



SOCIAL CAPITAL





Welcome

Social capital (social connectedness and community networks) plays a vital role in shaping our health and wellbeing and can contribute to health inequalities across Wales.

‘Social capital’ is understood to describe social relationships and networks, including those with family, friends, neighbours, and the wider community, characterised by trust and reciprocity. The social connections and networks we have within our communities are fundamental to our health and well-being.

Social capital is, therefore, of central importance to policy makers and service providers looking to improve health and reduce health inequality through improved social connection and participation in communities across Wales.

Our September e-bulletin includes a range of projects and initiatives that are using this approach to shape health and well-being and improve health inequalities in communities throughout Wales.

Let us know what you think of our e-bulletin by answering two questions. Click [here](#) for the survey.

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Webinar: No one left behind – The future of social connections and communities in Wales

Public Health Network Cymru

Public Health Wales

Social connections play a vital role in our health and wellbeing and can be a contributory factor in some people's experience of poorer health outcomes. Changes are already happening that impact the ways we relate to each other. We live increasingly digitalised lives, our working lives are changing and changes in demographics, family composition and the way we engage with politics and our institutions mean we need to think about the challenges and opportunities ahead for our social lives, relationships, and communities. An inclusive

approach to protecting and promoting social connections in a rapidly changing world is important for our future health and wellbeing.

Click [here](#) to find out more and view the presentations and live recording from the event



Research

Social Capital, Cancer, and the Countryside

Rebecca Gardner

Macmillan Rural Cancer Experience
Researcher, NHS & Macmillan

**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**

**CYMORTH CANCER
MACMILLAN**

A brief overview of the role of social capital in the first-year findings from the **Macmillan Rural Cancer Experience Evaluation in Mid Wales**

“Community here are amazing. So many people are willing to help. You know so many in the village and they know you. I have really great friends and great support from people, I don’t think I need therapy.”

Sitting in a toasty living room in a house on the hillside in Aberdyfi, above a wild sea, a labrador is lying at our feet and the rain is still running its constant meandering paths down the windowpanes; the notion of what social

capital means for people with cancer in rural Mid Wales is reinforced to me once again. The above quote is a small extract of one of 38 interviews that have made up the first year of the Macmillan Rural Cancer Experience Evaluation, where upon the notion of community (and the embodied social capital) has emerged as a strong theme. This is contradictory to the other emergent themes that represent catalysts for rural inequalities in the cancer experiences of this rural population (See Figure 1). Stories of warm meals aplenty delivered to doorsteps, for periods of time that go beyond just ‘being a friend’, have been commonly relayed to

me, along with community support of both a practical and financial nature.

