



Beyond Crisis: Turning the tide for Cancer Care in Wales

Senedd elections 2026

MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT

Introduction

Cancer care in Wales is in crisis. Too many people are waiting too long for diagnosis and treatment whilst struggling to get the support they need, when and where they need it. The system is stretched, the pressures are growing, and for people living with cancer, delays and disparities have lasting consequences. Delays cost lives.

The people of Wales deserve better.

At Macmillan, we believe this must be a turning point. The next Welsh Government must take action to deliver systemic changes that tackle unwarranted variations in treatment and care, address deep-rooted inequities, and put the voices of underserved communities at the heart of cancer care.

Macmillan is ready to be a partner in turning the tide. We will work alongside government, NHS Wales, professionals, sector partners and most importantly, people affected by cancer in Wales – wherever they live, whatever it takes and whichever community they're from – to make it happen.

Developed in partnership with people with lived experience of cancer in Wales and Macmillan professionals, our manifesto sets out four urgent priorities for building a fairer, sustainable future for cancer care in Wales:

1. A ten-year cancer strategy that provides long-term direction, investment and national standards and drives consistent, inclusive, high-quality and person-centred care across Wales – ending a cycle of short-term fixes.
2. A well-supported cancer workforce, with improved, equal access to training, support and career progression, wherever in Wales staff are based.
3. A revolution in cancer data and digital infrastructure, to plan smarter, deliver faster and empower both people living with cancer and professionals, utilising data to support decision-making, empowering patients and future-proofing services.
4. A holistic, person-centred cancer system, with access to support when, where and how people need it – recognising that supporting people living with and beyond cancer is just as important as treating it.

Vital statistics

- We estimate that in 2025, about 190,000 people living in Wales will have had a cancer diagnosis at some point in their lives.¹
- The cancer waiting times target in Wales that 75% of people should start treatment within 62 days of first suspicion has never been met. In 2024, the average figure was 56%.²
- Cancer mortality rates in Wales are 52% higher in the most deprived areas of Wales than in the least deprived.³
- 70% of people with cancer have at least one other long-term condition.⁴
- Due to a postcode lottery in cancer services, 44% of people with cancer in Wales have been affected by local variation in treatment and care – totalling roughly 84,000 people with cancer.⁵

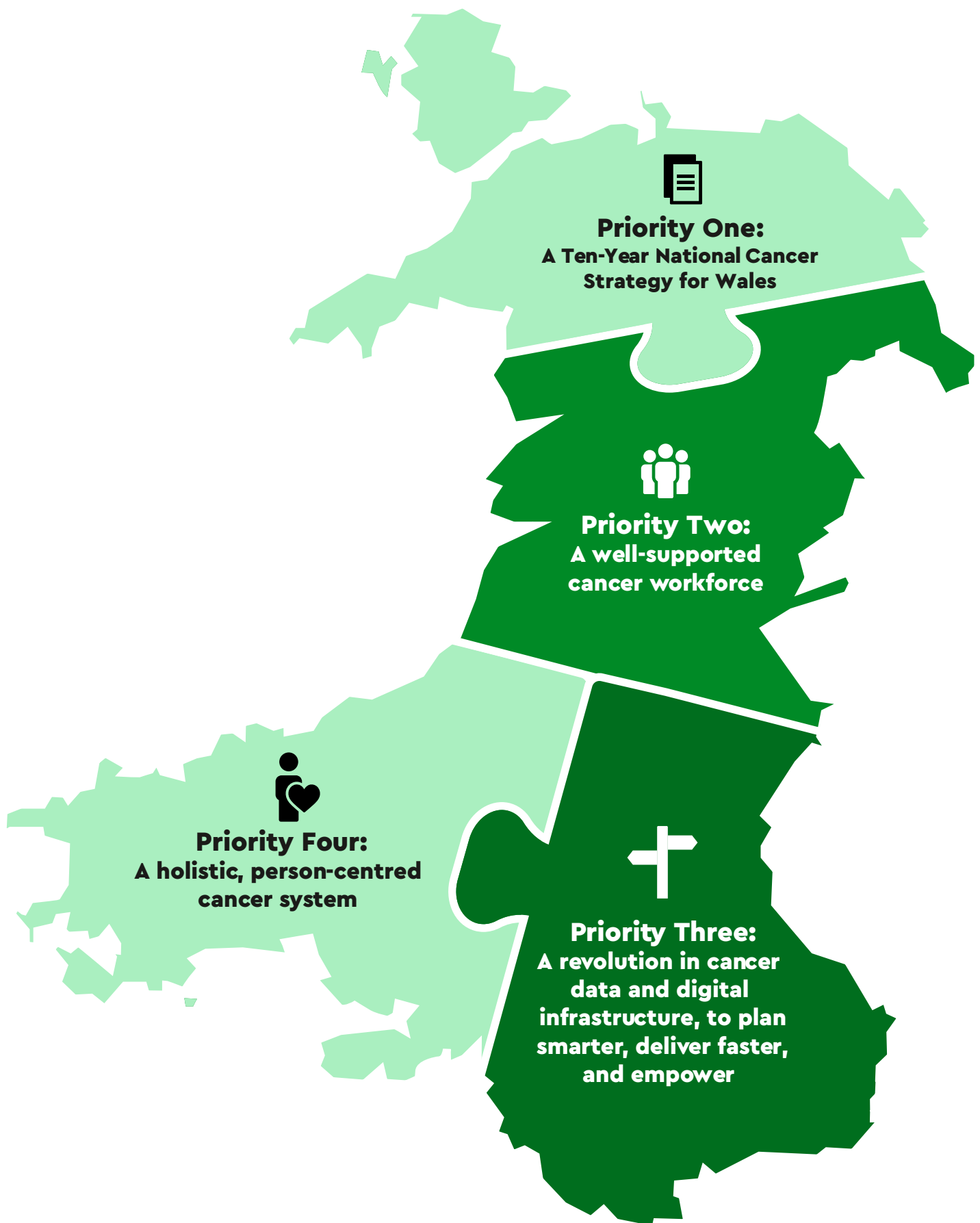
1 Macmillan Cancer Support: [Cancer prevalence.](#)

