

NEWS RELEASE

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24 November 2015

Huge opportunity to demonstrate savings key Welsh Government programme makes to health service in Wales

A Welsh Government report published today indicates huge potential to accurately demonstrate the significant savings the Supporting People Programme makes to the NHS in Wales.

The Supporting People (SP) Programme is a key Welsh Government programme that supports more than 60,000 people each year to live as independently as they can. By providing help to people as early as possible, Supporting People helps to prevent more serious problems from developing further down the line.

Proponents of the programme have long spoken of Supporting People's ability to make savings to health, social services and community justice. However, there has been a lack of concrete, coordinated evidence to back this up. This report could change that.

Today's findings have come out of an initial pilot study which explored whether a 'data linking' technique could demonstrate the national impact of Supporting People.

The project used a database of health information and linked that with Supporting People data from Blaenau Gwent and Swansea Councils. This was then used to examine health service use for a sample of more than 13,000 people over a period of two years – the year before people began receiving support and the year after the Supporting People intervention.

The data demonstrated that in the 12 month period before support began, people accessing Supporting People services used GP services around twice as frequently as the general population. For the majority of groups of people studied, GP use increased around the point when people started receiving support, before dropping off to below pre-support levels. Some similar patterns were seen in the use of A&E services.

In short, although further work will be necessary to demonstrate whether the same pattern holds true across the whole of Wales and for other health services, the study gives an initial indication that people in receipt of Supporting People services made more appropriate use of health services once they started receiving support.

More work needs to be done on the exact reasons behind this, but supporters of the programme would argue that its focus on early intervention plays a key role.

Auriol Miller, Director of Cymorth Cymru and Chair of the Supporting People Research and Evaluation Steering Group said

“Cymorth has long known that the Supporting People Programme brings huge benefits, both to the people being supported and to other areas of society, and this study is a significant step forward in being able to effectively evidence this impact.

This is particularly important in light of Wednesday's Spending Review. With more cuts to public spending likely, it is more vital than ever that we target spending effectively. This report helps us

start to demonstrate that Supporting People is the key preventative programme that anecdotal evidence has long suggested it is and that it has huge potential to make significant savings to the health service in particular.

This study has managed to unlock a really crucial issue that has been stuck for quite some time and

I'm delighted that Cymorth Cymru was able to be part of the group pushing this work forward."

Dr Peter Mackie, Senior Lecturer, School of Planning and Geography, Cardiff University also welcomed the report.

"I warmly welcome the findings of this feasibility study. Across the UK, organisations working with vulnerable people have rightly been asked to better demonstrate the impact of their support services. Anonymously linking support providers' information with key data sets such as their routine health records is a fantastic way of doing this.

This work marks an incredibly important step forward in testing this method in Wales and it also provides fascinating first insights into the potential scale of the positive impact of Supporting People services on use of health services."

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Notes

1. The Emerging Findings can be downloaded here <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/supporting-people-data-linking-feasibility-study/?lang=en>. The full report will be published in 2016.
2. The project made use of the Welsh Government core funded SAIL (Secure Anonymised Information Linkage) Databank at Swansea University (<http://www.saildatabank.com/>), and linked routine health records held securely and anonymously in that location with administrative Supporting People data gathered by two local authorities, Blaenau Gwent and Swansea.
3. The Supporting People (SP) Programme is a Welsh Government programme that supports more than 60,000 people each year to live as independently as they can. It funds a variety of services to support a wide range of marginalised people at risk of housing crisis, including people at risk of homelessness; families fleeing domestic abuse; people dealing with mental or physical health problems, or learning disabilities; ex-service personnel; care leavers; and older people in need of support. <http://gov.wales/topics/housing-and-regeneration/services-and-support/supporting-people/?lang=en>
4. Cymorth Cymru is the representative body for providers of homelessness, housing-related support and social care services in Wales. Our members support people to live independently, managing their own lives in their own homes. Cymorth Cymru Director, Auriol Miller, is Chair of the Research & Evaluation Steering Group that oversaw the Welsh Government feasibility study. www.cymorthcymru.org.uk

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