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Welsh Women's Aid Response: A call for information – Welsh Government Draft Budget proposals for 2023-24

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These are the views of:	<i>Welsh Women's Aid (Third Sector) - the national charity in Wales working to end domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women.</i>

About Welsh Women's Aid

Welsh Women's Aid (WWA) is the umbrella organisation in Wales that supports and provides national representation for independent third sector violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence (VAWDASV) specialist services in Wales (comprising our membership of specialist services and members of the regional VAWDASV Specialist Services Providers Forums). These services deliver lifesaving, and life-changing support and preventative work in response to violence against women, including domestic abuse and sexual violence, as part of a network of UK provision.

As an umbrella organisation, our primary purpose is to prevent domestic abuse, sexual violence, and all forms of violence against women, and to ensure high-quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender-responsive and holistic. We collaborate nationally to integrate and improve community responses and practice in Wales; we provide advice, consultancy, support, and training to deliver policy and service improvements across government, public, private, and third sector services and in communities, for the benefit of survivors.

We also deliver the Wales National Quality Service Standards (NQSS), a national accreditation framework for domestic abuse specialist services in Wales, supported by the Welsh Government, as part of a UK suite of integrated accreditation systems and frameworks. More information on the NQSS can be found here: <http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/our-members/standards/>

Introduction

Welsh Women's Aid welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for information.

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At the time of submitting this response, we have recently published our Perfect Storm Report¹, in which we highlight the extent of the crisis faced by specialist services that support survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence (VAWDASV) across Wales. In the report, we highlighted the many ongoing impacts of underfunded and precariously funded services which we hope will inform the development of a sustainable funding model and the 2023-24 Welsh Government Budget. These include:

- A continued increase in demand for services
- The ongoing impact of COVID-19 coinciding with the end of short-term emergency funding granted after the onset of the pandemic
- Over a decade of austerity, leaving public services cut and specialist services picking up the pieces
- The cost-of-living crisis and associated increases, particularly in energy costs
- Short-term funding cycles
- Ongoing sector-wide issues with staff recruitment and retention
- Pay disparity between equivalent statutory and non-statutory roles

Whilst we acknowledge previous commitments to sustainable funding and the sustainable commissioning workstream set up by the National Partnership Board as part of the new VAWDASV strategy, implementation of these commitments cannot wait any longer. We strongly urge the Welsh Government to speed up the implementation of this work, and to clearly commit to long-term funding cycles within this budget, not only to identify gaps and duplication but also to ensure the longevity of core services for survivors of VAWDASV in Wales.

1. What, in your opinion, has been the impact of the Welsh Government's 2022-23 Budget, including funding related to the recovery of the pandemic? Have Welsh Government business support policies been effective as the economic outlook for 2023-24 continues to worsen?

We welcomed the following within the 2022-23 budget:

- Additional £10 million to support young people who do not meet the threshold for homelessness services
- Given the ongoing effect of the cost-of-living crisis on survivors of VAWDASV, we particularly welcome the additional £180 million, outside the normal reserve arrangements, to fund additional measures to respond to the cost-of-living crisis
- The recent commitment of £957 thousand to develop the VAWDASV Blueprint

¹ <https://welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Perfect-Storm-Report-ENG-compressed.pdf>





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- An extra £93 thousand to expand training commitments under the Ask and Act scheme

However, we are disappointed that the VAWDASV Strategy, released in 2022, was not accompanied by adequate commitment to a sustainable funding model for specialist VAWDASV services. As mentioned above, we welcome the establishment of a sustainable funding workstream by the new National Partnership Board, but we believe progress in this area is far too slow and whilst the additional money is welcomed, without strategic oversight and improved partnership working with specialist services, support for survivors will continue to be piecemeal.

