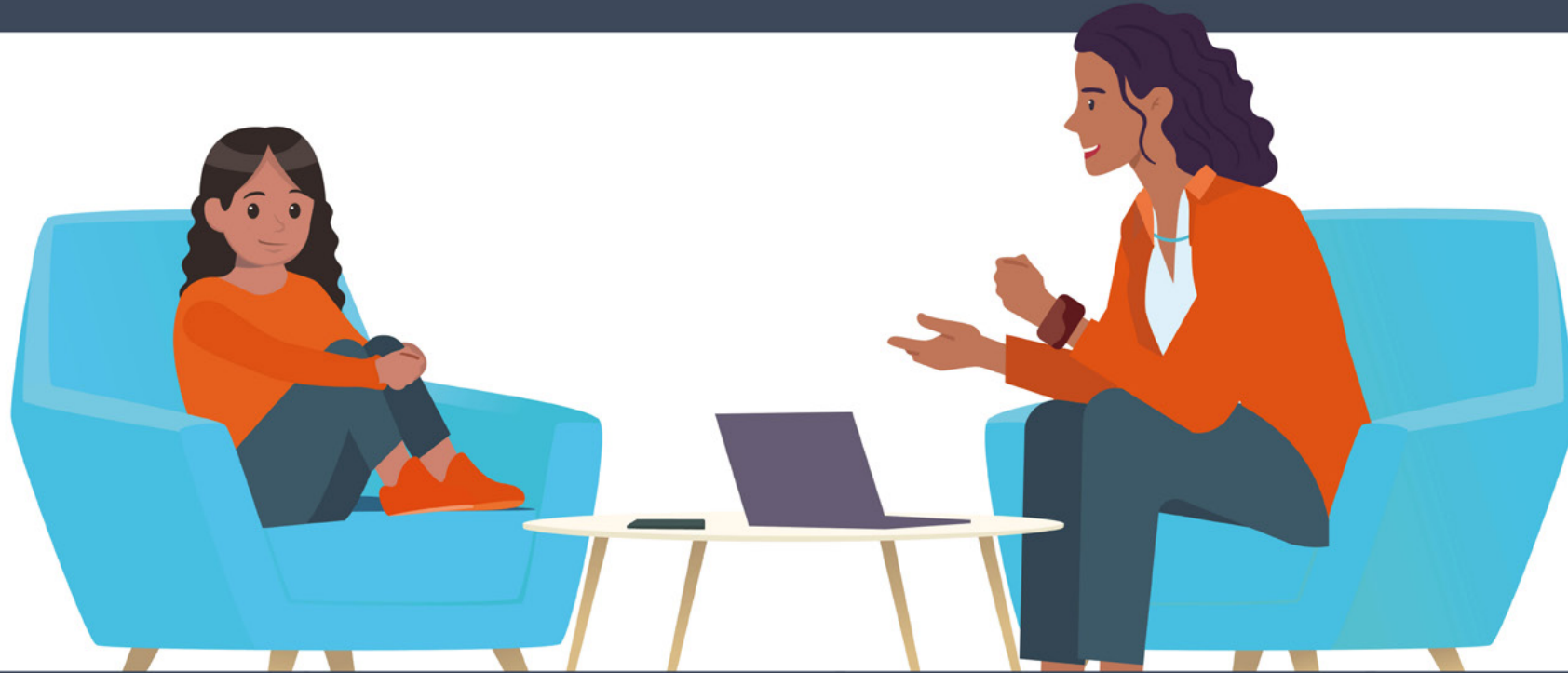


Checking mental health support for children and young people in Wales

Summary Report 2024



In 2024 we did a joint review of mental health support for children and young people.

We checked the support they get from:



What we did


We focused on children and young people aged 11-16 across Wales.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and Estyn helped us look at what support children and young people get:

- before a referral to CAMHS
- while they waited for an assessment from CAMHS
- if the assessments say they don't get specialist CAMHS support.

i Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provide care and treatment for children and young people with more serious mental health needs.

Professionals from our Review Stakeholder Group gave us advice and feedback as we carried out the review.



This report tells you what we found — what's working well and what we think needs to improve.

Why this is important

Getting the right help at the right time makes a big difference.

Having good mental health affects:



We want to make sure all children and young people get the mental health support they need, no matter who they are or where they live in Wales.



The review had 2 parts.

Part 1 — Information

We asked health boards for information about what mental health services are available and where they are across Wales. Then we talked to managers about what we found.



Part 2 — Fieldwork



We looked at the work of 3 health boards and local authorities:

- Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Torfaen County Borough Council
- Hywel Dda University Health Board and Ceredigion County Council
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.



