EITEM AGENDA / AGENDA ITEM: 5.1

***Cyd-bwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal y Canolbarth* / Mid Wales Joint Committee for Health and Care**			
***Dyddiad y Cyfarfod*: Date of Meeting:**	1 September 2026		
***Teitl yr Adroddiad:* Title of Report:**	Rural Health and Care Wales Work Programme update report		
***Arweinydd:* Lead:**	Keith Jones, Programme Director for the Mid Wales Joint Committee and Director of Operational Planning & Performance for Hywel Dda University Health Board, and Anna Prytherch, Head of Rural Health and Care Wales		
***Pwrpas yr adroddiad:* Purpose of the Report:**	To receive an update report on the RHCW Work Programme 2026/27	***Ar gyfer cytundeb* For Agreement**	
		***Ar gyfer trafodaeth* For Discussion**	
		***Ar gyfer gwybodaeth* For Information**	✓

***Crynodeb* / Summary**

This report provides an update of progress made to date by Rural Health and Care Wales (RHCW) in achieving its Work Programme for 2025/26 and 2026/27.

***Argymhelliad* / Recommendation**

For information - The Mid Wales Joint Committee for Health and Care is asked to note for information the progress made in achieving the RHCW Work Programme for 2025/26 and 2026/27.

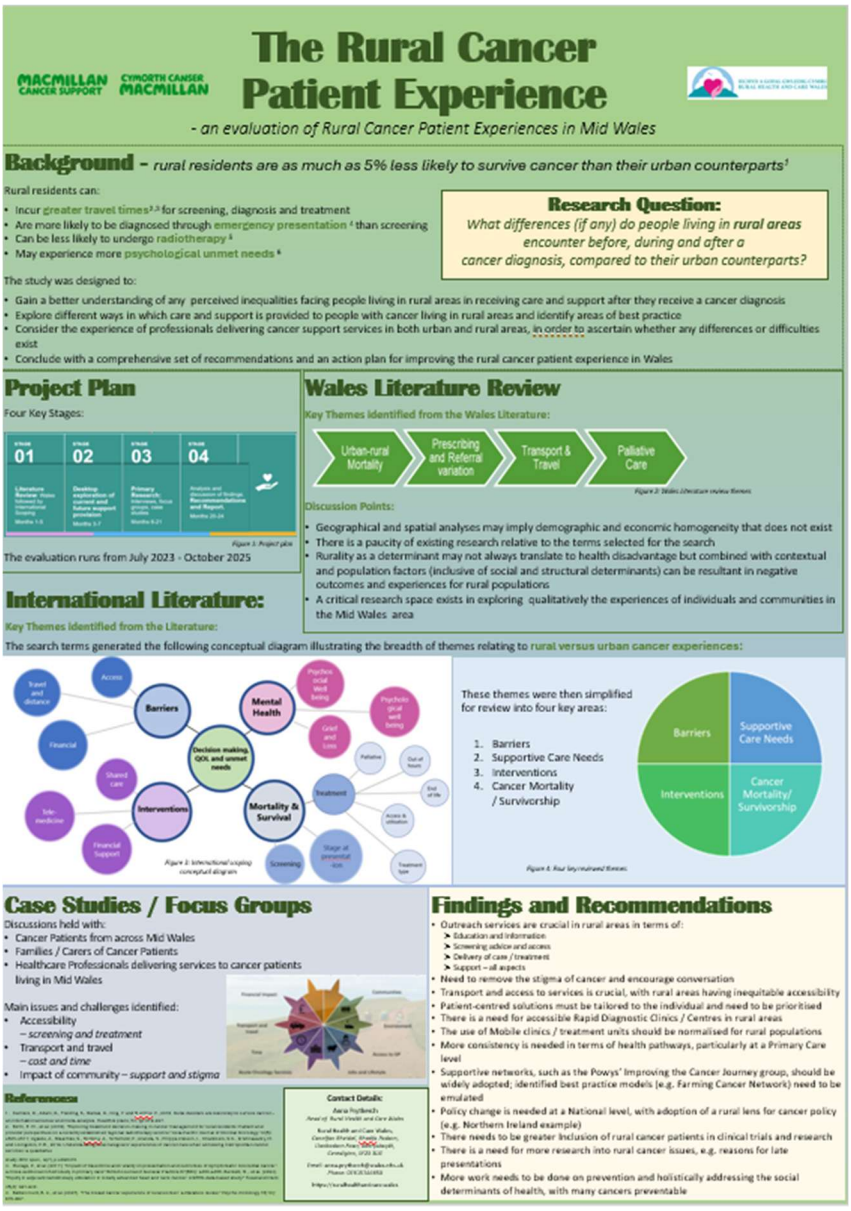
IECHYD A GOFAL GWLEDIG CYMRU
RURAL HEALTH AND CARE WALES

RHCW Progress Report
October 2025 - August 2026

Aim 1: Health, Wellbeing and Prevention

- *Improve the health and wellbeing of the Mid Wales population.*

- The findings and recommendations of the **Macmillan Rural Cancer Patient Experience** research were presented at the LIRCH (Lincoln Institute for Rural and Coastal Health) Hippinghold Conference held in Lincoln on 22nd April 2026,



where the official launch of the UK-wide PLACE (Place based Action for Cancer Equity) network was conducted. A PLACE networking event was held the day prior to the Conference on the 21st April (all costs for attendance funded through the network).

In addition, findings from the Rural Cancer Patient Experience research were presented in Poster format at the Macmillan Professionals Conference held in the International Convention Centre (ICC) in Birmingham on the 23rd & 24th April 2026. Attendance was again fully funded.

RCHW officially launched the **Macmillan Rural Cancer Patient Experience in Mid Wales at the Macmillan Rural Cancer Symposium** held in the Metropole Hotel in Llandrindod Wells on 16th June 2026. If you wish for a copy of the report, please email anna.prytherch@wales.nhs.uk.

RHCW had been commissioned by Macmillan to organize the Symposium, which was a great success, with 53 people attending the interactive day of workshops and presentations.