It must be recognised that the Welsh Government VAWDASV grant makes up a small proportion of the overall funding required for specialist organisations to provide the life-saving and life-changing services they deliver. Specialist services make up a significant amount of their funding through competitive and time-consuming tender processes for short-term pots of funding from other public authorities (such as the Home Office and Police and Crime Commissioners) and charitable bodies. It should be noted that these tendering processes are cumbersome, taking up much of the time needed by specialist services to provide direct support to survivors, and make it harder for smaller and more specialist by and for organisations to compete for funding. Consequently, more reliable centralised funding would allow our member services to provide services more efficiently and would ensure consistency of support for all survivors of VAWDASV across Wales.

The Housing Support Grant is vital to ensuring accommodation-based provision, such as refuge services, are delivered. We welcome the extra funding delivered by Welsh Government, particularly for young people who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing homelessness. However, lack of suitable housing or accommodation remains to be one of the most prevalent barriers preventing survivors from accessing support, and there is a clear need to ensure that local authorities are also funded sufficiently to enact their responsibilities under Homelessness duties and to make sure that services providing this critical accommodation are resourced adequately to be able to provide support directly at the point of need.

It should be noted that throughout the last financial year, we have continued to see rises in the number and complexity of survivors needing direct support from services. In the 2021-22 financial year, member organisations and the Live Fear Free helpline saw:

- 42% of survivors referred to refuge were unable to be supported, the majority of whom (22%) were unable to be supported due to a lack of refuge space
- A 61% increase in survivors accessing specialist sexual violence services
- An 18% increase in contacts to the Live Fear Free Helpline
- A 71% increase in the number of survivors who reported so-called honour-based violence, a 143% increase in the number of survivors who reported trafficking/human slavery, and an 88% increase in the number of survivors who reported forced marriage

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If refuge providers in Wales are forced to turn any survivors away due to lack of space and resource, more must be done to ensure suitable, sustainable funding in the long term.

2. How should/could the Welsh Government support the economy and business following the pandemic, Brexit and inflationary and other economic pressures?

The COVID-19 pandemic shone a light on existing gaps in policy, planning, and provision relating to violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence. Many of these issues were apparent prior to the pandemic, but when a 'shadow pandemic' was declared by the United Nations² in light of the global increases in VAWDASV that followed the pandemic-related restrictions, Welsh Government responded accordingly. Data from our member organisations representing the specialist VAWDASV sector across Wales told us that during the first quarter of the 2021-22 financial year, 59% has accessed COVID-19 specific funding but this dropped to 33% by the end of the year. Meanwhile, during this time, demand on services has not abated. We saw 35,536 contacts to the Live Fear Free Helpline during the 2021-22 financial year, which represented an 18% increase from the previous financial year, when the COVID-19 pandemic began. Combined, these show that whilst the short-term adaptations from the Welsh Government in the light of the pandemic were welcome, they ceased far too soon, and the pressure on services remains at an all-time high.

It is important to look at this increase in service demand in a wider context. As outlined in our Perfect Storm Report³, these struggles occurred against a backdrop of decreased funding due to the UK's departure from the European Union alongside many years of austerity. These longer-term issues combined with more recent crises such as increasing inflation and the cost-of-living crisis has left specialist services in financial precarity. If another unprecedented event such as the COVID-19 pandemic were to occur, specialist services for survivors of VAWDASV across Wales may be entirely lost.

We urge the Welsh Government to provide leadership to public bodies such as local authorities and health boards to ensure that VAWDASV services are delivered across all regions, ensuring that statutory VAWDASV commissioning guidance is adhered to across all devolved funding streams at a national as well as local level. Notably, specialist services should remain independent and fully funded, not be taken in house without the consultation of survivors and counter to expert advice.

☑ How financially prepared is your organisation for the 2023-24 financial year, how will inflation impact on your ability to deliver planned objectives, and how robust is your ability

² <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>

³ <https://welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Perfect-Storm-Report-ENG-compressed.pdf>





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to plan for future years?

As previously mentioned, Welsh Women's Aid represents a range of specialist service providers across Wales. A continued issue for specialist services in the VAWDASV sector and beyond is one-year short funding cycles. We have highlighted in several previous budgetary calls for evidence that the VAWDASV sector continues to face uncertainty because of a lack of secure and sustainable funding, and the effect this is having on service delivery. In particular, smaller, more specialist services, such as sexual violence services, services by and for Black and minoritised ethnic women, and services supporting women with multiple needs remain most at risk.