We looked at inspection reports from:

- 48** secondary schools
- 8** all age schools
- 5** Pupil Referral Units
- 12** special schools
- 18** independent schools
- 9** local authority education service departments.



We read the health and social care records of children and young people, including care experienced children.



We ran 3 online national surveys for:

children and young people

215
children and young people

parents and carers

200
parents and carers

professionals

91 CAMHS staff
76 Local Authority staff
17 voluntary sector staff
68 primary care staff



- ➔ We involved organisations including Mind Cymru and Children in Wales.
- ➔ We worked with youth advisory boards.
- ➔ We involved 9 focus groups.

The good news:

There are lots of well-trained staff working across services supporting children and young people's mental health needs.

Most areas have "safe spaces" or "crisis hubs" where young people can go when they're struggling.

Schools are working hard to support students' mental health, with special support rooms and trained staff to help. They have school counsellors and work well with CAMHS, services, and organisations.

The Welsh Government has lots of plans, funding and new laws to make sure children and young people get the right support for their mental health.

There are more early support services available now, including online help, school counselling, and local support groups.

When young people do get support from mental health services, many find it really helpful.



The challenges:

About half of young people said they don't know where to get help for their mental health.

Many young people and families find it hard to access Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Some young people have to wait a long time to start getting help after they've been assessed.

Young people often have to tell their story multiple times to different professionals, which can be frustrating.

Support isn't the same everywhere in Wales - some areas have better or faster services than others.

The point at which you can get CAMHS needs to be clearer.

There isn't enough funding especially as demand is rising.

Information needs to be clearer and easier to understand.

Schools need more staff and resources to support pupils.

About getting support

In the children and young people's survey

50% said they didn't know where to get support for their mental health.

29% felt they could get support when they need it.

16% felt they got the right amount of support.

Most said the greatest help with their mental health came from their family and carers.

50% felt they weren't listened to when decisions were made about support.

83% felt their mental health needs affected their schooling the most.

“Just as I started to feel an improvement, my sessions ended.”

“I had a very supportive counsellor who adapted sessions to what I wanted to focus on.”

“I think the once a week or every two weeks was good, but the total amount of appointments/sessions is not really enough to really make a difference.”

“Treatment was disjointed, different people all the time – I didn't form a relationship with anyone – they didn't get to know me. I had to explain everything again and again to new people, I didn't like any of them.”

Early support

We were told about lots of services and professions that step in early to support children and young people and their families across Wales.

Online and app-based services

Online services like Kooth, help lots of children and young people, especially those who don't want face to face support.



About CAMHS

There are different types of CAMHS support:

Primary CAMHS – support for mild mental health issues.

Secondary CAMHS – support for moderate to severe mental health symptoms.

88% said they had got, or tried to get support from CAMHS.

75% felt they were not offered any support while they waited for CAMHS.

Only 26% said they would recommend CAMHS to others.

Lots of children felt they didn't get the right support they needed at the right time, by the right service.

“The CAMHS worker that I had last had a good relationship with me, and she helped me to open up about my struggles which the other CAMHS workers that I saw previously did not make me feel comfortable enough.”

How it works

Step 1

Referral

Usually by a GP, school or local authority service, in some parts of Wales you can make a self-referral too.



Step 2

CAMHS Single Point of Access (SPOA) team

They look at the referral and decide if there's an assessment or if the child should be connected to other support.



Step 3

Assessment

This should happen within 28 days. Assessments decide if a child or young person should get CAMHS services or be connected to other support.



Step 4

Initial Treatment and Support

This should start within 28 days. If there's a waiting list, the child or young person should get help and advice while they wait.



CAMHS single point of access team (SPOA)

Over 60% of parents and carers felt that the CAMHS process wasn't clearly explained to them.

Over 65% felt they weren't told how to keep their child safe while they waited for an assessment.

Often decisions about getting CAMHS support were made in the same ways across Wales. But sometimes they weren't.

Communication from CAMHS could be better.

Information about why some children and young people were not accepted needed to be clearer.

Healthcare staff told us:

“CAMHS are inundated with referrals, and they don't have the staff or resources to meet the significant increase. This has meant young people are on very long waiting lists. There are also a lot of inappropriate referrals being made.”

“There appears to be a lack of understanding of emotional health [versus] mental health by referrers who I feel would benefit from some training and updating on what CAMHS do.”

Recommendations:

- ➔ Health boards and local authorities should check their SPOA teams.
- ➔ Health boards must:
 - make sure CAMHS teams communicate clearly
 - make sure advice is given when there's an assessment
 - explore ways CAMHS teams can work better with GPs and other services.

Risk assessments

Keeping everyone safe is important.

