



FTWW: Fair Treatment for the Women of Wales is the only patient-led voluntary organisation in Wales dedicated solely to women's health equality, representing women living with chronic, recurrent, often invisible health conditions, both physical and mental, across the country.

In the run-up to the Welsh Parliament elections, FTWW's members have a number of key asks to ensure that women's health is prioritised in the aftermath of Covid-19 and beyond

Context is important, so FTWW would ask political parties to be aware that:

- **Women make up 52% of the population in Wales**
- **More women than men are living with chronic illness, both physical and mental**
- **Health conditions affecting women tend to incur a significant diagnostic delay**
- **Women require more clinical interventions as a consequence of pregnancy and childbirth**
- **Women, including disabled / ill women, are more likely to be care-givers, single parents, on low incomes and at increased risk of poverty.**

Over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, FTWW's research(1) has shown that:

- Women are at risk of being disproportionately affected by the cancellation of medical appointments, hospital procedures or operations, and difficulties accessing medication
- Women with, as yet, formally undiagnosed health conditions have found it hard to take advantage of the provisions put in place for those considered 'vulnerable', including supermarket or pharmacy deliveries
- Pregnant women have been at higher risk of injury, trauma, and subsequent mental health issues as a result of restricted services
- Disabled / ill women are more likely to be on low incomes and have found it hard to pay increased utility and food costs
- Women are at increased risk of mental health issues as a consequence of ill health in combination with the additional practical and psychological pressures of lockdown
- Women's main concern, coming out of lockdown, is that historical lack of investment in awareness, research, and services for their specific health concerns will be exacerbated as universal demand for NHS care goes up, monies are re-directed, and services reprioritised

Rather than compounding women's health concerns, the nation's emergence from Covid-19 should be seen as an opportunity to change the narrative surrounding women's health

FTWW asks that parties focus on:

- ensuring that gynaecological issues are no longer taboo
- combating cultural bias that sees women's reporting of symptoms often normalised or trivialised by public and professionals alike
- mechanisms to improve accuracy and time to diagnosis for health conditions with which women are affected
- making sure that all women in Wales, irrespective of location, have straightforward access to high-quality, specialist health services

FTWW's Asks in Women's Health:

- **Menstrual Well-being Through the Life-Course to be a mandatory part of the new school curriculum for Wales, delivered by those with specialist knowledge of the topic. This would ensure that open and accurate dialogue takes place, enabling those affected to recognise problems and seek help**
- **Endometriosis, a chronic health condition which affects the same number of girls / women as diabetes or asthma yet takes 8.5 years to diagnose in Wales, is prioritised in primary and secondary care, with specialist, tertiary services adequately resourced to cope with demand (2)**
- **Two specialist recurrent miscarriage clinics to be opened in Wales, one of which to be in north Wales (3)**
- **Menopause be part of a Public Health Wales awareness campaign, and for every health board to have a specialist British Menopause Society (BMS)-accredited menopause clinic which can accommodate self-referrals as well as GP triage (4)**
- **Investment in specialist mother-and-baby peri-natal mental health beds across Wales, ensuring that every woman in need can receive specialist in-patient care with her baby, whilst remaining close to home and support networks**
- **Investment in specialist in-patient care for people living with mental health issues involving self-harm (5) and eating disorders (6) and obsessive-compulsive disorder, the majority of whom, in total, will be women and girls**
- **Every health board to invest in equitable, high-quality services and pathways for the comparatively high numbers of women living with auto-immune conditions (7), Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (8), and fibromyalgia**
- **Ensure that awareness campaigns and diagnostic models be inclusive of women, including cardio-vascular disease, heart attacks, and autism**

To make Women's Health the priority that it needs to be in Wales, FTWW asks that:

- **The NHS in Wales, including health boards, to work with FTWW: Fair Treatment for the Women in Wales to co-produce services which are fit for purpose and based on patient need**
- **That the voluntary and grassroots sector in Wales be sustainably resourced to continue providing services for those in need.**

Citations

- 1) <http://www.ftww.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FTWW-Report-on-The-Impact-of-Covid19-on-Womens-Health-in-Wales.pdf>
- 2) <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/endometriosis-care-in-wales-provision-care-pathway-workforce-planning-and-quality-and-outcome-measures.pdf>
- 3) <http://www.ftww.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Miscarriage-report-FINAL.pdf>
- 4) <http://www.ftww.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/FTWW-Making-the-Case-for-Better-Menopause-Services-in-Wales-Report.pdf>
- 5) <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/jun/04/one-in-five-young-women-have-self-harmed-study-reveals>
- 6) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2696560/>
- 7) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2527069/>
- 8) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5020453/#:~:text=Background,skin%20fragility%20and%20abnormal%20bleeding>
- 9) <https://www.openaccessjournals.com/articles/new-evidence-may-explain-why-conditions-such-as-fibromyalgia-affect-more-women-than-men.pdf>