Recommendations from the Rural Cancer research were the focal point, with prioritization undertaken of what actions to take next. Further dialogue is being held with Macmillan and other potential funders to see what could possibly be funded to improve the rural cancer patient experience.

There was enthusiasm also for establishing a Rural Cancer network in Mid Wales and a questionnaire was sent out to attendees to gauge interest.

- A **review of the Pharmacy provision across Mid Wales** has been undertaken and a comprehensive report produced, along with an **infographic** of the Pharmacy service provision across Mid Wales. If you wish for a copy of the report or the infographic, please email mari.lewis2@wales.nhs.uk.

- Three **Alzheimer's Research UK (ARUK)-funded dementia research events** were held across Mid Wales, having taken place on 3rd February (Aberystwyth University), 10th March (Coleg Meirion Dwyfor, Dolgellau) and 7th April 2026 (Theatre Hafren, Newtown). In addition to presentations on the work of RHCW and the scoping review of Dementia Services across Ceredigion, Gwynedd and Powys (specific to each location), ARUK funded researchers shared their research findings on the following topics:

    - Plasmalogen Lipids and Synapse Function: Exploring Novel Therapeutic Avenues for Alzheimer's Disease - *Dr Roberto Angelini, Swansea University*
    - Using Fruit Flies (Drosophilia Meganogaster) to Understand Genetic Risk for Alzheimer's Disease - *Dr Owen Peters and Dr Gaymor Smith, Cardiff University*
    - From blood cells to brain cells: uncovering the earliest changes in the brain that happen during Alzheimer's Disease - *Dr Natalie Connor-Robson, Cardiff University*

  In total, over the 3 events held in Aberystwyth, Dolgellau and Newtown (funded by ARUK, organised and delivered by RHCW), 94 individuals registered to attend, with 70 actual attendees from a range of organisations (third sector, private and public sector, students etc). Feedback received was overwhelming positive and the events have encouraged follow on engagement through:

    - Presentation on Dragon 470 Radio in Dolgellau on the Gwynedd scoping and the ARUK funded networking events (15th April 2026)
    - Invitations to extend the dementia scoping work to include case studies from people living with dementia and their carers / families
    - Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor students planning a visit to the dementia fly labs at Cardiff University, with early discussions also taking place with Aberystwyth University Nursing students
    - Engagement and strong links built with ARUK funded researchers based at Cardiff University who want to work more closely with people living rurally in Mid Wales, not only for dementia clinical research trials but also NMD.