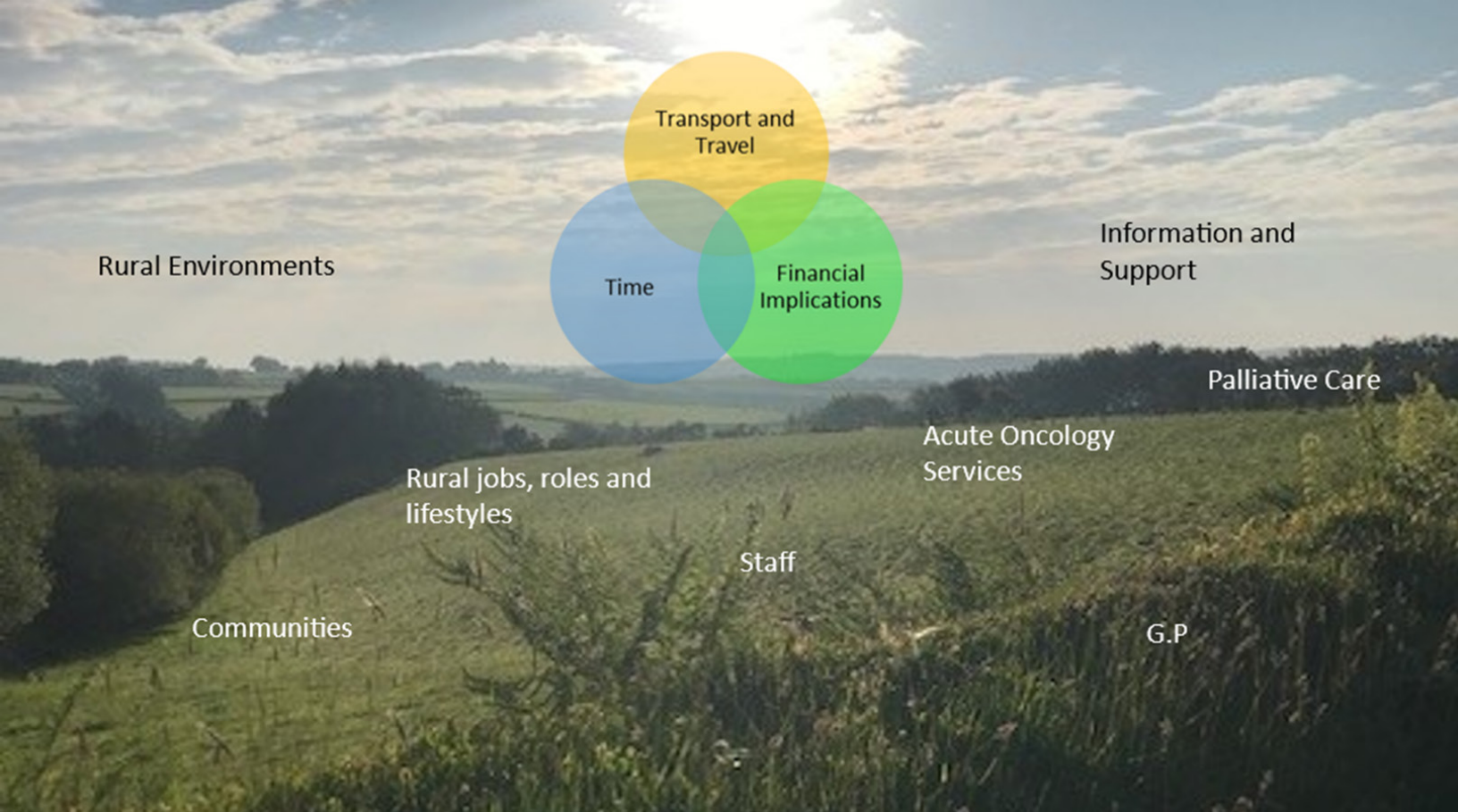


Figure 1

Memorable recounts from one person with cancer who has a physically recorded cancer journey exceeding 5600 miles to date, or another doing 144-mile round trips for appointments laying on the back seat of a car, both illustrate barriers associated with transport, travel and finances that have made potential inequalities so readily identifiable. But how are these challenges and barriers being mitigated in the countryside? The answer so often has been through social capital. A mum of two children needing 6 weeks (of Monday to Friday) radiotherapy 70 miles away from home, told me she would have been travelling daily had it not been for her

local religious community paying for accommodation in north Wales near to the treatment centre. For another it was a circle of friends in the community that took it in turns to drive her to appointments that meant she could both get there, and afford it; or another that was leant a car by a local farmer as the hospital ambulance suspension caused too much pain for his wife’s bone cancer on the rural roads.

Whilst these small vignettes present the most fleeting of glimpses into this project, social capital has emerged as both something to be valued and looked after. I feel it has been demonstrated to be one of the best opportunities

in counterbalancing inequalities in the rural cancer patient experience. But as investment and services are cut in some rural areas, and demographics show an ever aging population, social capital will need to be nurtured; succinctly summarised by one participant:

“I think communities are going to look after communities - but we need the investment.”

If you are interested in finding out more about the evaluation or would like a copy of the full report and recommendations due June 2025 then please contact: contact@ruralhealthandcare.wales



Policy

Beyond parks and playgrounds: fostering and celebrating a culture of play for children and teenagers

Marianne Mannello

Assistant Director: policy, support, advocacy, Play Wales



Many of us have fond memories of growing up in a time when it was accepted that children, once old enough and confident enough to negotiate the outside world independently or with friends and siblings, played outside and ranged within neighbourhoods freely. Where did you learn to catch, balance, hide? How about finding friends, falling out with them, making friends again? The spaces near where we live and grow up have always been a place of connection – full of cracks, nooks and crannies where magic erupts when children have enough time and are allowed to play.

Playing is central to children’s physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing. Studies show that playing helps children feel part of their neighbourhoods and wider communities. Playing also supports:

- socialisation
- resilience
- health and wellbeing
- learning and development
- happiness.

Our childhood memories of playing, of having ‘everyday adventures’ near where we live, represent the rich and lively culture of children’s play. Through playing children:

- create and pass on games,

songs and stories

- work together, negotiate, and build relationships
- feel connected to each other and their neighbourhoods.

Welcoming places and the company of others to play with every day is still important to children, as demonstrated in a Play Wales survey where nearly 7,000 children tell us how satisfied they are about when, how and where they can play in their local area.

In the survey, children were asked how often they played or hung out with their friends. Nearly half (42%) said that they go out and play or hang out with friends most days. A further third play out a few days a week.

This research identified trends and issues that commonly impact on children's ability to access opportunities to play, including:

- changes in neighbourhoods
 - increased car use, increased traffic (moving and parked), changing work patterns
- parental restrictions due to perceptions of neighbourhood safety
- increase in participation in structured activities and educational demands
- children are 'out of place' in the public realm, increasing intolerance towards children and teenagers playing and meeting up.