Little has changed since our most recent state of the sector report, and our clear recommendations for a sustainable funding model for the sector- which we have consistently highlighted as critical within our last 6 state of the sector reports- have not yet been forthcoming. Sustainable funding should mean longer term funding (at least five-year funding cycles), cross-directorate budgetary commitment and high-quality, collaborate commissioning practices. Over and above this, we have recently highlighted the postcode lottery that exists across Wales for many types of service. For example, our Duty to Support report⁴, commissioned by Joyce Watson MS, identified a postcode lottery of services for children and young people across Wales, leading to some children reporting a significant impact on their ability to recover from abuse.

Further, significant areas of devolved government, including economy, health, employability, and poverty have evidenced little commitment to investing in preventing or responding to VAWDASV to date. Some such as housing, education, social services, children and communities invest in responses related to VAWDASV but these are not joined up to form a strategic approach to tackling VAWDASV, posing the danger of duplicated or siloed working leading to ineffective responses to the scale of VAWDASV in Wales.

Ultimately, these issues leave specialist services and the sector as a whole in an extremely precarious financial position year on year, with this financial year as no exception, and the budget must commit to joined up working to tackle gender-based violence.

3. With inflation and costs of living issues continuing to escalate, what action should the Welsh Government take to help households cope with this latest crisis?

While the direct economic impacts of the cost-of-living crisis must not be underestimated, the impact on survivors of VAWDASV should not be either.

Financial and/or economic abuse has been on the rise for many years, and this will only have been compounded by the recent economic turmoil in the UK. Data from our membership of specialist services shows that between

⁴ <https://welshwomensaid.org.uk/news/18049/>





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quarter 4 of last year and quarter 1 of this year, refuge services in Wales saw a 48% increase in the number of survivors reporting financial or economic abuse. Further, in a recent report⁵, Women's Aid Federation England (WAFE) found that almost all survivors (96%) surveyed had seen a negative impact on the amount of money available to them as a result of cost-of-living increases and two thirds (66%) of survivors said abusers are using the cost-of-living increases and concerns around financial hardship as a tool of coercive control, including to justify further restricting their access to money. Further, almost three quarters (73%) of women living with and/or having financial links with the abuser said that the cost-of-living crisis had either prevented them from leaving an abusive relation or was making it harder for them to leave. Further evidence⁶ from WAFE has found financial hardship remains to be a barrier when seeking refuge space. Indeed, research⁷ has found that many women either sofa-surf or spend time on some form of emergency accommodation or B&B whilst waiting for refuge space and a small but discernible number of women resort to rough sleeping including the use of 24-hour buildings or sleeping in their cars. This leaves women vulnerable and at risk. In their research, WAFE found that many women rely on informal support networks such as friends and family when faced with financial hardship leaving an abusive relationship, but many women do not have such support networks, and this leaves them either stuck in the abusive relationship or facing serious financial precarity.

The cost-of-living crisis is also affecting the sector more broadly. Many of our member organisations that run direct services such as refuge have seen extreme increases in their general running costs such as food, water, gas, and electricity. This is exacerbated by inflexible funding that is often based on backdated costings from the previous financial year. One member service told us⁸ that despite rising costs, their funding would be based on last year's costs, leaving a £5,000 funding shortfall for their floating support project and a £1,500 shortfall for each of their refuges. Whilst some have been able to access short-term support with energy bills, many have not, and there is no clarity around what support will be available after April 2023. This uncertainty is leaving VAWDASV services in economic turmoil, and mid-cycle commissioned services must be given immediate financial support from Welsh Government to address the impacts of the increase cost of living on their services and enable them to continue the crucial support they provide for survivors of VAWDASV.

To conclude, it is clear that financial abuse, exacerbated by economic precarity, is a continuous driver of violence against women and girls, and we urge the Welsh Government to utilize their resources to address the ongoing inflation and cost of living issues with a gendered lens, ensuring that equality impact and needs assessments are undertaken as appropriate, and survivors remain at the forefront of policy in this area.

