

P-06-1488 Establish a 'Care Society' to Tackle the Long COVID Crisis in Wales – Correspondence from the petitioners, 10 February 2025

Dear Jeremy Miles AS/MS,
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care,

Thank you for your response to the petition calling for a 'Care Society' in Wales to address the Long COVID crisis. While I appreciate the Welsh Government's recognition of the issue and investment in rehabilitation services, this crisis is not just a medical issue—it is an economic and social one. The current approach does not address the structural changes needed to prevent mass social and economic exclusion as levels of chronic illness continue to rise.

The Cost of Inaction

Without meaningful intervention, Wales faces:

- A long-term workforce crisis: ONS data already shows exponentially increasing rates of economic inactivity due to long-term illness. If Wales continues to rely on employer discretion and a work-first model, more people will be forced out of the workforce entirely, leading to reduced tax revenues, increased NHS costs, and a growing crisis in care sectors.
- A rise in poverty and destitution: The current disability benefit system (which remains under Westminster control) is failing thousands. The Welsh Government cannot change this, but it can mitigate the consequences by creating pathways for participation that do not rely on punitive assessments or means-testing.
- Further decline in local economies: A shrinking workforce means fewer people with disposable income to support local businesses, leading to more closures, particularly in rural areas. Without intervention, this will accelerate economic decline in already struggling Welsh communities.

A Practical Welsh Response: Policies Within Devolved Powers

This may seem beyond Wales' capacity, but history shows otherwise. When Aneurin Bevan created the NHS, he did so in a time of economic hardship, and without full control over taxation or benefits. Today, Wales has more devolved powers than Bevan did—enough to lead the way again.

Here's what Wales can do within its existing powers:

1. A Guaranteed Basic Income for People with Chronic Illness

The Welsh Government has already piloted a basic income scheme for care leavers. A similar model could be extended to those with Long COVID and other chronic illnesses through:

- A Basic Income for Health and Participation, providing financial security without the conditionality of Universal Credit or Personal Independence Payment (PIP).
- Initial pilot funding through the Welsh discretionary social care budget, in partnership with local authorities and health boards.

This would not only improve individual well-being but also increase participation in alternative economic models, such as cooperatives, local food production, and mutual aid networks—sectors that will be vital in a shifting economic landscape.

2. Expansion of Community-Based Work & Care Cooperatives

Many people with chronic illnesses can contribute to society outside of traditional employment, but the current system does not recognise this. Wales could:

- Fund worker-owned co-ops for people with Long COVID and other disabilities, focused on flexible work in areas like digital services, local food production, and peer support.
- Expand Social Prescribing Initiatives, linking those with chronic conditions to meaningful local engagement that does not require adherence to standard work schedules.
- Establish a national Care Economy Strategy, similar to the foundational economy work already being explored, but explicitly focused on supporting disabled and chronically ill people in participatory roles.

3. A Publicly-Owned Clean Air Strategy

While improvements to ventilation in healthcare and education are noted in your response, this needs to go further. The Welsh Government can:

- Establish a National Clean Air Fund to retrofit public buildings, libraries, and transport hubs with HEPA filtration.
- Use devolved planning powers to mandate HEPA filtration in new social housing and public infrastructure projects under the Optimised Retrofit Programme.
- Fund public awareness campaigns on airborne disease prevention as a collective responsibility, similar to past public health efforts on smoking and seatbelt use.

The Opportunity Before Us

Wales cannot wait for Westminster to solve this crisis. The principles that built the NHS—collective responsibility, universal access, and the prioritisation of human well-being over profit—are within our grasp today. With bold leadership, we can prevent the worst-case scenario of economic collapse, rising poverty, and social isolation.

Bevan built the NHS under greater constraints than we face now. Wales has an opportunity to lead once again—not just in rehabilitation services but in redefining what a care-based society looks like in the 21st century.

We urge the Welsh Government to take this moment not just to treat, but to transform.

Yours sincerely,
Charles A. Waltz
Co-Founder, The Care Society Cymru