2 [Suspected Cancer Pathways data from StatsWales.](#)

3 Public Health Wales. [Cancer mortality in Wales.](#)

4 Macmillan Cancer Support. [Cancer and other long term conditions.](#)

5 Macmillan Cancer Support/YouGov survey of 2,002 adults in the UK who have had a cancer diagnosis.



Priority One: A Ten-Year National Cancer Strategy for Wales

We're calling for a new Ten-Year National Cancer Strategy that:

- Is fully resourced and for the long-term, ending a cycle of short-term funding and firefighting.
- Enables collaboration across all partners to ensure people have wraparound care and support at the right time and in the right place.
- Is designed with patients, professionals, and all communities, not imposed on them.
- Is based on a rolling delivery plan with regular evaluation, learning from best practice within Wales, across the UK and beyond.
- Focuses on tackling unwarranted variations in cancer treatment and care, which are driven by systemic issues linked to geography, times of need and cancer types.
- Is led by, and accountable to, a new Minister for Cancer.
- Delivers on the commitment to ensuring that NHS Wales is anti-racist.
- Drives improvement in cancer waiting times to meet the 75% target.

In our conversations and focus groups, both people affected by cancer and Macmillan professionals were clear: Wales needs a long-term, sustainable National Cancer Strategy.

The current Cancer Improvement Plan was a necessary short-term measure, but it is not enough. People living with cancer face long waits for diagnosis and treatment, stark inequities in access to care, and support that often varies depending on who they are and where they live.

If Wales continues to be the only UK nation without a long-term cancer strategy, it risks falling further behind.

The new strategy must tackle the persistent inequities and unwarranted variations in cancer outcomes that exist across Wales – driven by economic deprivation, geography, ethnicity and other factors. It must facilitate delivering care when and where people need it, ensuring that every person with cancer has timely access to the right support, from the right professionals, and at every stage – from diagnosis through treatment to aftercare – no matter their own abilities, language, age or background.

The strategy should be led by the establishment of a new Minister for Cancer, to drive accountability and system-wide leadership, including increased regional collaboration.

The strategy must be co-produced with the people who know cancer best: patients, professionals, sector leaders and communities. Macmillan wants to work with the next Welsh Government to bring together everyone who has a part to play in innovating and transforming our cancer care system. It must provide the foundations for sustainable, world-class cancer care in Wales. Wales needs to lead – not lag – in cancer care.

“It was only because at that appointment, my insistency and pressure placed on my GP, that I got referred. That referral saved my life.”

Neil's Story



At 51, Neil's life changed after a workplace blood test with North Wales Police revealed high PSA levels. Because of his age, it wasn't NHS-provided, and he had no symptoms, his GP initially dismissed it. "It was only because at that appointment, my insistency and pressure placed on my GP, that I got referred. That referral saved my life."

Diagnosed with prostate cancer, Neil underwent a Radical Prostatectomy in Ysbyty Glan Clwyd, but men now have to travel to England for surgery because his local health board does not have the necessary robotic equipment. "If men were diagnosed in other Welsh Health Board areas, they wouldn't need to travel to London." Beyond basic exercises, there were few options for rehab, emotional or peer support, prompting Neil to create and chair three North Wales Prostate Cancer Support Groups across his region and campaign for earlier PSA testing and more equitable access to care and treatment.