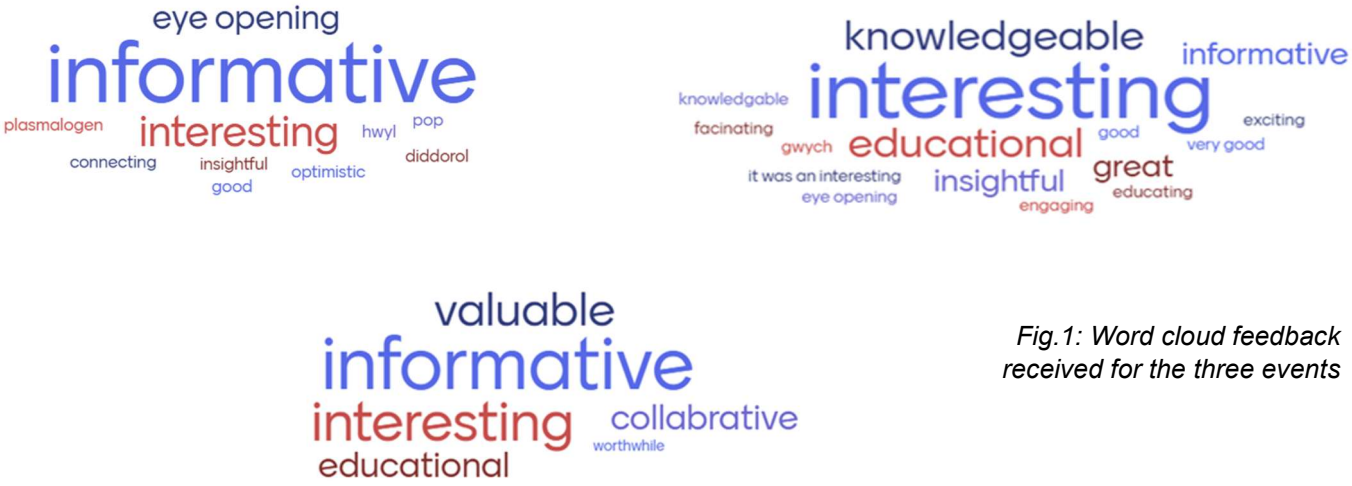


Fig.1: Word cloud feedback received for the three events

- The scoping work on **dementia services across Mid Wales** has been completed, with feedback obtained from a range of relevant organisations, including local authorities and service providers. The report is currently undergoing final editing and will be circulated to members in due course.

  A Poster depicting the work was presented at the Lincoln Institute for Rural and Coastal Health (LIRCH) Hippinghold Conference on 22nd April 2026 and the final report will be presented to the RHCW Stakeholder Group at its June meeting and thereafter to the Mid Wales Planning and Delivery Executive Group (MWDEG).

  Work has also been ongoing on developing case studies from across Mid Wales, with contributions now received from participants in Gwynedd and Powys. In addition to a questionnaire format enquiry, some of the case study engagement has been via adoption of a focus group approach to capture opinions and shared experience; a first draft of the case study report has been produced.

Aim 2: Care Closer to Home

- *create a sustainable health and social care system for the population of Mid Wales which has greater focus on care in the right place.*

- The **Sustainable Communities / Cymunedau Cynaliadwy** project (Regional Integrated Fund (RIF) funded) in Lampeter, Ceredigion was completed on 31st March 2026, followed by a three-month interim period whereby RHCW provided background support for the initiative to continue, with currently regular attendees taking on board the running of the social mornings.

A final report on the project has been produced; in total, 56 social mornings were held between February 2025 and March 2026, with support provided to 52 individuals in the Lampeter community (15 males, 28 females and 9 unidentified).

Additional RIF funding has been secured by RHCW for 2026/27 (£37k) to continue to emulate the model of support in other communities in Ceredigion, based on the LiCoSS toolkit that has been developed (below):

The toolkit is a model that can be used for rural communities seeking to instigate self-supportive activities for vulnerable residents and is based on the experiences and lessons learnt through this and previous community resilience projects RHCW has delivered and studied.

In taking the Sustainable Communities forward in 2026, 4 communities have been identified in Ceredigion (Tregaron, Talybont, Ffostrasol and Llanon), with consultation underway via engagement with community groups in each locale, with 2 communities to be selected for ongoing support.

- Analysis of the **GP / Primary Care provision across Mid Wales** survey has been completed, with a Poster of findings produced that was displayed at the Royal Welsh show (RHCW stand), with a presentation also made on findings at the Wales Institute of Social Economic Research and Data (WISERD) conference held in Cardiff on 8th and 9th July 2026.