☑ How should the Budget address the needs of people living in urban, post-industrial and

⁵ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/the-cost-of-living/>

⁶ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Financial-Hardship-report-FINAL.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Nowhere-to-Turn-2021.pdf>

⁸ <https://welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Perfect-Storm-Report-ENG-compressed.pdf>

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rural communities and in supporting economies within those communities?

It is important to acknowledge that the cost of accessing services is high for survivors of VAWDASV in rural parts of Wales. Whilst our membership of specialist services covers the entirety of Wales, in more rural parts of Wales, services are likely to be further away from survivors, making it harder and more expensive for them to access, and this is undoubtedly a barrier to support. This is a particularly prudent issue for disabled survivors and older survivors.

We have previously highlighted⁹ that services are not funded consistently across all local authorities within Wales, and this lack of Wales-wide strategy and consistency makes it very difficult to identify gaps in provision and to implement a whole-society approach to tackling violence against women and girls.

One of the core aims of the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015 was to introduce a duty to implement local strategies to end the postcode lottery of services for survivors across Wales. Sadly, 7 years after the implementation of this act, this remains to be a problem for survivors, particularly in rural parts of Wales. Ultimately, we believe clear funding in this draft budget to guarantee parity of specialist support across Wales is the only way to achieve Objective 6 of the new VAWDASV strategy, which aims to provide *all* victims with *equal* access to appropriately resourced, high quality, needs-led, strength-based, intersectional, and responsive services across Wales.

4. Are Welsh Government plans to build a greener economy clear and sufficiently ambitious? Do you think there is enough investment being targeted at tackling the climate change and nature emergency? Are there any potential skill gaps that need to be addressed to achieve these plans?

6. Is the Welsh Government using the financial mechanisms available to it around borrowing and taxation?

N/A

7. The Committee would like to focus on a number of other specific areas in the scrutiny of the Budget. Do you have any specific comments on any of the areas identified below?

Welsh Government policies to reduce poverty and gender inequality. Is enough support being given to those people living in relative income poverty?

⁹ <https://welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/WWA-response-to-Welsh-Government-Budget-2022-23.pdf>





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As we highlighted in our response to the 2022-23 draft budget, all forms of VAWDASV are rooted in and are expressions of unequal gender relations in society. These intersect with other forms of oppression such as sexism, ableism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia and other factors such as age, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and disability, mean these women experience VAWDASV in different, often more severe ways.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis is felt disproportionately by women. In an analysis of the gendered impact of the cost-of-living crisis¹⁰, the Women's Budget Group reported that the increases in the cost of living will hit the poorest hardest, and given that women have lower levels of savings and wealth, as well as less capacity to increase their hours of paid work due to other factors such as caring responsibilities, the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis will affect women more acutely. This also has a direct impact on violence against women. As outlined above, many forms of VAWDASV including financial and economic abuse have increased since the precarity in the UK's public finances became apparent and we believe the Welsh Government must consider the disproportionate effect on survivors, many of whom are women, and allocate resource to tackle income inequality accordingly.

We appreciate the parts of the VAWDASV strategy aimed to address gender inequality through an intersectional lens, but we believe the Welsh Government is still missing large parts of structural inequalities that contribute to VAWG. Many systemic barriers are faced by Black and minoritised women, migrant women, Deaf and disabled women, LGBT+ women, and women facing multiple disadvantages when it comes to accessing resources to tackle gender and income inequality, such as access to housing and support services. These need to be systematically dismantled via proper, sustainable resourcing for specialist services, especially for dedicated by and for specialist services.

Welsh Women's Aid welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to embedding gender budgeting across the work through the Programme for Government. We acknowledge the work of the Budget Improvement and Impact Advisory Group and, accordingly, the gender budgeting pilot, Personal Learning Accounts (PLA), the evaluation of which is imminent. However, we believe progress in this area of work is too slow. It is vital that this budget enables equal access to support through effective resourcing of services, acknowledging that the services required by women who are survivors of VAWDASV, particularly those with intersecting support needs, are not homogenous and they should be funded accordingly.