"It shouldn't matter where in Wales you live, you should have access to the best treatment options available and to the right support – emotional and physical." Neil's story supports the need for a Ten-Year National Cancer Strategy for Wales to ensure consistency, tackle inequity and unwarranted variation – and Macmillan is committed to doing whatever it takes to make it happen.

Priority Two: A well-supported cancer workforce

We're calling for:

- A cancer workforce strategy delivered by Health Education and Improvement Wales.
- Clear career progression pathways for cancer professionals and dedicated professional development time.
- Regular collection and publication of detailed data about the cancer workforce to enable continued workforce monitoring and planning.
- Action to create a workforce that is equitable and culturally responsive.

A world-class cancer service needs a well-supported workforce. Dedicated cancer and healthcare professionals across Wales go above and beyond to meet the challenges of delivering complex and compassionate care in challenging circumstances. But they work in a cancer system that does not sufficiently support them.

To deliver a cancer workforce in Wales that meets future demands, we need an ambitious strategy, backed up by funding, that includes the whole workforce – from specialist nurses to dietitians, support workers to physiotherapists, psychologists to GPs.

Access to professional development opportunities supports recruitment, retention, and with rapidly evolving cancer treatments and technology, it ensures professionals can meet the increasingly complex needs of people living with cancer. We must see clear career pathways developed for cancer professionals, with dedicated time and funding to support their development. Access to training must also be equitable and available across Wales, where professionals need it.

A vital part of strengthening the cancer workforce is understanding who they are. Without a detailed understanding of the number of professionals in the cancer workforce, it is impossible to develop accurate modelling for future needs. We also need to see regular collection and publication of detailed workforce data to enable continued workforce monitoring and planning.

With the ever-increasing complexity of care and the growing number of people being diagnosed, the cancer workforce needs to be culturally responsive and function differently. This includes identifying and developing the future skills needed to realise the potential of new technology and deliver truly personalised and equitable care across hospital and community settings. It includes both cancer and non-cancer specialists having the skills and knowledge to support people with cancer and other long-term conditions.

“Cancer care is about more than treatment. It's about the whole diagnosis journey, and the support that surrounds it”

Rachel's Story



At just 33, fit and marathon training, Rachel's stomach pains and fatigue were repeatedly dismissed as side effects of medication and IBS – she was assumed to be too young to be a cancer patient. Only after her dermatologist intervened was she diagnosed with bowel cancer. While her treatment moved quickly, the emotional and holistic support she needed was missing.

“On the ward there was no one to turn to... somebody should be there when you're going through life-changing surgery.” With no guidance or signposting to dietitians, physios or suitable rehab programmes, Rachel turned to organisations including Macmillan for support. Seven years on, she is still living with fatigue, muscle loss, infertility and emotional needs and has only recently begun receiving NHS psychological help.

Rachel's story shows why Wales needs a well-supported cancer workforce: “Cancer care is about more than treatment. It's about the whole diagnosis journey, and the support that surrounds it. It's about the right people/clinicians being wherever and whenever you need them.” This Senedd election is a chance to make that happen, and Macmillan is committed to doing whatever it takes to ensure it does.

† Priority Three: A revolution in cancer data and digital infrastructure, to plan smarter, deliver faster, and empower.

We're calling for:

- A nationally integrated digital system to link primary, secondary, and community care.
- Standardised cancer coding and data collection protocols across all boards.
- Patient-facing tools to give people access to their own records and empower informed decisions.
- Regular collection and publication of cancer patient experience and outcomes to facilitate learning, identify gaps and hold systems accountable.
- Data in relation to inequities in health and access to health services to be routinely collated, shared and used transparently.

Currently, Wales's fragmented and outdated data and digital systems are failing people with cancer. Our systems often don't speak to each other – even within the same health board. This compromises continuity of care and creates real risks for patients: decisions made without full information, repeated tests or missed appointments, and unnecessary stress.

Macmillan is calling on the next Welsh Government to revolutionise cancer data and digital infrastructure with long-term investment and leadership – creating a system that works for and empowers both people living with cancer and professionals.

We need a nationally integrated IT infrastructure that links primary, secondary and community care – including emerging neighbourhood healthcare models – to ensure that the right information is available, whenever it is needed. We also need consistent, standardised cancer coding and data collection, digitally shared across all health boards, to drive better care, reduce variations and enable real-time analysis of outcomes, experiences and needs.

We believe people living with cancer in Wales should have access to their own data, with user-friendly digital tools that put them in control of their care and support shared decision-making. Such technology already exists – it's time to scale it up across Wales.