The Challenge of Primary Care and GP Provision across rural Mid Wales

Anna Prytherch
Head of Rural Health and Care Wales

Aims and objectives of research

- To develop a clear picture of GP and Primary Care provision across Mid Wales and to outline recommendations for improvement *from a regional perspective*
- To include analysis of:
  - A review of Primary Care in Wales, including key strategic documents and guiding legislation / models of delivery
  - A survey of Mid Wales GP practices
  - Accessibility of GPs in Mid Wales, focussing on distance travelled (SAIL data team)
  - Accessibility of GPs in Mid Wales, based on distances travelled and public transport options, including time
  - Analysis of models of best practice in the delivery of GP / Primary Care services in rural areas (literature review)
  - Recommendations and development of a Plan of Action for GP and Primary Care in rural Mid Wales

Setting the Context

- In 2019, the United Nations estimated that 3.4 billion people across the worked lived in rural areas
- Rural residents generally have poorer health outcomes and higher mortality rates that urban dwellers (World Health Organisation, 2010)
- Regions with stronger primary care services have improved health outcomes, lower costs and reduced inequity in health (Starfield et al., 2005)
- Mid Wales is a sparsely populated, rural area, with an elderly demographic with increasingly complex health needs
- Rural areas, including Mid Wales, have more profound GP recruitment and retention difficulties
- Mid Wales, and generally most rural areas, face additional accessibility issues in terms of geography and accessibility of hospitals / healthcare sites, road infrastructure, transport issues and digital connectivity
- Focus is needed on improving healthcare accessibility and ensuring equitable quality of care for people living in rural Mid Wales

Primary Care in Wales

Defined by the Welsh NHS Confederation (2025) as "*the first point of contact for healthcare*" (92% of individuals' entry point)

Also referred to as an "anchor institution" (Welsh NHS Confederation, 2025)

Welsh Government strategy "*A Healthier Wales: our Plan for Health and Social Care*" (2018, updated 2024) calls for delivery of more community-based health and care services, that are integrated and co-productive

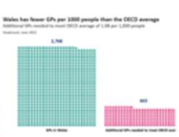
National *'Primary Care Model for Wales'* - a place based approach with emphasis on care closer to home, using collaborative multi-professional teams

Strategic Programme for Primary Care - co-ordinates the implementation of the Primary Care Model for Wales, with identified workstreams, e.g. prevention, digital technology and workforce development

General Practice (GP) in Wales

- In 2023-24, GPs in Wales received 29 million calls and attended 18 million appointments (Primary Care Information Portal, DHCW, 2024)
- In February 2025, there were 1.6 million GP appointments every month - equating to more than half of the population of Wales seeing a GP every month
- GP recruitment and retention a national crisis
- Vicious circle - overburdened GPs, unable to adequately serve populations, especially in light of ageing demographic with increasingly complex health needs - leading to early retirement / part-time working
- BMA campaign in 2024 "Save our Surgeries" calling for increased funding, investment in the workforce, a better workforce strategy and improved staff wellbeing
- July 2025, Senedd's Health and Social Care Committee launched major inquiry into the growing crisis facing GP practices in Wales
- Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) Cymru Wales described general practice in Wales as being "in crisis" (2025)
- Rural issues even more acute

General Practice (GP) in Wales



- Wales has fewer GPs per 1,000 people than the OECD average (1.08 per 1,000 ppl)
- Most GP practices in Wales are run by independent partnerships, contracted by their health board to provide services according to the General Medical Services (GMS) contract)

Primary Care Clusters

Region	Cluster	No. Population	% Wales	% Mid Wales	% Health Board
Wales		3,298,182			
Mid Wales		258,614	8.32%		
BCUHB		715,005	21.67%		
	Ynys Môn	69,949	2.12%	27.05%	9.78%
PTHB		147,369	4.36%		
	North Powys	88,156	2.21%	21.71%	48.63%
	Mid Powys	80,142	0.81%	14.45%	21.20%
HDdUHB		469,799	12.18%		
	North Ceredigion	45,940	1.39%	21.38%	11.44%
	South Ceredigion	47,519	1.44%	22.76%	11.86%

60 Primary Care Clusters in Wales

Mid Wales region includes the following clusters:

