

Our manifesto for the 2026 Senedd election



About the British Geriatrics Society

The British Geriatrics Society (BGS) is the membership organisation for all UK healthcare professionals engaged in the treatment and care of older people across the UK. Since 1947 our members have been at the forefront of transforming the quality of care available to older people. Our vision is for a society where all older people receive high-quality patient-centred care when and where they need it. We currently have over 5,600 members, including nearly 300 in Wales. Our members work across the multidisciplinary team, including geriatricians, nurses, GPs, allied health professionals and pharmacists working in acute, primary, and community care settings.

2026 marks the start of the BGS's new Strategic Plan in which we have reframed our mission around five themes: a health system fit for purpose; healthy ageing for all; the right care for older people in the right place; high standards of care; and a workforce skilled to meet the healthcare needs of older people.¹ These five themes will underpin all of our work over the next three years and form the basis of our asks of the next Welsh Government in this manifesto.

Context

Wales has an increasingly ageing population. There are more older people living in Wales than there have ever been. In 2008, 18% of the Welsh population was over 65. By mid-2032, this is expected to rise to 25%. By 2060, there will be over one million people over the age of 65 living in Wales.² Since devolution, successive Welsh Governments have committed to ageing well policies, including the appointment of an Older People's Commissioner for Wales in 2008. Despite this, older people face significant challenges that prevent them from ageing and dying well. Healthy life expectancy in Wales is just 60 years old, meaning that on average people are spending a quarter of their life in poor health.³ Many older people will have multiple health conditions, including frailty and dementia, requiring significant health and social care support. Action is needed to ensure that older people are supported to stay healthier for longer and are able to access the right care when they need it.

Older people are the main users of health and social care services in Wales. They also experience the longest waiting times to be admitted, transferred, or discharged from hospital. The incoming Welsh Government has an opportunity to build a health and social care system that is fit for its older population. We recommend a focus on seven key areas outlined in this manifesto.

Our calls for the incoming Welsh Government

1. End corridor care in Wales

Healthcare professionals in all hospitals in Wales are being forced to provide medical care for their patients in hospital corridors or other unsuitable environments. This harmful practice is widespread, with all twelve Welsh emergency departments reporting that they have treated patients in corridors.⁴ Corridor care disproportionately affects older people; the older you are, the more likely you are to face long waits in emergency departments. In 2025, people 85 and over spent an average of six and a half hours in emergency departments in Wales.⁵ For those with multiple conditions, including dementia and frailty, longer waits can be particularly harmful, resulting in health deterioration and avoidable deaths. We urge the incoming Government to urgently commit to ending the unsafe practice of corridor care in Welsh hospitals.

Ending corridor care is achievable. There are examples of hospitals in the UK which have rapidly stopped the practice of corridor care. Solutions need to focus on accelerating patient flow and increasing capacity in hospitals. Addressing the shortage of community-based services, including community rehabilitation and social care services, will reduce avoidable admissions and allow people to leave hospitals when they are medically fit rather than being stuck in hospital where their conditions can become worse. Front Door Frailty services are effective in identifying older people when they arrive in ED and avoiding admissions. The BGS has examples from across the UK where waiting times have been reduced, and corridor care stopped. We are ready and willing to share

these with the incoming Welsh Government to help end the harmful practice of corridor care.

Call 1: We call on the incoming Welsh Government to commit to ending the harmful practice of corridor care in Welsh hospitals.

2. Expand capacity in rural areas

The healthcare system in Wales is not set up to provide care where it is needed the most. Wales is a comparatively rural nation compared to other parts of the UK. The rural population occupies 82% of the land and accounts for 32% of the national population.⁶ The growth in the older population tends to be heavily concentrated in rural areas. Between 2011 and 2021, the older population in rural areas increased by 27% in England and Wales compared to only 15% in urban areas.⁷ This is caused in part by high migration rates of older people away from urban areas as they get older. Older people are the predominant users of the healthcare system, but healthcare services are highly concentrated in urban areas, creating significant disparities in access. For example, we know rural health boards have relatively fewer geriatricians compared to urban areas. Hywel Dda University Health Board and Betsi Cadwalader University Health Board are the two most rural health boards, but each have only one geriatrician for every 900 people over the age of 85.⁸ By comparison, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, the most urban health board, has one geriatrician for every 334 people over the age of 85.⁷ We urge the incoming government to ensure that the healthcare system in Wales is set up to provide care where it