Records and paperwork didn't always show a risk assessment had been done.

Sometimes information wasn't put up on the system quickly enough making planning care difficult. GPs and local authority staff didn't get information about what was happening or why a referral wasn't accepted.



Recommendations:

- ➔ Health boards must listen to feedback and be clear about why decisions are made. They must make sure record keeping improves.



Passing the level of need for CAMHS.

Some health boards couldn't fully explain how they decide who gets help.

It also wasn't clear why some were offered an assessment and others weren't.

Decisions about who can get support is different across Wales.

“Many children and young people won't get support from them because they're not 'unwell enough'.”

“Sometimes children and young people don't reach the threshold 'on paper' but as a professional, you know when someone is in crisis.”

“The threshold to access supports seems to need to be close to death.”



Recommendation:

- ➔ The Welsh Government should work with health boards and review the CAMHS system so it's the same across Wales.

The 'Missing Middle'

Some children and young people don't get support. They don't get CAMHS support and don't get the right support from other places either. We call this the Missing Middle.

Only **28%** of CAMHS staff felt there is enough support for children and young people who can't get support for CAMHS.

Lots of CAMHS teams were trying to help children and young people by:

- having staff work with schools and other services
- training school nurses and health visitors
- working with GPs
- holding events and roadshows and more.



Recommendations:

- ➔ Health boards and local authorities must:
 - work together and review how they work with other services
 - make sure there are clearer steps and systems to make decisions about who gets CAMHS support.



After a referral

Lots of children, young people and families got letters from CAMHS about the different options of support available. But some of these letters included:

- general information
- support that wasn't right for the person or didn't meet needs
- information that was out-of-date.



Recommendations:

- ➔ Health boards must:
 - make sure all CAMHS teams review support services in their area and online
 - review their processes, including the letter templates and the information they give people.
- ➔ Health boards, children's services and education services must work together to:
 - check there's support for those who don't get CAMHS
 - make sure all support meets people's needs
 - promote the different types of support available.

Mental health crisis care

CAMHS crisis teams across Wales help people who need urgent help.

Some children and young people who didn't get support from CAMHS ended up needing help from the CAMHS crisis teams or A&E.

Lots of children and young people in crisis get assessments and support quickly.

Lots of health boards have opened Sanctuary Spaces so children and young people have a safe, calm place to get help. But these are open at different times across Wales.

- 💬 "My child's decline in mental health should have been picked up sooner before crisis point."
- 💬 "Too many children reach crisis point before anyone takes notice."
- 💬 "The Hangout (Cardiff and Vale) has given me a safe space to talk. Not necessarily the best place to support long-term, more of a short-term service."



Neurodiverse needs and CAMHS

Neurodiverse is about having a brain that works differently, this can include autism. Many CAMHS staff felt CAMHS isn't the right service to support neurodiverse needs. Some are developing new ways of working to help them better.



Recommendation:

- ➔ The Welsh Government must work with health boards to explore how to improve support for neurodivergent children and young people, who have mental health needs.

Getting support quickly – within 28 days

Many assessments are carried out quickly. But support and treatment by CAMHS is often delayed and some children and young people waited several months.

At the 3 health boards **91%** received an assessment within 28 days. But a lot of the support took longer than the 28-day target.



Recommendations

- ➔ The Welsh Government should work with health boards to:
 - make sure assessments and support happen within 28 days
 - make sure CAMHS services are the same across Wales.

Support in schools

Even though the number of school-based counsellors has gone up, more pupils need them so waiting lists can be long.

37% said they were happy in school

50% said they felt safe in school.

CAMHS work with schools and offer training and advice. Sometimes they give assessments and step in to support.

Schools are finding new ways to support pupils:

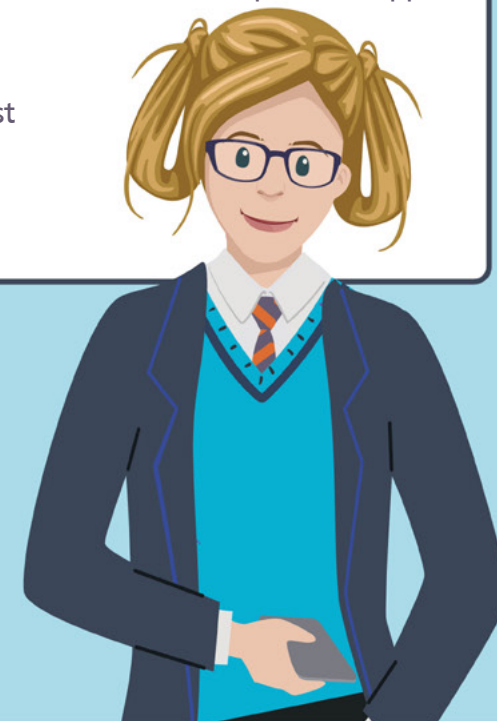
- They have safe spaces.
- They connect with youth workers, counsellors, school nurses and community organisations.
- They offer pupils short-breaks or time-out cards if they're feeling anxious.
- They use community activities like art therapy and boxing.