Further, we believe the 2023-24 draft budget must consider the capacity of services and departments to deliver the promises in the new VAWDASV strategy, including the development of a system of sustainable commissioning, effective strategic planning, developing a national framework of standards for specialist service delivery, and including survivor voices across the full range of the Blueprint framework. These must be adequately resourced and developed in parallel with complimentary policy such as the Wales LGBTQ+ Action

¹⁰ <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-gendered-impact-of-the-cost-of-living-crisis.pdf>





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Plan, the Strategy for Preventing and Ending Homelessness, the Gender Equality Plan, the Action Plan on Disability, and the Welsh Government Race Equality Action Plan. These strategies should be supportive of one another, inform the development of this budget, and work together to tackle the root causes of violence and inequality. Cross-governmental work must facilitate joined up working across strategic areas to align equalities work and VAWDASV work.

☑ How/whether the approach to preventative spending is represented in resource allocations (Preventative spending = spending which focuses on preventing problems and eases future demand on services by intervening early).

For years, experts have been referring to violence against women as a ‘major public health problem and a violence of women’s human rights’¹¹. This recognises that violence against women sits at the intersection of many areas of policy and government including health, housing, communities, justice, and education. Further, reports from the Women’s Resource Centre¹² show that on average, the women’s sector saves the NHS £500 million per year and as such, investment in women’s services and the adoption of a public health approach to violence against women and girls should be an absolute priority for the Welsh Government.

We welcome the acknowledgement in the new VAWDASV strategy that the principles of a public health approach provide a useful framework to understanding the causes and consequences of violence, abuse, and control. We agree with Welsh Government that co-ordinated effort is needed, acknowledging the causes of health and social problems through multi-agency responses. We also welcome the acknowledgement that working across all these areas of work to implement primary, secondary and tertiary prevention is key to implementing a public health approach and the promise to align the VAWDASV strategy with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and the commitment to the seven wellbeing goals which are relevant to the prevention of VAWDASV. We believe the draft budget must include solid commitments to ensure both public and third sector bodies are funded sufficiently to enable them to take action to achieve these goals.

It is important to note that many forms and manifestations of VAWDASV remain under-recognised and under-reported, such as public sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and VAWDASV perpetrated against older people. Whilst we acknowledge that awareness raising has been highlighted in the new VAWDASV strategy, and the previous attempts by the Welsh Government to engage with public campaigns to highlight these, such as the 2019 national campaign to make older people aware of their rights under the Social Services and Wellbeing

¹¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

¹² <https://www.wrc.org.uk/blogs/blogs/the-womens-sector-700-million-out-of-pocket-heres-why-and-what-we-can-do-about-it>





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(Wales) Act 2014¹³, we do not believe these have been wide-reaching enough and many have been too short-lived. As such, we urge the Welsh Government to include dedicated funds to highlighting the prevalence of all forms of VAWDASV in order to reflect the aim of taking a public health approach to the matter.

☑ How resources should be prioritised to tackle NHS waiting lists for planned and non-urgent NHS treatments. Do you think the Welsh Government has a robust plan to address this issue?

N/A

☑ The sustainability of NHS, social care, further and higher education, local government and other public services more generally. Is the Welsh Government providing adequate support to the public sector to enable it to be innovative and forward looking through things like workforce planning.

We wish to highlight the disparity in the way that the Welsh Government has administered funds to statutory and non-statutory services. In our response to last year's call for evidence, we highlighted the issue of staff retention for third sector specialist services and pay disparity. In our State of the Sector report in 2021, we showed that specialist services are able to offer roughly £20,541 for a support worker role whilst statutory bodies are able to offer roughly £24,000-£26,000 for similar roles. Even for equivalent role, specialist services receive significantly lower funding to cover staff wages. For instance, an independent sexual violence advisor (ISVA) in a rape crisis centre in Wales has a wage of roughly £27,444, but in statutory sector-run sexual assault referral (SARC) centres, wages are roughly £35,000 within the same locality.

