



Eich llais mewn iechyd | Your voice in health
a gofal cymdeithasol | and social care

Summary Report on What We've Heard in Powys

Event: Ystradgynlais Locality Focused Engagement

Date: September 2023

What We Did

We arranged to have a presence in the locality of Ystradgynlais for the month of September. Llais volunteers were invited to attend with staff and we had one volunteer who was able to take part. We ensured that, for each day we were in the area, there were multiple sessions to attend so the team travelling down could all lift share and then split up on arrival.

The reasons for this focused engagement are as follows:

- To raise awareness of Llais and engage with the public
- To spread awareness of the Llais Complaints Advocacy Service
- To obtain the views of people about their health and social care services
- To seek feedback on rural health and social care
- To encourage people to consider becoming a volunteer for Llais

We engaged with approximately 200 people during the month. Some people just took away the information flyers, others took away information and links to our online surveys and some people were willing to share their views with Llais representatives. We had paper copies of the surveys available for people who were unable to complete them online. Paper copies of surveys were also posted out to Ystradgynlais Group Practice and staff were asked to put them out on display in their surgery waiting rooms.

Where we went

6th September
Coelbren Coffee Morning
The Hub at Abercraf Post Office and Café
Cymru versus Arthritis Support Group

12th September
 Coelbren OAP Club
 Ystradgynlais Warm Hub
 Ystradgynlais Over 50s Fitness
 Ystradgynlais Welfare Hub

15th September
 Ystradgynlais Friends Tea Bar
 Ystradgynlais Hospital Outpatients MIU/Outpatients/X-Ray
 Ystradgynlais Volunteer Centre

21st September
 Ystradgynlais Library -
 Coffee & chat – 10.30 -12 pm
 Creative Writing – 11 – 12.30 pm
 Sewing Group – 12 -2pm
 Purls of Wisdom Knitting Group – 2 -3.30 pm
 Audiology Group
 Ystradgynlais Volunteer Centre
 Community Café
 Community Foodbank

25th September
 Pengorof Surgery
 Tesco

28th September
 Ystradgynlais Youth Club

What we heard

Topic	No. of people providing comments
GP Access	
Positive	18
Could do better	24
Dentistry	
Positive	3
Could do better	14
Hospital Access	
Positive	11
Could do better	7
Elderly Care	
Positive	5

Could do better	8
Pharmacy Service Could be better	3
Distance to services Could do better	3
Other Concerns	2

During the month, we received comments which reflected a range of experiences and opinions, with some patients sharing positive experiences, whilst others faced challenges in accessing services and communicating their needs effectively.

The feedback from people in the community can be summarised as follows:

GP Access

- Several individuals praised Pengorof Surgery for its pleasant and polite staff, ease of getting appointments and care provided by nurses.
- Seven Sisters Medical Practice received compliments for its service, with people commenting that they were seen quickly.
- There were mixed feelings about the triage system at Ystradgynlais Practice. Some people did not like having to explain to the receptionist the reason for their call. There were some comments about the length of time waiting for a call back.
- There were concerns and frustration expressed with the long waiting times on the phone when trying to contact Pengorof Surgery and Dulais Valley Primary Care Centre. There were comments about the potential cost for pay-as-you-go mobile phone users.
- Some people spoke of the lack of availability of appointments when they did manage to get through on the phone.
- People spoke of the difficulty of getting face-to-face appointments with a doctor, which sometimes led to issues in diagnosis and treatment.
- Difficulty for older people in using the appointment system, particularly early morning telephone calls and difficulty explaining over the phone what is wrong.
- Patients mentioned difficulties in accessing Ystalyfera and Abercraf branch surgeries. There was a feeling that these surgeries were understaffed. There were also concerns about the difficulty getting to Pengorof Surgery for some patients because of its location.
- Some people spoke about issues with getting prescriptions, while others expressed concerns about obtaining medication without proper consultation, eg when a prescription was provided from a telephone call.

Dentistry

Overall, there was a mix of satisfaction and frustration with the availability and quality of dental services in the area, with long waiting lists and limited options for NHS dentists being common concerns.

- The NHS dentist in the area is generally highly regarded, but there is often a long wait for appointments.
- Some people complained about cancellation of appointments and the inability or long wait for them to be re-arranged.
- Some individuals have resorted to private treatment due to issues with NHS dentists.
- There were mixed experiences with private dental care and dissatisfaction with the cost.
- The lack of available dentists in the area has resulted in some people having to seek dental care in neighbouring regions.