- Aberhonddu (parts excluded in research)
- North Ceredigion
- South Ceredigion
- North Powys
- Mid Powys

GP Clusters in Mid Wales, noting GP surgeries in each cluster (30 practices*)

Research Findings

Survey conducted of GP practices in Mid Wales (n = 27)

- Survey of all Mid Wales GP practices conducted in 2025 (n = 27)
- Electronic mailings x3 and personal visits, where paper copies were distributed
- Phone calls and follow ups
- 33% response rate (n = 9)
  - All "partnership" models
  - Nearly 90% offer GP training placements (n=8)
  - 90% noted issues with recruitment (n=8)
  - Funding and financial pressures also noted as major challenge
  - Diabetes, Depression and Mental Health biggest challenges for patients
  - All on NHS Wales App, with different levels of functionality

"We want to be funded properly for providing rural care and dispensing services to our patient population and for the work we do to be properly recognised despite the challenges."

"A real recognition of the importance of general practice and dispensing services. We have been denigrated over the years in the press and politicals to the point our team suffer abuse on a daily basis and patient expectation far outweighs our contractual responsibilities and what we are funded to provide."

"I think the profile of general practice, particularly rural general practice needs to be raised. Our practice is the only provider of healthcare in our whole 450 square miles. Our patients come to us as the first point of call for all their healthcare needs. this disproportionately affects our capacity levels as opposed to an urban practice or practice with closer healthcare facilities such as pharmacies, walk in centres, A&E, and urgent primary care centres."

Survey conducted of GP practices in Mid Wales (n = 27)

- 55% had vacancies, mainly for GPs
- Retention of Receptionists noted as particularly difficult
- Between 80 - 300 telephone contacts per day per practice
- Only 2 were dispensing Practices
- Varied supplementary services offered, mainly vaccinations
- Limiting factor - national GP survey at same time
- Time constraints cited for non-completion of survey

"Been trying to recruit a salaried GP for nearly 1 year - we have had several applicants but they are all from far away not willing to move to the area."

"Challenging recruiting experienced/qualified reception/dispenser team members and also leadership posts"

"Historically it has been challenging retaining reception/dispenser positions to the practice though this is easing. These roles have historically been filled by younger inexperienced people who then gain a good grounding in general practice before moving on to other things."

"GPs and Practice Managers need to be at the heart of decision making when it comes to health boards developing local services, these decisions should be clinically led, based on population need and service gaps."

GP accessibility in Mid Wales

- Do individuals use their nearest GP surgeries in rural areas?
- How far do people travel to attend their GP surgeries - are they accessible?
- How does this compare to distance travelled by patients to the GPs in more urban areas?

Data:

- Data from SAIL Databank, report produced by SAIL researchers (Rhodri Johnson, Rowena Bailey, Jane Lyons et al., 2025)
- Initial cohort of 21 GP practices from Mid Wales, filtered to 15
- 86,996 registered individuals in the 15 rural GP practices; urban comparison used 136 GP practices with 979,651 patients

Findings:

- 63% of rural patients registered at GP practices closest to their home, compared to 45% of urban patients (limited options / accessibility?)
- Mean distance travelled to "nearest" GP was 6.3km, compared to 2.3km urban

Percentage of individuals registered to nearest or more distant GP practices

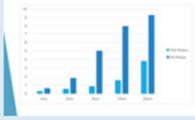
Analysis level	Description	Not registered to nearest GP	Registered to nearest GP
Study Group	Comparator Urban based GP surgeries	55.4% (543045)	44.6% (436607)
	Mid Wales GP surgeries	37.0% (32163)	63.0% (54833)
GP Location	Rural village and dispersed in a sparse setting	29.2% (6041)	70.7% (14579)
	Rural town and fringe in a sparse setting	19.2% (6809)	80.7% (28409)
	Urban city and town in a sparse setting	62.0% (19313)	38.0% (11845)

High demand with minimal staff to meet the needs, patients more demanding with higher expectations

Still managing to provide a high standard of care to our patients, and create an ethos of learning, sharing and development of our team despite the incredibly challenging landscape for rural, general, dispensing practice

