

**Comisiwn
Bevan
Commission**

Boots

Health on the High Street

Round table report

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Introduction

In October 2024, the Bevan Commission hosted a Round Table discussion, bringing together key stakeholders to discuss the concept of 'Health on the High Street'. The Bevan Commission is grateful to Boots for sponsoring the event and enabling this important discussion to take place.

The aim of the event was to gain a better understanding of what people and communities value to help them, and their families, maintain and improve their health and wellbeing, and to explore what innovative developments may be possible to help meet these needs in local communities.

We are facing unprecedented challenges to our health and social care services in Wales and ultimately to the health and wellbeing of our population. We have complex demographic changes, with an increasing number of people living longer with long-term health conditions, putting an immense strain on already stretched services. This, combined with global challenges such as Covid-19 and the climate emergency, requires new innovative solutions to ensure we support health and care in a way that is fit for the future.

Urgent, coordinated action is needed from all stakeholders and this discussion provides a pivotal opportunity to engage with cross-sectoral stakeholders to explore how local communities and partners can contribute to delivering more integrated, sustainable health and care. Together, we must find new ways to positively impact the health and wellbeing of people across Wales.

Context

The current landscape for health and social care in Wales is evolving, with services needing to transform to meet changing needs. Consistent with the Bevan Commission's [Foundations for the Future](#) report, this involves building resilient and resourceful people and communities, finding sustainable and innovative solutions to prevent ill health and help people manage their health and wellbeing closer to home in their local communities.

In response to this, community pharmacies are able to expand their role by integrating digital innovations and preventative health measures to alleviate pressure on the NHS. This shift is not only about enhancing pharmacy services but also about incorporating broader health interventions on the High Street to alleviate NHS pressures and promote long-term public health. Their initiatives, particularly under the 'Prescription Newydd' contract, aim to address health and care inequalities by targeting underserved communities and promoting value-based care.

Accessibility issues persist as the public remains unaware of some available services. There is a need for better public education and health messaging to normalise making services 'community by default' for greater convenience and to help people better manage their conditions, preventing unnecessary escalation to secondary care.

Wales faces significant data access issues, which hamper informed decision-making, and the opportunity to maximise proactive, preventive health measures. For instance, one in four deaths in Wales stem from conditions like undiagnosed hypertension, underscoring the need for increased public awareness and self-monitoring such as blood pressure checks, to facilitate early detection and management.

Primary and community care, which makes up 91% of NHS contacts in Wales, is seen as a vital yet underutilised resource on the High Street. Opportunities for services to move closer to communities, promoting prevention and easier access to care should be explored further. Examples such as Community Health and Care Hubs as well as services provided by businesses such as pharmacies on the High Street are already evolving.

The digital landscape offers further opportunities to enhance community-based care, which will also require a cultural shift, to embrace equitable and integrated health and social care within everyday life across Wales.

The role of employers is critical, with rising sickness absence and attrition rates, pointing to the necessity for business-led wellbeing initiatives to maintain a productive workforce. Businesses and organisations such as Business in the Community (BITC) are making efforts in improving workplace wellbeing through studies and tools that help businesses understand the economic value of a healthy workforce.

What does 'Health on the High Street' mean?

Community Centric and Accessible

Policy makers should realign attention and appropriate resources towards primary care services and address accessibility challenges, particularly for older people who face practical barriers such as transportation, resources and technology.

Beyond relying on traditional community settings, it also makes sense to engage with familiar settings, such as sports clubs, local pubs, religious settings. By using existing assets and thoughtful design, health initiatives can become more effective and inclusive, extending beyond traditional High Street locations to wherever people naturally congregate whether in rural, valleys or urban communities.

Making every contact count by meeting people where they are, rather than planning services around existing structures. This approach emphasises adapting health and care delivery to fit into people's everyday environments, ensuring that services are accessible and relevant. This also helps reach out to the most vulnerable and remote parts of the population who also need most support with their health and wellbeing needs.

Supporting Health and Care Infrastructure on the High-Street strategically

The decline of high streets in Wales highlights the necessity to sustain vibrant communities and the opportunities to include health and care within these plans. Using empty spaces for public services could enhance community engagement and improve overall health and wellbeing while revitalising town centres.

Policymakers can help address this agenda by taking a series of measures including adjusting commercial rates, addressing parking space issues, providing better access to public toilet facilities. These are key elements to support a healthier and more accessible high-street and its services which in turn will promote healthier lifestyles.

There is a need for strategic alignment of various health and care components. Understanding and leveraging influential community members and building trust are key to organically driving change and enhancing the effectiveness of health-related programmes.

Involving the whole of our communities

Developing approaches that engage with local communities and third-sector organisations to address health issues more creatively and less medically is recommended. This involves not just providing medical support but also integrating social and community support to provide services such as social prescribing to address issues like loneliness and malnutrition amongst older people.

It is important to ensure individuals are fully aware of and can access the benefits and services to which they are entitled. This dissemination of information is vital for supporting those in need, particularly through trusted channels such as third-sector organisations which play a crucial role due to their credibility within communities.

One way of delivering this approach would be to establish local hubs that house various services including general practitioners, housing advisors, benefits advisors, charities and community pharmacists, to address the multifaceted issues that have a significant influence on a patient's health and wellbeing.

Data Sharing and Communication

The importance of data sharing is essential for maximising people's health and providing holistic care. Lack of effective communication was identified as a major issue in the Bevan Commission's [Conversation with the Public](#) report. People often assume that data systems are already interconnected between different primary and secondary care providers which is not the case.

Better access to health and social care services will be enabled by better information sharing notably via digital means.