This disparity is particularly stark for specialist children and young people roles, where an average local authority-based role working with children pays 9.1% higher than in the specialist third sector. Given the tight budget restraints under which specialist services are working due to inadequate funding, they have less flexibility to match wages and are experiencing extreme staff attrition to public sector roles as a result. Further, local government cuts are putting increasing pressure on specialist services. Research¹⁴ from the New Policy Institute alongside the Lloyds Bank Foundation shows that rising demand and shrinking resources in council services often leaves local charities to pick up the pieces. Together, these highlight the need not only for public sector bodies to be funded sufficiently and sustainably, but also for third sector services to be given parity of priority when it comes to funding, to allow them to provide the core services they deliver when public sector bodies are unable to do so.

¹³ <https://gov.wales/age-friendly-wales-our-strategy-ageing-society-html>

¹⁴ <https://www.lloydsbankfoundation.org.uk/media/fdwfepo/a-quiet-crisis-summary.pdf>





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Separately to the above, we wish to highlight our concerns around the focus on innovative support in this question, alongside the need to maintain consistent funding for core services both across the public and third sectors. Increasingly, specialist services are required to enter competitive tender bids for funding to deliver novel programmes and interventions, and whilst we appreciate the importance of diverse programmes of support and piloting new approaches, this should occur in addition to rather than in lieu of funding for tired-and tested, evidence-based, core services from trusted providers.

☑ Whether there has been adequate investment from the Welsh Government in basic public sector infrastructure.

N/A

☑ Support for children and young people whose education, development, and mental health and well-being have been affected by the pandemic. Is there enough infrastructure investment targeted at young people?

In our previous responses to these calls for evidence we have highlighted the existing postcode lottery of specialist services for children and young people affected by VAWDASV across Wales. Indeed, in our recent report, A Duty to Support¹⁵, we found that despite roughly 1 in 5 children in Wales experiencing domestic abuse, only a small percentage receive support from specialist VAWDASV services, and only three out of 20 local authorities in Wales that responded to our freedom of information reviews had a designated children and young people scrutiny committee to examine the need for specialist support for children and young people.

Many of our member services deliver excellent support and intervention for children and young people affected by VAWDASV, however, many refuge services still have no dedicated funding for children and young people workers, and provision remains extremely limited in comparison to the scale of the population in terms of services' area coverage and the prevalence of VAWDASV both directly perpetrated against children and young people and to which they are witness. Whilst we appreciate the effort made in the recent VAWDASV strategy to acknowledge children and young people's needs, including the setting up of the children and young people workstream within the VAWDASV Blueprint approach, this must be accompanied by strategic, ringfenced investment in support and services for children and young people.

☑ Whether it is clear how evidence and data is driving Welsh Government priority setting and budget allocations.

¹⁵ <https://welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CYP-FOI-Report-ENG-WWA.pdf>





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We wish to raise concerns around the many forms and manifestations of VAWDASV that still lack solid evidence or data, particularly Wales-specific data, and we urge the Welsh Government to invest resource to understand the scale of these to allocate budget accordingly. These include, but are not limited to data relating to:

- Older people
- Children and young people, particularly surrounding child to adolescent parent violence and high-quality evidence centering the voice of children in Wales, particularly those with care experience
- Those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)
- Adult sexual exploitation
- Communities in rural areas in Wales
- Protected characteristics, particularly the impact of VAWDASV and accessibility of support services for Deaf/disabled people, LGBTQ+ people and those from Black and minoritised ethnic communities
- Speakers of other languages, particularly with regards to the investment needed to conduct high-quality research with interpreters and evidence that much of the terminology surrounding VAWDASV either does not translate directly or does not exist at all in many other languages

We welcome the acknowledgement in the Draft National Action Plan to end the abuse and neglect of older people that evidence surrounding abuse perpetrated towards older people in Wales remains lacking, but we urge Welsh Government to commit funds to expand the evidence base so that support and interventions are thorough, evidence-based and funded according to need.

Additionally, we wish to highlight our previous point surrounding gender budgeting, and we urge the Welsh Government to incorporate needs assessments covering the impact of budget allocations on different groups, including women, in all budgets going forwards.