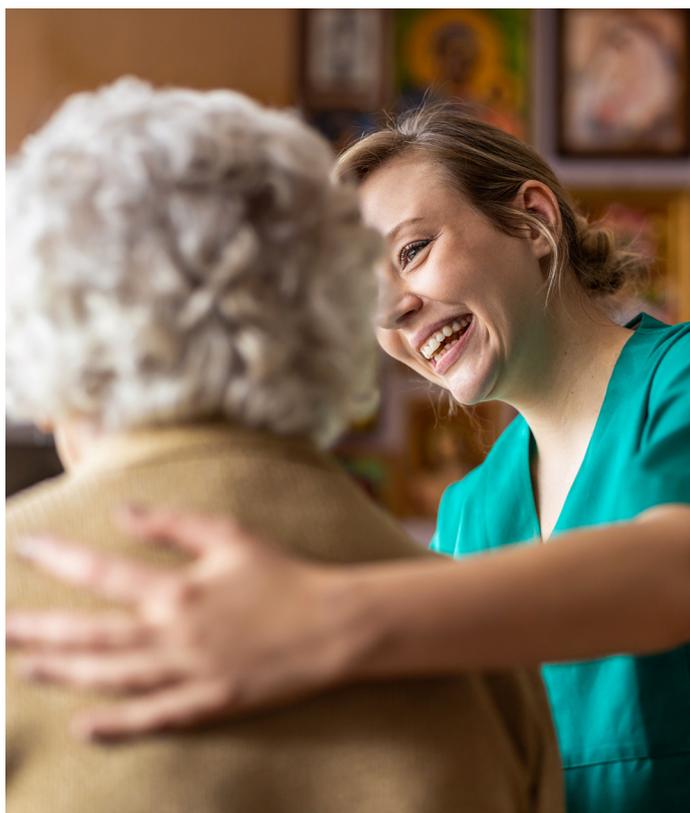
is needed the most. This can be achieved through prioritising care in the community, increasing the number of training posts in rural areas, and investing in areas with the fastest growing ageing populations.

Call 2: We call on the incoming Welsh Government to ensure the healthcare system is configured to provide care where it is needed the most, through expanding capacity in rural areas.

3. Prioritise moving care into the community

Most older people prefer to receive care in community settings rather than in a hospital. This is especially the case for the growing proportion of older people living in rural areas who often travel long distances to receive the care they need. This can be a huge barrier to accessing appropriate care, especially for those with cognitive and physical impairments. The incoming Welsh Government must prioritise moving care into the community through equipping primary and community services with the resources to support people to live independently with good health in their own homes. In 2025, the Welsh Government published their *Proactive Care National Integrated Care Guidance Framework*, outlining how healthcare teams can identify older people who may be living with frailty and put in place interventions to help them age well. We urge the incoming government to commit to ensuring that proactive care is scaled up across the whole country. This will ensure the healthcare needs of older people are identified as early as possible and interventions are put in place to prevent them deteriorating. This improves health outcomes, reduces hospital admissions, and is cost-effective.

Call 3: We call on the incoming Welsh Government to prioritise moving care closer to home by investing in community and primary care and mandating proactive care in all parts of Wales.



4. Stop preventable hospital harm

Long stays in hospital are dangerous for older people. In hospitals across Wales, older people experience severe delays in being admitted, transferred, and discharged from hospital beds. In January 2026, over 1300 people in Wales experienced discharge delays at any one time.⁹ As a result, many beds are being filled with people who are medically fit to go home. Extended hospital stays often lead to prolonged inactivity for older people, resulting in deconditioning, characterised as a decline in muscle mass, physical function, and overall independence. Prolonged stays also mean a greater risk of delirium and infection. A long stay in hospital can mean the difference between maintaining independence and requiring long-term care, and in some cases may contribute to earlier mortality. Deconditioning is preventable. Ensuring that older people stay mobilised from the moment they present at hospital will prevent avoidable physical and functional decline. Cultural change is needed across hospitals in Wales to ensure rehabilitation is prioritised during hospital stays, with shared responsibility across the whole multidisciplinary healthcare team.

Call 4: We call on the incoming Welsh Government to prioritise stopping preventable hospital harm in older people through developing an action plan to stop deconditioning in hospital settings.

