

# Making stroke a priority

A manifesto for the 2026 Senedd Cymru election



# Introduction



## Stroke is Wales' fourth biggest killer.

It is a leading cause of disability, instantly changing the lives of the 7,000 people who will have a stroke this year in Wales. The good news is that with the right investment, stroke is preventable, treatable, and recoverable.

As we approach the 2026 Senedd Cymru election, it is crucial to prioritise stroke care in Wales. When it comes to stroke outcomes, Wales currently ranks 21 out of 26 countries in Europe. England is positioned at 12.

Annually, stroke costs NHS Wales £220 million, and the Welsh economy £1.63 billion. Without intervention, this could rise to £2.8 billion by 2035.

### Neglecting investment in stroke will have significant consequences.

Mums, dads, grandparents, young people, even children – anyone can have a stroke, and its impact is traumatic. Stroke is a leading cause of disability and can leave survivors unable to move, see, speak or even swallow. Stroke can also lead to personality changes and depression.

Our manifesto, crafted through the insights of stroke survivors, their families and professionals, presents three crucial calls to action. We strongly urge all political parties to embrace these recommendations, making sure Wales does not fall behind the rest of Europe and ensuring people affected by stroke receive the support they need.

By transforming stroke services, we can drive improvements in prevention, treatment and recovery across all health conditions.

**Any political party wanting to transform health in Wales should place stroke at the top of its priority list.**



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and the Welsh economy  
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# 1. Transformation of **stroke services** as a **programme for government**

**The treatment and care of people who experience a stroke in Wales has been declining since 2019. The Quality Statement for Stroke (published in 2021) commits to developing nationally optimised pathways to improve stroke services and address variations in care. It emphasises the need for collaboration between health boards, people affected by stroke, and stakeholders to enhance prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation for people who experience a stroke. The national transformation of stroke services is a crucial next step to address the current inconsistencies and overcrowding across the whole stroke care pathway.**

It's clear that adequate funding and strategic planning are needed to implement these changes effectively. Our healthcare workforce is critical for our success. By investing in workforce development and ensuring the transformation of stroke services, we can make Wales an attractive place for healthcare professionals to work, thereby ensuring the high-quality services and positive outcomes our communities need.

The transformation of stroke services must be committed to in the Programme for Government because, while decisions are devolved to health boards in Wales, they are under significant budget pressures. Without clear prioritisation and funding from the Welsh Government, this critical work may not be completed due to competing demands and financial constraints. Ensuring dedicated resources and strategic support is essential.

New service standards for stroke in Wales must include a commitment to improved thrombectomy and thrombolysis rates, increased early supported discharge and improved six-month reviews, with associated measures that are regularly reviewed. Life after stroke services should be integrated into the pathway and service standards through cross-sector collaboration, ensuring holistic support for all stroke survivors.

In addition, a new set of stroke service standards for Wales must address health inequalities, including those felt by Welsh-speaking stroke survivors. For example, a specific health inequality faced by Welsh-speaking stroke survivors is the lack of access to speech and language therapy in their first language, which can hinder their recovery and communication abilities.

## **Call to action:**

Committing to the national transformation of stroke services in the next Programme for Government will improve treatment rates across the stroke pathway, reduce variations in treatment and improve outcomes.

Moving to a regional network model, including developing comprehensive stroke centres and a new set of dedicated stroke service standards will provide resilient, high quality and sustainable healthcare by enhancing recovery and quality of life for stroke survivors, while maximising NHS resources from the hospital through to life after stroke support in the community.

## 2. Ensure the **implementation** of a **national biennial and bilingual Act FAST /Cam NESAs stroke awareness campaign**

The Act FAST (Face, Arms, Speech, Time)/Cam NESAs (Nam ar yr wyneb, Estyn, Siarad, Amser) public awareness campaign is proven to increase awareness of the most common symptoms of stroke and improve outcomes for stroke survivors.

Nine out of ten strokes could be prevented. Increasing awareness of the signs of a stroke alongside its risk factors would maximise messaging and resources.

Running targeted stroke awareness campaigns alongside an Act FAST/Cam NESAs national campaign was recommended by Healthcare Inspectorate Wales in their 'National Review of Patient Flow: a journey through the stroke pathway' in 2023.

### Call to action:

Help people access the right care at the right time by ensuring the implementation of a national biennial and bilingual Act FAST/Cam NESAs campaign.

This should run alongside stroke prevention campaigns targeting groups of people at the highest risk of having a stroke. This may include Black and Asian people, and those living with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, excessive alcohol intake, smokers, and those with Atrial Fibrillation (AF). Prevention campaigns should include highlighting the risk factors for stroke and preventative measures to help reduce those risks, including education on healthy diets, exercise, alcohol consumption, smoking cessation, and stress reduction.





### 3. Specialist **mental health support** for **stroke survivors**

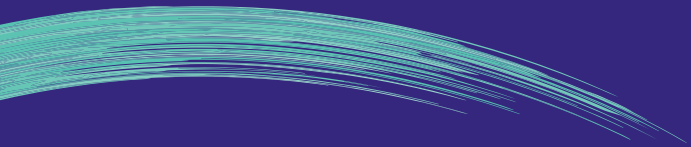
A recent survey conducted by the Stroke Association found that around three quarters of stroke survivors experience at least one mental health problem following a stroke, yet only 3% received support when they needed it the most. Currently, there is little specialised support available in Wales to help stroke survivors address their mental health.

#### **Call to action:**

For the Welsh Government to continue to prioritise mental health and wellbeing, with increased funding; building on new initiatives, such as the partnership work conducted by the Stroke Association and Mind Cymru, to ensure specialist mental health support is available for stroke survivors and their families. This will support early intervention and timely access to care.

#### **Conclusion**

Our manifesto for the 2026 Senedd Cymru election is a call to action for all political parties to prioritise stroke care in Wales. By acting on these three key calls we can ensure that stroke survivors receive the support they need to lead fulfilling lives. Together, we can make a significant impact on stroke outcomes and improve the quality of life for thousands of people across Wales.



The Stroke Association is the only charity in the UK providing lifelong support for all stroke survivors and their families. We provide tailored support to tens of thousands of stroke survivors each year, fund vital stroke research, and campaign to secure the best care and support for everyone affected by stroke.

It's only thanks to the generosity of our supporters and donors that we can provide vital support.

Donate or find out more at **[stroke.org.uk](https://stroke.org.uk)**



## Contact us

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Website: **[stroke.org.uk](https://stroke.org.uk)**

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