

# Candidate Briefing: Supporting people at the end of life

Palliative and end of life care in Wales

March 2026

## 1. Introduction

Marie Curie is the UK's largest palliative and end of life care charity. We work hard to enable people who are living with a terminal illness, and their loved ones and carers, to have the best possible experience at the end of life. We offer expert care across Wales, in people's communities and in our Cardiff and the Vale Hospice and deliver specialist care, guidance and support to families with matters related to dying, death and bereavement through our free information and support services. We are also the largest funder of palliative and end of life care research, and we work with Members of the Senedd and policymakers to ensure that more people in Wales have the best possible end of life experience.

This briefing is designed to provide candidates for the 2026 Senedd election with an overview of palliative and end of life care in Wales. Palliative and end of life care is a critical part of our health and social care system. When we get it right, it can have a profound impact on people living with a terminal illness and those close to them. Sadly, for too many people the care they need is not available or accessible. The result, almost one in three adults in Wales have unmet palliative care needs.

This briefing explains what palliative and end of life care is, sets out the challenges our palliative and end of life care system is facing and the solutions that Marie Curie believe are necessary to ensure that everyone can access the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

## 2. What is palliative and end of life care?

2.1. Palliative care offers physical, emotional and practical support to people living with a terminal illness. It can be offered at any point after a terminal diagnosis.

2.2. **Palliative care** is holistic and can include treatment and care which focuses on:

- Managing symptoms.
- Offering emotional, spiritual and psychological support.
- Offering practical support, including things such as planning for the future or getting equipment.

- Giving people good quality of life.
- 2.3. Palliative care can include end of life care but is much broader and can last for longer. **End of life care** offers treatment and support for people who are near the end of their life. It usually starts to be offered to those thought to be in the last year of their life and aims to help someone to be as comfortable as possible in the time they have left.
  - 2.4. Palliative and end of life care is delivered by a complex mix of generalist and specialist services across the health and social care system. While some may receive palliative and end of life care from specialist services others will be supported by GPs, community and district nurses, allied health professionals, paramedics and social care.
  - 2.5. Hospices are an important part of this broader palliative and end of life care system. Hospices provide a wide range of services, including inpatient care, outpatient care, hospice care at home, companion services and bereavement support.
  - 2.6. Demand for palliative and end of life care is growing. By the 2040s, 37,000 people in Wales will likely need palliative and end of life care each year, an increase of 5,000.<sup>1</sup> To meet this growing demand we need everyone involved in the delivery of palliative and end of life care, in all parts of our health and social care system, to take action.

### 3. A system at breaking point

- 3.1. Gaps in care and a system under severe pressure mean too many people are spending their final days isolated, in pain, and struggling to make ends meet.
- 3.2. Recent research estimates that **almost one in three adults in Wales have unmet palliative care needs**, meaning that their symptoms are not managed effectively and they do not have enough support from primary care at the end of life.<sup>2</sup>
- 3.3. Wales has an emerging policy framework for palliative and end of life care. The [quality statement for palliative and end of life care for Wales](#) sets out a clear destination that government, health boards and providers should be working towards. The new [National Service Specification for Wales: Palliative and End of Life Care Services](#) and forthcoming commissioning framework for hospice services should support greater consistency in delivery towards these high-level ambitions.
- 3.4. However, we currently have a significant implementation gap.
  - 37% of bereaved people reported that healthcare professionals had not discussed death and dying with the person who died.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Marie Curie (2026) *Unmet palliative care need in Wales* <https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/document/unmet-need-in-wales-briefing-2026-english>

<sup>3</sup> Marie Curie (2024) *Time to care in Wales Implications for Wales of 'Time to Care: Findings from a nationally representative survey of experiences at the end of life in England and Wales'*

- Almost one in five people in Wales had no contact with a GP either in person or over the phone in their final three months of life.<sup>4</sup>
- Of every emergency department attendance in Wales, one in 14 is related to someone in the last year of life.<sup>5</sup>
- In 2023, on average, over a fifth of hospital beds in Wales were occupied every day by people in the last year of life.<sup>6</sup>

3.5. Behind these statistics are real world experiences that demonstrate the impact of both good and bad care at the end of life.

- Read Joyce's story [here](#).

## 4. Transforming end of life care: Priorities for the next Welsh Government

- 4.1. To truly transform palliative and end of life care, the incoming Welsh Government must focus on action.
- 4.2. As outlined above, much work has been done to put the necessary strategic policy in place. This policy framework sets out clear and specific standards for palliative and end of life care and recognises the need for a system-wide approach to ensure all parts of Wales' health and social care system are equipped to meet the needs of people living with a terminal illness.
- 4.3. To drive lasting change, Marie Curie Cymru have recommended action in the following areas:

### Service planning and delivery

- Require health boards to undertake population level needs assessments for palliative and end of life care and use this as the basis for planning services.
- Require Regional Partnership Boards to have a palliative and end of life care lead.

### Funding and finance

- Establish a sustainable funding solution to ensure that the palliative and end of life care system can meet the growing need for care.

### Workforce

- Carry out a regular census of the palliative and end of life care workforce to aid workforce planning and development.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Marie Curie (2025) *At breaking point: Time to transform end of life care in Wales* <https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/senedd-manifesto>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## Community and out of hours care

- Place a palliative care nurse in each primary care cluster to provide expert advice and guidance and support effective care coordination.
- Deliver a 24/7 single point of access via 111, staffed by clinically trained palliative care staff.
- Integrate palliative care paramedics into palliative care teams across Wales.

## Unpaid carers

- Consistently undertake and regularly review carers' needs assessments.
- Develop training for unpaid carers in the essential skills needed to care for someone at the end of life.

## Poverty

- Include people living with a terminal illness in the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

## 5. Getting support

If you or someone you know someone needs advice or support related to death, dying, palliative and end of life care or bereavement, Marie Curie has a range of support available:

- Access information and advice online: <https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/>
- Call our advice line on **0800 090 2309**

For more information please contact:

Natasha Davies  
**Senior Policy Manager, Wales**

[Natasha.Davies2@mariecurie.org.uk](mailto:Natasha.Davies2@mariecurie.org.uk)

Dr Tomos Evans  
**Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Wales**

[Tomos.Evans@mariecurie.org.uk](mailto:Tomos.Evans@mariecurie.org.uk)