Hospital Access

- People expressed appreciation for all the services provided at Ystradgynlais Hospital – with people praising the Minor Injuries Unit for its prompt service; positive comments were received about the IBS nurse; the Audiology Department was commended for being friendly and efficient; the hospital staff were reported to be caring and supportive during the COVID pandemic.
- Concerns were expressed about the under-utilisation of Ystradgynlais Hospital, which is seen as a very important resource in the community.
- The Day Hospital closure was seen as having a significant negative impact on the community and there were calls for it to be re-opened.
- There was positive feedback about Morriston Hospital's diabetes treatment service and coronary care.
- Positive experience was provided about cancer treatment, with community support in Powys and treatment provided in Singleton Hospital.
- There were concerns about very long waiting times for planned surgery, particularly shoulder and knee surgery. People spoke about waits of 5, 6 and 8 years and some people had resorted to private healthcare due to the extensive wait.
- We heard praise for ambulance crews but concerns about ambulance resources being stuck outside emergency departments, leading to inadequate coverage in Powys.
- It was reported that there was difficulty in obtaining recommended equipment for a baby due to having a Powys postcode and it was suggested that the parents should purchase the equipment themselves.

- Challenges in accessing maternity care were reported, with a patient being sent to Neath Port Talbot Hospital initially and then having to transfer to Singleton Hospital because doctors not available in Neath.

Elderly Care

- Positive experiences were reported with services like Tŷ Croeso Day Centre, Neath Crisis Centre and the monthly hearing aids service in Ystradgynlais Library.
- There was praise for district nurses and St David's Hospice for their support and making arrangements for end-of-life care at home.
- There were concerns about the availability of social workers for older people.
- There was a desire for better support for people living with dementia locally, including the need for a dedicated key worker who could provide consistent support and guidance.
- There was a need for more community-based care options due to the area's ageing population and geographical challenges, which can complicate accessing services.
- We heard about the reluctance of older people to complain about services due to fear.

Pharmacy Services

- There were concerns about availability of certain medications and pharmacies not able to fulfil prescriptions.
- There was frustration that a community pharmacy was not providing some expected services, eg Hay Fever review.
- People spoke of difficulty in finding a pharmacy which could dispense medication out-of-hours, with an example given of a prescription provided at Morriston Hospital on a Sunday.

Social Services

- There were questions about the fairness of access to services, particularly around Flying Start.

Distance to services

- There are challenges related to the distance to healthcare services. One person mentioned that their daughter had to stop getting vaccinations in Brecon due to difficulties with public transport.

Other Concerns

- Housing concerns were raised, particularly in relation to lack of social housing and the high cost of new builds. There was concern that new developments in the area might strain local services, and there was a need for better health and social care infrastructure.
- There were challenges related to disposing of incontinence products, with the lack of council-provided service for this purpose and the cost of disposal bags being a concern.

Discussions with Young People

- Young people attending Ystradgynlais Youth Club spoke about positive experiences of varying health services - attending GP, dentist, orthodontics, A&E and hospital appointments for long term health conditions. They said that doctors and nurses spoke directly to them in a way that they were able to understand.
- There was limited awareness of the school nurse service and ChatHealth.
- Some young people mentioned assessments for ADHD/Autism but were unsure about the outcomes and waiting times.

Surveys

We had two surveys available for people to complete, either online or via paper copy. We had a general survey where people could tell us about any health or social care service they received, and a survey about GP services.

General Survey – Tell us about health and social care services you’ve received

We received 8 responses to this survey from people with an SA postcode.

The services people commented on were:

GP Services	2	Both respondents reported difficulty getting timely appointments, which resulted in delays in receiving relevant treatment.
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Public transport to be able to access services	2	Two respondents emphasised the need for improved public transport to access services, with one person mentioning living in a remote valley area and unable to drive.
Audiology	1	Excellent service at local hospital.
Lack of social housing	1	Concern about lack of social housing in the area, particularly for older people.
Dentist	1	Difficulty getting an appointment and frustration that the first question asked was about NHS or private status, rather than addressing the dental issue. They also mentioned the high cost of seeing a hygienist.
Social Services	1	A respondent with a daughter with Autism mentioned that they no longer have contact with social services. Expressed concern about limited opportunities for their daughter to interact within the local community.