5. A healthcare workforce equipped to care for older people

Wales's ageing population needs a healthcare workforce equipped to care for older people with multiple long-term conditions, including frailty and dementia. This requires more experts in older people's healthcare, such as geriatricians, alongside skilling up the wider workforce in the skills to care for people with complex needs. The BGS recommends a benchmark of one geriatrician to every 500 people over the age of 85.¹⁰ In Wales, there is approximately one geriatrician for every 633 people over the age of 85, with only two health boards meeting the recommended benchmark.⁸ Based on current figures, at least 45 additional geriatricians are needed across the country to meet the recommended benchmark.⁸ This requirement is set to grow, driven both by the projected doubling of the population aged over 85 by 2045 and the expected retirement level of around 40% of geriatricians in Wales within the next decade. Therefore, it is vital that the incoming government focuses on increasing the number of experts in older people's healthcare. This should include increasing training numbers and encouraging medical students to specialise in geriatric medicine. Additionally, the whole multidisciplinary workforce, including nurses, allied health professionals, pharmacists, and GPs, should be skilled in care for older people with complex needs. Most healthcare professionals, regardless of specialty, will care for older people so it is vital that they receive training in common conditions of older age, including frailty and dementia.

Call 5: We call on the incoming Welsh Government to ensure its healthcare workforce is equipped with the skills to provide high quality care for older people with multiple conditions, including dementia and frailty.

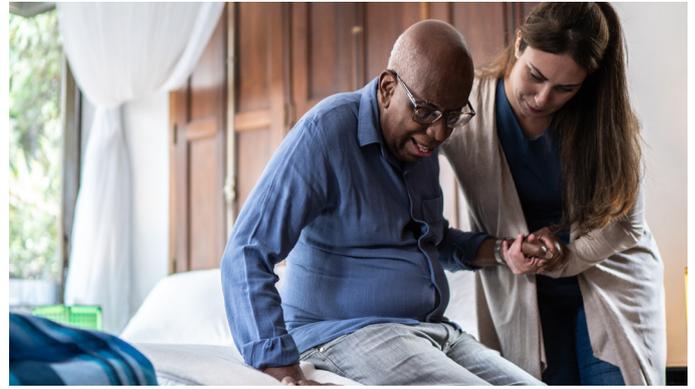
6. Reform Social Care

As Wales's population continues to get older, the social care needs of its population will continue to grow. Currently, the social care system is not equipped to meet these demands. Many older people face prolonged waits for social service assessments and care packages, and experience extended hospital stays despite being medically fit to return home, leading to deconditioning and escalating care needs. Around one in four older people in Wales wait over 30 days for a social care needs assessment and one in six are still waiting an additional 30 days for this care to be put in place.¹¹ It is imperative that the incoming Welsh Government prioritises creating a functional and sustainable social care system. Reforms must include removing barriers to careers in social care and establishing a long-term, sustainable model that can meet the needs of an ageing population.

Call 6: We call on the incoming Welsh Government to create a functional and sustainable social care system to support its ageing population.

7. Recommit to age-friendly strategies

In 2021, the Welsh Government published its plan for an *Age Friendly Wales*, committing to make Wales a nation that supports people of all ages to live and age well. The strategy recognises the range of interventions needed to support an age-friendly Wales, such as improving access to health and social care services; improving housing, transport, and community spaces; encouraging community engagement; and tackling age-related poverty. As Wales's population gets older, it is vital that the Welsh Government continues to commit to



making Wales an age-friendly society. Crucial to this will be initiatives that enable older people to stay healthier for longer, alongside ensuring health and social care services are accessible when needed.

The current government is currently consulting on plans for a dementia strategy. There are 51,000 people living with dementia in Wales and this is expected to increase to 70,000 by 2040.¹² Therefore, it is crucial that the next government prioritises and recommits to strategies to support the unique needs of this growing population group.

Call 7: We call on the incoming Welsh Government to commit to age-friendly strategies.

If health systems work for older people, they work for the rest of the population. The BGS in Wales is committed to working with the new Welsh Government to improve the health and wellbeing of older people in the country. We are ready and willing to share resources, expertise, and examples of best practice.

To arrange a meeting to discuss the recommendations in this manifesto or older people's healthcare more broadly, please contact BGS Policy Co-ordinator, Lucy Aldridge (l.aldridge@bgs.org.uk).

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