We believe regular collection and publication of cancer patient experiences and outcomes is vital to track progress, facilitate learning, identify best practice, highlight inequities and hold services and health boards to account. The last national cancer patient experience survey was conducted by Macmillan with NHS Wales in 2021/22. That's too long to wait to hear from the people who matter most.

“Give men the tools early – it could transform recovery.”

David's Story



David was managing a bingo club in 2008 when a PSA test revealed aggressive prostate cancer. Surgery, radiotherapy and years of hormone therapy followed, alongside painful side effects including a double mastectomy and long-term incontinence. Support from the incontinence nurse and the North Wales Prostate Cancer Support Group became crucial.

As group secretary, David has supported hundreds of men and helped launch PSA testing events. He stresses the importance of early interventions. “Give men the tools early – it could transform recovery.” Evidence shows that timely access to pelvic floor support improves continence and quality of life, yet services in Wales are inconsistent. He adds, “If my PSA had been tracked properly, treatment could have restarted sooner and maybe stopped the tumours spreading.”

David's story highlights why Wales urgently needs a revolution in cancer data and digital infrastructure – to plan smarter, deliver faster and empower everyone living with cancer.

Priority Four: **A holistic, person-centred cancer system.**

Cancer support goes beyond clinical treatment. We're calling for:

- Access to prehabilitation, rehabilitation, and psychological support for everyone diagnosed with cancer in Wales.
- Greater access to community-based services, providing cancer support where and how people need it (including on clinical wards).
- Consistent access to Holistic Needs Assessments (HNAs) across Wales.
- Targeted investment in underserved communities.

Cancer can disrupt someone's whole life, entailing practical, physical, emotional and financial problems that can last long after treatment ends. Conversely, person-centred care that provides for a person's medical, psychological, emotional, and practical needs being met across treatment and care settings, has been shown to improve outcomes.

Access to vital services such as prehabilitation, rehabilitation and psychological support varies hugely across Wales, and at worst is unavailable. Tackling this variation will embed a preventative and rehabilitative approach that prioritises early intervention, rehabilitation and support where and when people need it.

Delivering more holistic and coordinated cancer services in the community takes pressure off hospitals, is often more accessible for people and can reduce health inequities. We need a long-term approach with dedicated investment to support this shift.

Person-centred care can be delivered through Holistic Needs Assessments (HNA), which result in Personalised Care and Support Plans (PCSPs), to ensure every person with cancer can access help to navigate the care and support they need. It is vital that our systems both track progress, by collecting data on HNAs, and use PCSPs to facilitate quality conversations in all relevant settings, including in emergency medicine. Everyone diagnosed with cancer in Wales should have access to personalised care and the opportunity to discuss their needs and concerns, but we know this isn't happening for too many people.

The delivery of person-centred care must be underpinned by an extensive workforce skilled in providing inclusive care, afforded the time and space to ensure conversations about it take place, and supported by robust data to measure progress and inform service design. We need cancer services that are co-designed with communities and people with lived experience, including those most underserved and marginalised, to ensure we're reaching those who need the most support.

“Juggling being a parent and a cancer professional was overwhelming. I had to stop work to be there”

Daisy and Catrin's Story



Daisy from Anglesey was just 17 when she asked, "Do I have cancer, Mum?" – a question that shattered her mother Catrin, a cancer professional herself. Diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma, Daisy faced gruelling 4–6 hour round trips to Liverpool for diagnostic consultations for treatment initially up to three times a week.

North Wales couldn't offer specialist care for her age group. Catrin said, "Juggling being a parent and a cancer professional was overwhelming. I had to stop work to be there for Daisy – every appointment, every fear, every mile." Daisy rang the bell in August 2025, but her journey exposed a painful truth: postcode should never determine access to care. She urges, "Push for the best care. Everyone deserves it."

Daisy's story is a rallying cry for holistic, person-centred care – so no one faces cancer alone or far from home. We must do whatever it takes, wherever you are, whatever your need, to make it happen.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone affected by cancer in Wales who shared their stories, experiences and insights to shape this manifesto. Your voices – honest, powerful and personal – are at the heart of everything we are calling for.

We also extend our thanks to Macmillan professionals across Wales who contributed their expertise and frontline perspectives. Your commitment to supporting people affected by cancer, often in pressurised environments and challenging circumstances, is what drives our mission to spark a revolution in cancer care for the future.

This manifesto is yours – and we will do whatever it takes to make sure your voices are heard.

At Macmillan, we do whatever it takes to help everyone living with cancer. Whatever your question or need, big or small, we are here to provide reassurance, information, and support to help you right now.

**For information, support or just someone to talk to,
call 0808 808 00 00 or visit macmillan.org.uk/whateveryouneed**