Schools said they need more funding, resources, staff and specialist support.



Recommendations:

- ➔ Education services and schools must check how they work and see if there are ways to improve.



Care experienced children

Lots of services work together to support care experienced children and young people.

Care experienced children were listened to and their wishes were part of decisions.

Parents and carers said information should be clear and accurate. When it's not, it adds to their stress.

Local authorities offer counselling. A few children getting CAMHS support were put back on the waiting list when their placement changed.

Sometimes professionals didn't agree about what support a child or young person should get. This slowed down support.



Recommendations:

- Health boards and local authorities must work together to:
 - make sure staff understand the challenges care experienced children face
 - strengthen connections and pathways between CAMHS and other services for care experienced children
 - develop guidance for staff.
- They must be better at keeping professional records including information about decisions.
- They must make sure partners attend all health and care meetings.
- They should have systems and processes that help decision making at all levels, including managing complex cases.



Making sure it's fair for everyone

There isn't enough information about how services support children and young people from different backgrounds, or who face health inequalities. This needs to improve.



Recommendations:

- ➔ The Welsh Government should:
 - look at how information is collected and used
 - think about publishing reports on this.

Language choice

Everyone should get support in their language. It makes it easier to express thoughts and feelings. Most Welsh speakers said:

- they weren't asked for their language choice
- they didn't get assessments or treatment in Welsh.

Online support services like SilverCloud are available in Welsh.



Recommendation

- ➔ Health boards and local authorities must consider people's language preferences. They must make sure Welsh speakers can communicate with CAMHS services in Welsh in line with the 'Active offer'.

Cost of getting support

Many families said it can be difficult to get to appointments because of timings, and travel costs.

Some CAMHS services weren't flexible, stopping support if people missed appointments.

Groups, like care experienced children need to be helped more so they don't miss appointments.



Recommendations:

- ➔ Health boards must be flexible and not stop CAMHS support, without looking at the circumstances.
- ➔ Plans should target helping harder-to-reach groups and complex cases to stop things getting worse.



Quality Improvement

Some CAMHS teams have ways to monitor and check their work, but not all.



Recommendations:

- ➔ Health boards must make sure all CAMHS services check their work and improve.
- ➔ The Welsh Government should develop one tool (system) that all CAMHS use to improve.

Recording and sharing information

Different services use different systems to manage information across Wales. Some use digital systems, some still use paper. This makes sharing information difficult.



Recommendations:

- ➔ Health boards and local authorities must set up systems to share information between services.
- ➔ The Welsh Government must work with health boards and local authorities to develop one joined-up digital record management system that they all use. This is urgent.

Funding

There are pressures on budgets across all services. Some mental health programs and support services have already stopped.



Recommendation:

- ➔ The Welsh Government should make sure there is enough funding for mental health support.

Involving people

Lots of services involve children, young people and families. They listen to them and include their views in events and planning. Many have youth advisory boards and gather feedback.



Recommendation:

- ➔ Health boards should make sure they have ways to include the views of children and young people and families.



Going forward

Health boards, local authorities and education will write plans for how they will respond to these recommendations. We'll check that they take all the steps to improve.

i Getting support

Whatever you're going through, these people are there to talk to:

Mind [▶ Mind.org.uk/about-us/mind-cymru-mind-in-wales](https://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/mind-cymru-mind-in-wales)

Young Minds [▶ Youngminds.org.uk](https://www.youngminds.org.uk)

NHS 111 Press 2 [▶ 111.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/m/article/mentalhealthandwellbeing](https://111.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/m/article/mentalhealthandwellbeing)

They won't judge you. They're free, anonymous, and always open.

To find out more about our work, go to:



[▶ hiw.org.uk](https://hiw.org.uk)



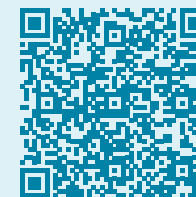
[▶ careinspectorate.wales](https://careinspectorate.wales)



[▶ estyn.gov.wales](https://estyn.gov.wales)

Thanks for reading this

You can read the full report here:



hiw.org.uk/joint-review-how-are-healthcare-education-and-childrens-services-supporting-mental-health-needs



WG51099

ISBN: 978-1-83625-937-4