Whilst playing comes

instinctively to children, the support of parents, policymakers and the wider community is necessary to ensure children have freedom, spaces and time to act on their natural instincts. Providing plenty of time, space and permission to play in communities will help children support their own sense of being well.

Public health policy and practitioners can help by gaining a deeper understanding of the range of spaces and places that children care about. Helping children have their voices heard through playful and play friendly engagement gives them opportunities to tell us what is important to them at a neighbourhood level. This in turn supports a more holistic understanding of children's play, which helps decision makers, across policy areas, to work together to apply an assets-based approach in providing for play.

A sense of place is important to help children to feel part of their community and neighbourhood. As has been the case for generations of children.

(Adapted from a blog provided for Public Map Platform, August 2024)

References

[What children say about play in Wales 2022](#)



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Research & Practice

Sustainable Communities: a rural community resilience project based in Lampeter and Llanidloes

Anna Prytherch

Head of Rural Health and Care Wales,
Rural Health and Care Wales

The “Sustainable Communities” project currently being delivered by Rural Health and Care Wales (RHCW) is a regional initiative, focussing on enhancing community resilience in two Mid Wales towns, Llanidloes and Lampeter. Launched in March 2024 and funded by Cynnal y Cardi through the UK Government, the project supports residents by organising social gatherings in safe places and co-ordinating volunteers to provide one-to-one assistance with various tasks. Two dedicated co-ordinators are working in

Mari Lewis

Research and Development Officer, Rural
Health and Care Wales

Lampeter and Llanidloes to strengthen social and community networks, connect volunteers with people in need and assist vulnerable residents. The project’s overarching objective is to enable vulnerable residents to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible, by building good social networks and community support.

The project aims to address loneliness and support independent living, with research suggesting that there is a strong correlation between loneliness, higher risks of

Brigitta Deak

Research and Development Officer, Rural
Health and Care Wales

depression and premature mortality^(9; 11). In Wales, nearly 20% of the population resides in communities with fewer than 1,500 people, leaving rural residents especially susceptible to isolation and loneliness⁽⁸⁾.

The Sustainable Communities project is managed by Rural Health and Care Wales (Hywel Dda University Health Board, Powys Teaching Health Board, and Betsi Cadwaladr Teaching Health Board). A previous community support program identified challenges in connecting community-based volunteers with statutory

services, whilst highlighting the benefits of connecting different communities / towns⁽¹³⁾. Sustainable Communities began consultations with existing community groups to assess their interest in participating at the onset of the project delivery and has recently undertaken a survey of residents to map out their needs.

The project's strategy is aligned with previous studies' recommendations, which have demonstrated the effectiveness of reducing isolation through social activities, contextualizing existing resources, and providing support^(4; 5; 6; 7). Various sustainable community initiatives in Wales, and globally, prioritize organising social events, co-ordinating volunteer support and delivering essential services to rural residents^(2; 3; 12). However, one limitation of these initiatives is the lack of effective advertising. An early outcome from the research to date has been lack of effective communication within communities of the numerous activities and events that exist, which aligns with general findings of the lack of awareness among the target population⁽¹⁾.

While sustainable community initiatives in Wales have made significant progress in addressing social and

health-related challenges, this project is constrained by limited funding and operates on a small scale⁽³⁾. To effectively address loneliness in our older, vulnerable rural residents, longer durations of interventions, a broader scope of strategies, or more tailored approaches, may be necessary⁽¹⁰⁾. Furthermore, there is a need for improved communication and enhanced co-ordination to ensure that social initiatives effectively reach and benefit the residents of rural communities.

There is a clear need for initiatives such as Sustainable Communities in rural areas, as loneliness remains a significant challenge for vulnerable individuals, even in close-knit communities. Flexibility and adaptability are essential for the successful implementation of any community project, as obstacles are inevitable. Collaboration across various sectors is key in community environments to raise awareness of available services and effectively reach the target audience through a range of communications. Additionally, fostering community mentoring between towns and villages should be encouraged.

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hapus

Practice

Hapus

Amy Davies

Principal Public Health Practitioner, Public Health Wales

Hapus aims to help spark conversations and action on mental wellbeing.

They provide evidence-based information and resources to support positive mental wellbeing.

Hapus wants to:
encourage people to prioritise their mental wellbeing, inspiring them to take action and focus on things that matter to them
bring people together around a common cause, to improve mental wellbeing for people in Wales
encourage individuals to

prioritise their mental wellbeing on a day-to-day basis and to take part in community life.

Hapus is delivered by Public Health Wales in partnership with the Arts Council of Wales, Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales, Cadw, National Trust Cymru, Natural Resources Wales, Sport Wales, Tempo, the Mental Health Foundation and the Welsh NHS Confederation.

