



## **The National Health Service (General Medical Services Contracts) (Wales) Regulations 2023**

### **Consultation response**

**April 2023**

Age Cymru is the leading charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation on changes to general medical service contracts as access to GP services is one of the most frequent issues raised through our ongoing engagement with older people across Wales. The changes identified in contact arrangements have the potential to make improvements where it really matters to them. Older people's need for GMS services is generally higher than for their younger counterparts, so in making changes in contracts that GMS services consider how the care needs of older people can be practically met.

Our annual surveys over the last three years<sup>1</sup> and engagement with older people in Wales have highlighted wide ranging issues in access to GP services. Ongoing issues in appointment systems, poor communication on changes in where various health services are available, lack of public transport to get to health appointments and delays and halting of ongoing health checks through the pandemic period. The changes proposed will help ease some of these issues.

Historically, changes in contract arrangements can have unintended consequences that are difficult to predict. As such, it is important that checks and measures are built into service change to ensure that issues can be identified before they become a

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<sup>1</sup> 2020 - <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-cymru/documents/covid-19-survey/experiences-of-people-aged-50-or-over-in-wales-during-the-first-covid-19-lockdown-and-the-road-to-recovery---october-2020-eng.pdf>

2021 - <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-cymru/documents/covid-19-survey/covid-survey-report---english-final.pdf>

2022 - <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-cymru/documents/covid-19-survey/age-cymru---report-on-the-current-experiences-of-people-aged-50-or-over-across-wales-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-views-on-the-year-ahead---june-2022.pdf>

critical. We hope to see a specific focus on this area in the work of the Llais, the Citizens Voice Body.

It is particularly important that in making these changes that older people across Wales are fully informed on what changes are being made, why the changes are being made, and over how long a time period this will happen. Calls to our information and advice service frequently include reference to not being told why changes are being made and that if they had this knowledge they could deal with things better. It is vital that a communications campaign accompanies these changes. The campaign should consider how those that are digitally excluded are reached in view of older people being disproportionately affected by digital exclusion.

For the changes to be most effective, it is important that the range of factors that can affect GP services' ability to carry out these functions is considered, and that full consideration is given on how they will be resourced. For example, health inequalities across Wales may mean that GP services in more deprived areas are at a disadvantage if funding settlements do not reflect this difference in demand for health care.

We welcome the detail included in new contracts on how patients are able to make appointments. Older people have told us that they feel disadvantaged in access to health care if they are not able to use digital technology. Particularly for older age groups, digital exclusion can mean that equality of access is not there and so areas with a higher proportion of older people may wish to consider how communication is enabled with those that are digitally excluded. One respondent to Age Cymru's current 2023 annual survey demonstrates how the proposed changes can work well:

'The processes my GP practice uses work really well. If I need something urgently I phone in the morning. If there are too 2 many phone calls waiting I can press a number for a call back. I give brief details to the receptionist and then receive a call from nurse or doctor or the receptionist calls to offer a same day appointment. Non urgent calls are made in the afternoon and the same process is used with appointments offered if needed in a few weeks' time. This needs to be replicated across all GP practices. (Female survey respondent aged 50-54)'

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