Patient Survey about GP Services

We received 43 completed surveys.

Name of Practice	No. of responses
Ystradgynlais Group Practice (Pengorof, Abercraf, Ystalyfera surgeries)	32
Dulais Valley Primary Care Centre	5
Amman Tawe Partnership	2
Practice not named	2

Ease of making routine appointments

There was a mixed response, with 19 people responding that they found it easy or OK and 22 people responding that they found it difficult or very difficult when making routine appointments.

The majority of people (31) made their appointments over the telephone, and others made appointments in-person or via the My Health Online service.

Almost half of respondents were able to receive their appointment in less than 48 hours, 6 people waited under a week, 8 people waited 1-2 weeks, 4 people waited 2-3 weeks and 5 people had to wait more than 3 weeks.

Ease of accessing urgent appointments

There was also a mixed response about making urgent appointments, with 11 people stating that it was easy or very easy, 14 people stating that it was OK and 14 people stating that it was difficult or very difficult.

Using My Health Online

Only 11 people reported using My Health Online. 26 people had heard of it but didn't use it and 8 people did not think that their surgery had it available.

Ease of requesting a repeat prescription

The majority of people had no difficulty requesting their repeat prescriptions. Some people used My Health Online for this purpose.

Privacy at the Reception Desk

About half of respondents felt that they had enough privacy at the reception desk area and about half felt that it could be better or that it was not private.

Travelling to the Surgery

Most people travelled to their GP surgery by car. 8 people said they usually walked, 4 people said that they used a taxi sometimes, 1 person said they would use the community car scheme and 1 person used public transport.

Surgery Opening Times

There was only one person who was not happy with the surgery opening times. Most people (31) reported that they were happy or very happy and 11 people

thought it was OK.

Helpfulness of Staff

Most people were satisfied with the helpfulness of staff, with 21 being very happy, 10 being happy and 10 thought it was OK. 2 people were not happy with the staff.

Communication

Only 1 person reported that they were not able to communicate in their preferred language.

36 people felt that communication they received from their GP surgery was adequate.

Some suggestions for improvement were:

- Using telephone call or text instead of letter
- Not having to telephone several times for test results
- More timely appointment letters – some letters arrived late, very close to or after the appointment date

Comments about the service

The comments received suggest a range of concerns related to telephone accessibility, appointment availability and availability of staff. Key points included:

- Inefficient phone system – Patients mentioned that it is challenging to get through on the phone to make appointments. They often had to call multiple times and then sometimes were told that appointments were only available for emergencies.
- Inflexible appointment system – The system of calling in the morning for a doctor to decide if a face-to-face appointment is needed was criticised for its lack of flexibility.
- Long waiting times – Many patients expressed frustration with long waiting times for a doctor call-back. Some had to wait several hours before receiving a call.
- Lack of support for vulnerable patients – There were concerns raised about the lack of support for vulnerable patients.
- Staffing – Patients called for more staff to handle phone calls and return calls promptly. There were comments about the need for more clinical staff, particularly district nurses. Reliance on locum doctors was mentioned. Concerns about part time doctors were noted.

- Doctors rushed – Some patients felt that the doctors seemed rushed and uncaring during appointments.
- Praise for staff – Positive comments highlighted the helpfulness of nurse practitioners and reception staff.
- Bilingual service – there was a comment requesting the option to speak in Welsh.
- Location related issues – Accessibility to treatment and appointments was raised as a concern for patients living in Powys but using a GP practice in another region. An example given was accessing physiotherapy, where the patient was not able to access the service in Neath (which was quick) but had to wait for referral through Powys system (much slower).
- Vaccination opt-out – There was a suggestion about allowing patients to opt out of flu and COVID vaccinations rather than postponement, to save NHS resources.
- Travel for appointments – Some patients mentioned having to travel to a different surgery when appointments were not available in their nearest surgery.
- Hope for improved service – Some patients expressed hope for a return to the level of service they had before lockdown.

In Summary

This report reflects a mixed range of opinions and experiences.

In the main, people are appreciative of services they receive, in many instances giving praise about staff and the care they provide. However, we also heard concerns about difficulties in accessing services for various reasons.

We are aware of the immense pressure within the health and social care system but the ability to address some of the concerns raised would likely lead to an improved experience for the population.