☑ Is support for third sector organisations, which face increased demand for services as a consequence of the cost of living crisis and the pandemic, sufficient?

Absolutely not. In a recent published report¹⁶ by Welsh Women's Aid, we highlighted a perfect storm of factors that are leaving services in severe financial precarity, including the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, many years of austerity, the cost-of-living crisis, and other more discrete factors such as increase in utility costs for refuge services.

¹⁶ <https://welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Perfect-Storm-Report-ENG-compressed.pdf>





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Whilst we appreciate that many of these individual situations could not have been predicted, it is important to lay them in the context of over a decade of austerity, causing cuts to local services which has been increasing the strain on specialist services for many years. To this end, we believe that third-sector organisations have been underfunded for many years, including pre-pandemic, and the cumulative crises have simply exacerbated this situation. We urge Welsh Government to make a longer-term plan to tackle to the intersecting crises faced by organisations across the entire third sector, including VAWG organisations.

It should also be noted that specialist services welcomed the additional funding provided by Welsh Government during the pandemic, but the majority of services have seen continued increases in demand for services despite the funding coming to an end. This shows that Welsh Government have the flexibility to cater to changes in service demand and economic pressures, and should develop longer-term, more flexible funding models to allow services to access such funds quickly and efficiently.

☑ What are the key opportunities for Government investment to support 'building back better' (i.e. supporting an economy and public services that better deliver against the wellbeing goals in the Well-being of Future Generations Act)?

Throughout the pandemic, VAWDASV specialist services have been making concerted efforts to continue and adapt to new ways of working to ensure consistency of support for survivors. However, the continued impact on survivors and staff in the sector must not be underestimated. Sustainability and availability of provision to protect and support all survivors of VAWDASV should be a key priority for building back better.

In our response to the draft budget in 2022/23, we included a number of calls to action, many of which remain relevant today:

1. Commit to recentring VAWDASV as a Welsh Government priority, and embed intervention, prevention, and support for survivors across all directorates.
2. Ensure funding for the VAWDASV sector is sustainable and contains ringfenced funding for specialist by and for organisations. This includes commitment to longer funding cycles, of a minimum of 3-5 years.
3. Commit to inflation-linked funding for specialist services to ensure basic amenities can be covered and not come at the expense of support for survivors of VAWDASV.
4. Provide funding contracts for specialist services that enable them to offer parity of employment conditions as those in statutory roles.
5. Commit to funds within contracts for specialist services dedicated to staff development and wellbeing.
6. Proactively plan to increase support services for underrepresented groups within the VAWDASV sector such as children and young people, older people, and survivors of sexual exploitation.
7. Commit ringfenced funding for a multi-tier of perpetrator interventions.

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8. Commit to a long-term solution for supporting survivors with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), including the creation of a last resort fund for Welsh providers to access, as recommended in the Gender based violence: the needs of migrant women report¹⁷ recently published by the Equality and Social Justice Committee.
9. Focus on funding evidence-based, core services as well as innovative programmes of support.
10. Prioritise funding for early intervention and prevention.
11. Ensure referral routes to specialist services are prepared for a rise in disclosures by children and young people at schools. This is particularly relevant as the new RSE curriculum is rolled out.
12. Ensure dedicated children and young people workers in both refuge and community services are available to provide practical and therapeutic services for children and young people to enable them to recover from their experiences, recognise abuse and develop healthy relationships in the future.
13. Increase the availability of varied flexible accommodation and support for survivors.
14. Develop a funding system that reduces competitive tendering and focuses on genuine collaboration.
15. Do not default back to the inadequacies of pre-COVID court proceedings.

All of the above recommendations require sustainable investment from the new budget and clear oversight structures to ensure this investment is joined up and effectively administered to the specialist services carrying out the work on the ground.

¹⁷ <https://senedd.wales/senedd-now/news/migrant-women-subject-to-gender-based-violence-and-abuse-are-often-hidden-in-plain-sight-according-to-senedd-report/>