You can find out more by visiting the [Hapus website](#), or you can follow them on social media:

Facebook - [@HapusMentalWellbeing](#)
Instagram - [@hapus.wales](#)
X - [@HapusWales](#)



Further reading

[Beyond the present: How to apply long-term thinking to reduce health inequalities - World Health Organization Collaborating Centre On Investment for Health and Well-being \(phwwhocc.co.uk\)](#)

[Communities and Climate Change in a Future Wales - World Health Organization Collaborating Centre On Investment for Health and Well-being \(phwwhocc.co.uk\)](#)

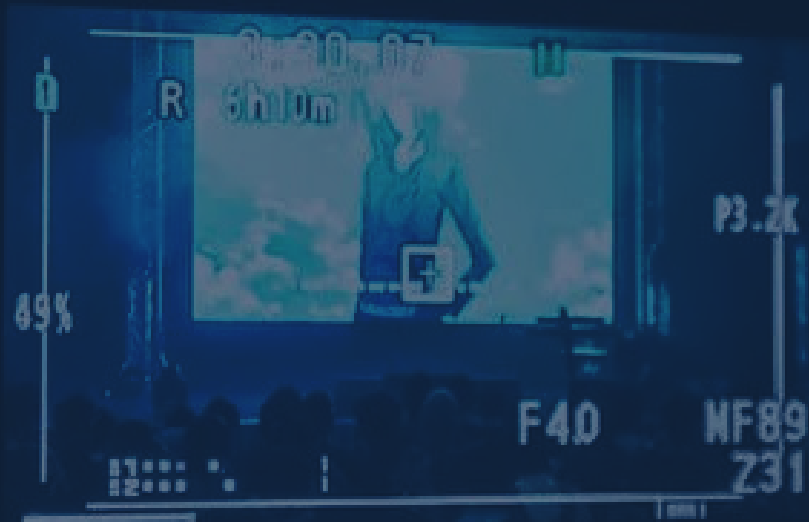
[The role of multisectoral collaboration in supporting community action | WCPP](#)

[COVID and the Coalfield: Vaccine Hesitance in Wales and Appalachia | The British Academy](#)

[Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology \(washington.edu\)](#)

[Health by association? Social capital, social theory, and the political economy of public health | International Journal of Epidemiology | Oxford Academic \(oup.com\)](#)

Videos



BARS

EVF DTL ZEBRA

LCD WFM

COUNTER-RESET/TC SE

FUNCTION SHTR/F



No one left behind – The future of social connections and communities in Wales

Social connections play a vital role in our health and wellbeing and can be a contributory factor in some people's experience of poorer health outcomes. Changes are already happening that impact the ways we relate to each other.

[Watch](#)



Developing Climate Surveillance for Wales: From Data To Action

This event showcased the latest perspectives from Public Health Wales and Welsh Government, emphasising how public health surveillance is essential to adapting to and mitigating climate-related health risks.

[Watch](#)



Wellness in Work: Supporting Health and Wellbeing at Work

Chaired by Mary-Ann McKibben, Consultant-lead for Healthy Working Wales (Public Health Wales), this webinar heard from academics who have undertaken research and evaluation to understand what works in relation to workplace health approaches.

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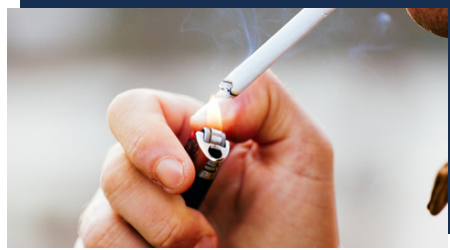
News & Resources





[Cancer incidence recovering toward pre-pandemic levels](#)

26-09-2024



[Over 10 percent of deaths in Wales due to smoking](#)

24-09-2024



[Roll-out of free school meals for all primary school children in Wales complete](#)

04-09-2024

[All News](#)

[No one left behind. A forward thinking approach to improving health and well-being for all in Wales through stronger social connections](#)

Public Health Wales

[Melo](#)

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

[All Resources](#)

Next Issue

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE



Behaviours play a key role in improving health and wellbeing. Identifying and understanding behaviours and factors that influence them, and how best to address these factors is integral to achieving the ambitions of public health policy and practice. Many professionals across the public health system in Wales are striving to make an impact on population health using this type of behavioural science.

For our upcoming e-bulletin we would like to hear from projects and initiatives who may be using behavioural science in your work to improve the health and well-being of communities across Wales. These can be national, regional or local initiatives, policies or programmes.

Our article submission form will provide you with further information on word count, layout of your article and guidance for images.

Please send articles to publichealth.network@wales.nhs.uk by 17 October 2024.

[Contribute](#)