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Shaping Wales' Future: Using National Indicators and Milestones to measure our Nation's progress

Introduction

BMA Cymru Wales is pleased to provide a response to the consultation by the Welsh Government on setting national milestones for Wales, which will help assess progress towards the 7 well-being goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The BMA is a professional association and trade union representing and negotiating on behalf of all doctors and medical students in the UK. It is a leading voice advocating for outstanding health care and a healthy population. It is an association providing members with excellent individual services and support throughout their lives.

Response

Having closely following the development of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and having responded to other related consultations during and following its passage, we are grateful to be given the opportunity to comment on this particular consultation.

Whilst we will not be providing a comprehensive response on this occasion, and will not therefore be offering a view in relation to all the questions that have been posed, we would nonetheless like to make a few points for the Welsh Government's consideration

National Milestones

We note the intention to maintain a small set of indicators that help understand progress according to Wales' wellbeing goals. This is an extremely complex area which does require granularity to encompass the wide-ranging measures, however as per our

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previous feedback on this topic we feel that it is difficult to give equal consideration and prominence to the 40 or so indicators. Establishing a concise set of national milestones as measures against the indicators is therefore a positive development, although we would caution against them becoming defined ‘targets’.

Many of the proposed milestones reflect BMA Cymru Wales priorities, as outlined in our recent [Senedd election manifesto](#)ⁱ, for example: ensuring a diverse workforce within an inclusive culture (Milestone 5); action on smoking, obesity and physical activity (Milestone 6) and ensuring a healthier environment with actions to improve air quality and phase out power generation from fossil fuels (Milestones 7 and 8). Additionally, achieving a net zero healthcare sector is one of the BMA’s policy prioritiesⁱⁱ across the UK and we would therefore support a milestone related to this goal.

As an association we are committed to addressing the determinants of health inequalities across the UK (as outlined in the recent toolkit for cliniciansⁱⁱⁱ), and therefore are keenly aware of the long-term health impacts that educational disadvantages and employment instability have upon individual and community health (Milestones 1,2 and 3).

Whilst we are supportive of the suggested Milestones as measures of progress or lack thereof, we are somewhat unclear about how they will be used in practical day-to-day terms, particularly within the NHS and in the community. It is important that the milestones do not become an additional, unwarranted layer of bureaucracy placed upon clinicians as a form of performance management. At the same time, it is clear that such measures of national importance are easily accessible, communicated to and understood by the health and care workforce as a point of reference.

National Indicators

In our response to the 2016 consultation ‘*Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: How do you measure a nation’s progress?*’^{iv}, we noted our concern regarding the apparent absence of measures that can identify progress that may be made towards tackling obesity. At the time, we commented that given “*the growing prevalence of obesity, and its relationship with conditions such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers, it must clearly be seen as a key priority*”. It is disappointing that there has been little tangible improvement with regard to obesity in the intervening five years, with the 2019-20 National Survey for Wales^v showing that 61% of adults are classified as overweight or obese, including 25% who are obese. It is therefore appropriate to restate our previous call for a specific indicator focusing on obesity prevention.

We would support the introduction of new indicators on travel and transport. BMA Cymru Wales has long supported Active Travel prior to and subsequent to the 2013 Act, but we are concerned about the implementation, with only 5% of people over 16 making at least one ‘active travel trip’ once a week in 2016-17. The Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee’s post-legislative scrutiny report^{vi} identified that the level of available funding constrained the activity of local authorities and advocated for an increase in the overall recurrent funding for implementation.

We would support an indicator focused on digital living standards. Whilst digital means of access ensured that many people were able to receive access to healthcare advice and treatment during the pandemic, this could not meet the needs of all in society, with an estimated 10.7m people in the UK having limited or zero basic digital skills according to the ONS^{vii}.

We would query the amendments to the indicators (p20) looking at quality of work, which proposes to remove job satisfaction and quality of employment indicators. We have long advocated for the benefits of medical engagement^{viii} as an association: aside from the wider socio-economic benefits of having an engaged, secure workforce, there is also clear evidence of the direct relationship between engagement and clinical performance within the NHS^{ix}.

We would support the expansion of the pay difference indicator to include ethnicity and disability pay gaps. The gender pay gap within medicine is well known, with data for NHS England showing a 18.9% difference between male and female hospital doctor pay and 15.3% for the GP equivalent. More work must be done to understand the differences in the gender pay gap with the intersectionality of different protected characteristics e.g. race and disability, and thus we would support such an indicator.

ⁱ BMA Cymru Wales 'A manifesto for health' (Nov 2020)

https://www.bma.org.uk/media/3564/bma_cymru_wales_manifesto_2021_eng_26nov20.pdf

ⁱⁱ BMA 'Climate change and sustainability The health service and net zero' (Oct 2020)

<https://www.bma.org.uk/media/3464/bma-climate-change-and-sustainability-paper-october-2020.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Reducing health inequalities in your local area: a toolkit for clinicians, BMA October 2021

<https://www.bma.org.uk/what-we-do/population-health/addressing-social-determinants-that-influence-health/reducing-health-inequalities-in-your-local-area-a-toolkit-for-clinicians>

^{iv} <https://gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-wales-act-2015-how-do-you-measure-nations-progress>

^v <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-07/national-survey-wales-headline-results-april-2019-march-2020-947.pdf>

^{vi} Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee *Post Legislative Scrutiny of the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013* (June 2018) <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11566-r/cr-ld11566-r-e.pdf>

^{vii} BMA 'Access to care: bridging the digital divide' (May 21) <https://www.bma.org.uk/news-and-opinion/access-to-care-bridging-the-digital-divide>

^{viii} BMA (2017) *Medical Engagement: Doctors Contributions to Change* <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/integration/medical-engagement-doctors-contributions-to-change>

^{ix} Clark J and Nath V (2014) *Medical Engagement, a journey not an event*. King's Fund