GP accessibility in Mid Wales

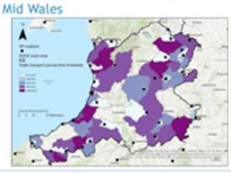
- Additional work undertaken with Dr Angela Curl, University of Otago, Christchurch, (Dept of Population Health) via a THINK (Transport and Health Integrated Network) secondment
- 34 GP practices (rural, Mid Wales) analysed
- Mean number of GPs within distance thresholds:



Key Findings

- 20% of the population in rural mid-Wales has a GP within 1km, compared to 40% of the population in all of Wales
- Almost all of the population has a GP within 20km
- There are limited options - on average people in rural mid-Wales have 3 GPs within 10km, compared to more than 5 across all of Wales
- There is very limited public transport

Public Transport access to GP practices in Mid Wales



GP accessibility in rural Mid Wales

Summary

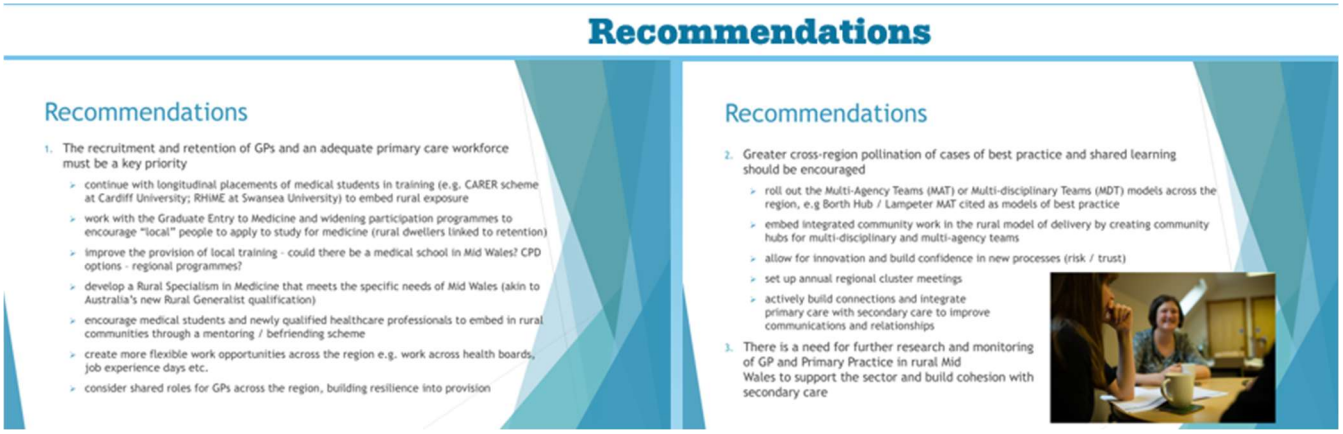
Compared to all of Wales, distances that need to be travelled to reach the nearest GP are longer for people living in rural mid-Wales. There is also limited choice of GP, as there are fewer available overall.

Long distances and poor public transport provision lead to reliance on private car to access healthcare. This is a challenge, in particular for an ageing population who may be increasingly unable to drive.

Long distances, reliance on car - poor public transport, issue with ageing population, may be unable to drive.

High levels of car dependence can have negative effects on individual, population and environmental health and should be considered in efforts to promote sustainability within the health system.

This report has not considered the availability of community transport services or tele-health, which are also important components of access to care, rather the focus here was on distances, assuming physical travel is necessary at some point.



- The work on assessing public and community transport in Ceredigion, funded by **IMPACT (Improving Adult Care Together**) has been completed. Just under 60 people attended the engagement events held in Borth, Aberystwyth, Tregaron and Llandysul, with over 100 participating in the public and community transport surveys. In addition to engagement with individuals, the work has included close liaison with Lloyds Coaches, Richard Bros, Transport for Wales, Ceredigion County Council, Community Transport Association, Hywel Dda University Health Board (HDdUHB), PACTO and Dolen Teifi. Please contact michelle.symes@wales.nhs.uk for a copy of the final report.

Aim 3: Rural Health and Care Workforce

- *create a flexible and sustainable rural health and care workforce for the delivery of high quality health services and care services.*

- RHCW is supporting a PhD study that is being funded by the **Women's Health Research Wales Centre** at Cardiff University ("*Reducing late presentations for health issues in rural communities of women through social and community network activation*"), with ML, Research and Development Officer for RHCW, awarded the scholarship to undertake the research, to commence in October 2026.