Education and Empowerment

There is a need for patient and public health education to empower individuals to share responsibility and take control of their health. Simplifying health education and making it more accessible through the High Street or public venues like leisure centres and libraries can help people to independently manage their conditions more effectively.

Educational programmes such as Education for Patients Programme (EPP) have proven effective in enhancing patients' understanding of their conditions, leading to better health management and outcomes. Expanding and building upon such initiatives to empower more people to take greater control over their health offers further potential.

Recommendations and next steps

1 Realign Focus to Prevention and Primary and Community Care and Address Practical Barriers to access Health and Care

Prioritise and Strengthen Primary Care:

- Shift attention and resources to support prevention, early intervention and primary and community care services. Establish community care facilities or hubs (including those on the High Street) where multiple services are available in one place.

Address Practical Access Barriers:

- Implement solutions to overcome transportation difficulties and maximise the use of technology and digital solutions to provide care closer to home.
- Ensure essential services like community pharmacies are conveniently located and provide a range of supporting services (such as point of care testing) and education support for the public. Professional signposting by community pharmacies and other local health providers to guide people to appropriate services.
- Overcome risk aversion within the NHS by encouraging innovation and streamlining procurement and operational processes to facilitate the 'trying out and testing' and adoption of new solutions and practices.

2 Enhance Data Accessibility and Invest in Digital Transformation

Improve Health Data Access and Patient Empowerment:

- Facilitate access to crucial health data for trusted organisations to unlock opportunities for improving and targeting health and care services and support.
- Enable and support patients to access their own medical records, empowering them to become active participants in their health and care journey. Examples of successful systems like 'Patient Knows Best', where people can access their health data.
- Commission campaigns designed to activate public, carers and patients to give them more information about their condition, how they can self-manage issues, the organisations available to support them outside of the NHS and credible sources of digital information and support.

Invest in Digital Infrastructure:

- Upgrade digital systems within the NHS, addressing fragmentation by investing in compatible systems to facilitate seamless communication and data sharing.
- Collaborate with and learn from tech-savvy businesses experienced in mapping consumer pathways to enhance health and care delivery models.
- Accelerate the development and rollout of the national NHS App to enhance data accessibility for patients and healthcare professionals.

3 Revitalise High Streets, Promote Healthy Environments, and Address Economic Factors Influencing Health

Revitalise High Streets to Support Health and Wellbeing:

- Implement policies such as lowering commercial rates for shops providing healthy produce and services to promote healthier retail options.
- Encourage local government and health and care services to occupy vacant High Street spaces, making them more accessible and rejuvenating community engagement.
- Improve infrastructure on high streets to accommodate people with limited mobility.

Promote Access to Healthy Food:

- Enhance the quality of food provided by food banks, also addressing recipients' cooking skills, facilities and nutritional needs.
- Tackle issues like affordability and availability of healthy food, providing support for those with limited cooking resources.

Address Economic Factors:

- Support local businesses to create jobs and reduce economic inactivity, leading to better health outcomes.
- Ensure individuals are informed about benefits and services they are entitled to, facilitating access to necessary support.

4 Implement Community Development Approaches and Foster Collaboration Across Sectors

Engage Communities and Third-Sector Organisations:

- Collaborate with not for-profit and community groups that hold trust within communities to help support the delivery of health messages and initiatives.

Empower Volunteers and Leverage Community Trust:

- Engage and support local volunteers in initiatives such as EPP and social prescribing. Provide training and incentives to volunteers to incentivise and sustain their involvement and recognise their contributions e.g., Boots Advantage Card points.
- Encourage the formation of self-help groups and peer networks to enhance community-based health support. For example, a prostate cancer self-help group where shared personal experiences have built trust, empowered patients and improved outcomes.

Foster Collaboration and Consistency Across Sectors:

- Ensure consistency and maximise opportunities in health messaging across different sectors to avoid confusion and enhance effectiveness.
- Develop stronger integration and working across health and social care services within local communities.
- Encourage leadership to embrace reasonable risk-taking, enabling staff and organisations to implement necessary changes and innovations.

5 Enhance Patient and Public Health Education While Balancing Immediate and Long-Term Health Needs

Expand Educational Programmes and Encourage Self-Care:

- Increase the availability of health education programmes such as Education for Patients Programme (EPP) in accessible locations such as the High Street, leisure centres, libraries, and community hubs. Promote programmes and initiatives that empower individuals to take greater responsibility for their own health through better knowledge and resources.

Balance Immediate and Future Health Priorities:

- Strategically distribute resources to provide proactive care for current populations whilst investing in preventive measures for future generations. Utilise policy frameworks like the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act to guide proactive and sustainable health initiatives.

Utilise Behaviour Change Strategies:

- Apply theories of change and other marketing techniques to influence fundamental behaviour shifts, similar to successful public health campaigns.

Conclusion

Health is everyone's responsibility and working together across agencies, organisations and professional groups will be critical to improving health and wellbeing in the community, where people live, work and play.

Many opportunities exist to help us transform our local High Street into one which supports sustainable health and wellbeing, creating vibrant, resilient and resourceful people and communities. Retailers and other services on the High Street have an important role to play in this, working with local people and other services to develop strong consistent messages and services to support health and well being

This report has brought together the insights and thoughts of a range of people from public, private and voluntary services to identify how we might develop the concept of 'Health on the High Street'. This cannot be achieved alone but will require creative collaboration and cooperation to 'try out and test' innovative solutions that are fit for now and the future.

Utilising all local assets to the best effect whether buildings, retailers, services or people will be critical to maximising the full potential of health on the High Street. This report and its recommendations provide a useful starting point from which to grow and build the healthy people and communities we all want, both now, and for our future generations to come.

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