- RHCW again hosted a **GEM (Graduate Entry to Medicine) event** with Swansea University on 1st July 2026, promoting this postgraduate route to medicine to people living across Mid Wales, where traditionally very few applications are received. The intensive course is open to graduates', people of all ages and from all disciplines. Last year's event instigated 4 applications for places on the course from Mid Wales. This year's event was hybrid, with all those registered opting to attend online, therefore it became an online only event.

  In addition to promoting GEM, Swansea University's new route to study Medicine for school leavers (a pilot with Powys Teaching Health Board (PTHB) and HDdUHB), was also publicised.

Aim 4: Hospital Based Care and Treatment

- *create an effective, efficient, sustainable and accessible Hospital Based Care and Treatment service for the population of Mid Wales, with robust outreach services and clinical networks*

- Following the unsuccessful bid for a Digital Inclusion Wales Grant to develop the model of **Virtual Rural Healthcare** across Mid Wales, an Expression of Interest was submitted to "Contracts for Innovation Cymru" on 28th May 2026, following an initial exploratory meeting with Joy Browning, Innovation Partnership Manager, Contracts for Innovation, also attended by Sarah Bartlett. The Expression of Interest (EOI) was successful and an invitation was extended to present in "Dragon's Den" format on the proposal in Cardiff on 29th July 2026. Whilst positive feedback was received, the funding was not awarded.

  A presentation was also made to the **Mid Wales Clinical Advisory Group** on 22nd June 2026 on the proposed model of Virtual Rural Healthcare, with further engagement with the health boards encouraged.

Aim 5: Communications, Involvement and Engagement

- *ensure there is continuous and effective communication, involvement and engagement with the population of Mid Wales, staff and partners.*

- Plans are underway for the **RHCW Conference 2026**, which is being held on the 10th and 11th November 2026, with the venue secured (Montgomery Pavilion, Royal Welsh showground, Builth Wells, Powys, LD2 3SY) and Plenary speakers being invited. As in recent years, the Conference will be held in hybrid format, both online and in person.

  Mabon ap Gwynfor MS, Cabinet Minister for Health and Care, has agreed to officially open the Conference on 10th November and the Chief Executives of the three health boards delivering services across Mid Wales (Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB), PTHB and HDdUHB) will again participate in a Panel discussion on the first day of the Conference.

  The "Call for Papers and Posters" for the Conference was circulated in early July, with the closing date being 25th September 2026. The Conference title and themes are listed below:

Living Well in Rural Wales

– working to improve the health, care and wellbeing of our rural populations

- The delivery of Integrated Health and Care services in Rural areas, including cross-sector, multi-agency and / or multi-disciplinary working
- The role of Rural Communities and unpaid Carers in Health and Care
- Advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual technology and Telehealth / Telemedicine initiatives that support remote delivery of Health and Care services in Rural areas
- Social / Green Prescribing and the impact of Art, Crafts and other non-clinical interventions on Health and Wellbeing

- Recruitment and Retention of Health and Care professionals in Rural areas
- Education, Training and Continuous Professional Development for Health and Care professionals working in Rural areas
- Addressing the broader Social Determinants of Health and the Preventative Agenda in rural health, care and wellbeing

- Two webinars have been held during 2026, these being the **RHCW Winter and Summer Webinars** that were held on 27th January and 28th July 2026, posters below:

- RHCW had its usual stand at the **Royal Welsh Show** (July 20 – 24, 2026) at Builth Wells, Powys this year, with the Poster below noting the events that were held at the stand:

  The stand exhibited latest research findings undertaken by RHCW and also held its popular children's colouring competition that focused on keeping healthy.

AP attended a number of events at the Show, representing RHCW, as below:.

- Being a **Panel member** at the **Macmillan Cancer Support and Farming Community Network** event (20/07/26) – based on the research undertaken on the rural cancer patient experience
- Launch of the **Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI) FarmersAid App**, attended by Llyr Gruffydd MS, Cabinet Minister for Rural Resilience and Sustainability (21/07/26)
- Attended the **DPJ Foundation** 10th Anniversary Conversation (21/07/26) that considered farmers' mental health amongst other issues
- Invited by Llais to participate in a **roundtable discussion** (18ppl) with **Mabon ap Gwynfor MS, Cabinet Minister for Health and Care** on "*Beyond distance: the hidden barriers facing low-income rural communities in accessing health and social care*" (22/07/26)