# NHS Direct Wales, quarter ending 30 June 2018

NHS Direct Wales is a 24-hour telephone and internet health advice service staffed by experienced nurses, dental and health information advisors.

The operation of 111 Wales in pilot areas will have affected the number of calls to NHS Direct Wales – see notes.

Key results during the quarter ended 30 June 2018:

- 64,985 calls were made to the main NHS Direct 0845 number, of which 50,188 were answered; the other 8,762 calls (12%) were made to information lines or were transferred from A&E departments.

- More calls were made and answered at weekends, though a larger proportion of calls were answered during the week.

- 689 online enquiries were made to the web-based enquiry service.

- 1,087,488 visits were made to the NHS Direct Wales website.

- 52% of the 0845 calls where a final outcome was recorded were directed towards primary care, 20% to A&E, and an ambulance was called in 8% of calls. The remaining 20% were provided with information or self care advice.

Chart 1: Number of calls per 1,000 resident population by age and gender, quarter ended 30 June 2018
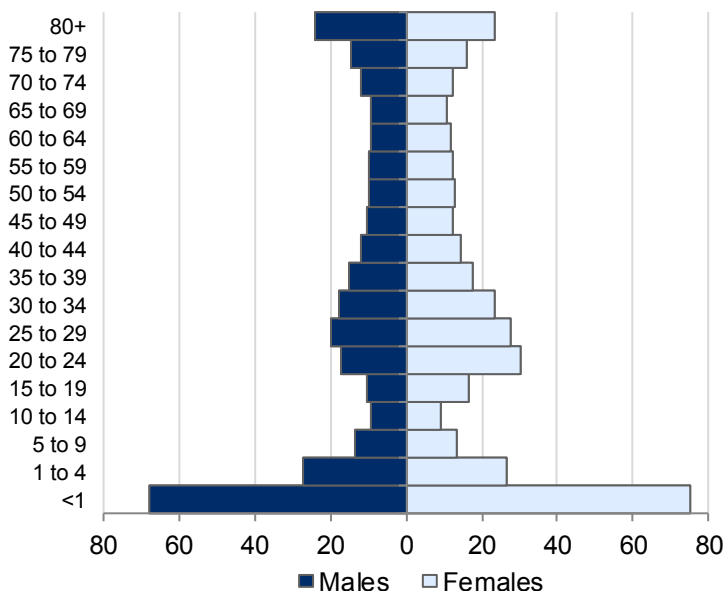
NOTES: This information relates only to those calls which were triaged and recorded on the assessment system.

Age and/or gender are not recorded for a small proportion of the calls.

Based on the 2017 mid year estimates of population (Office for National Statistics).

- The largest numbers of calls per 1,000 people in Wales related to patients under the age of 1. High rates were also seen for children aged 1 to 4, people in their twenties and early thirties and elderly people aged 80 or over.

- Rates for female patients were generally higher than for male patients.

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About this release

This release presents the latest quarterly data on the total number of calls made to, and answered by, NHS Direct Wales, alongside data for previous quarters. Charts presenting data on daily calls, web visits, use of online symptom checkers and patient characteristics are also shown.

Further information about NHS Direct Wales can be found in the 'Key quality information' section of this release.

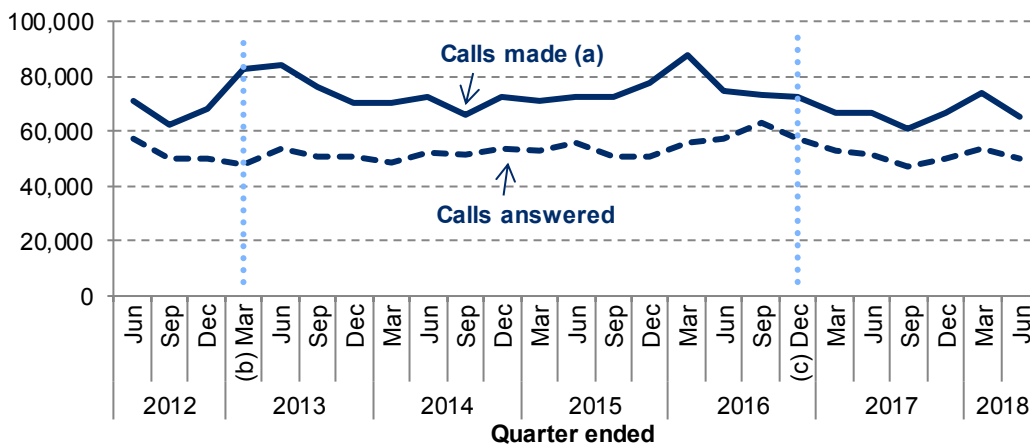Data from the start of the service is available in tables on StatsWales.

In this release

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## Chart 2: Calls to the NHS Direct Wales 0845 number, quarter ending 30 June 2012 to date

- 64,985 calls were made to the NHS Direct Wales 0845 number in the April to June quarter of 2018; of which, 50,188 were answered.

(a) The number of calls where the caller has listened to all of the welcome messaging and stayed on the line to be answered.
(b) Changes to the telephony system during the Jan-Mar 2013 quarter mean calls are not strictly comparable with previous data.
(c) The introduction of a pilot of 111 Wales during October 2016 will have affected the number of calls to NHS Direct from this time onwards.

The data underlying this chart, and other calls to NHS Direct, is available by month on StatsWales
NOTE: This data does not include around 10,000 calls which are transferred each quarter from the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust for clinical triage.

Chart 3: Daily calls to the NHS Direct Wales 0845 number, quarter ending 30 June 2018
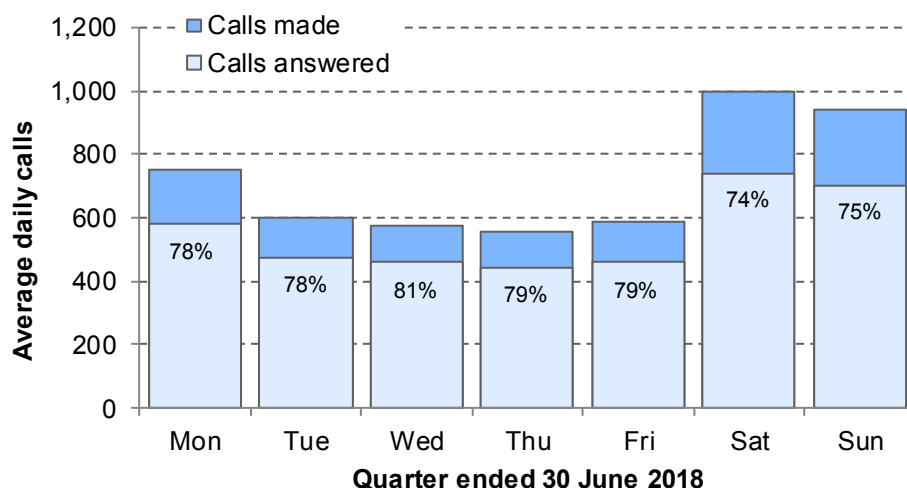
- Weekends were busier than weekdays during this quarter, and Saturdays were slightly busier than Sundays.

- Thursdays were the quietest day during the quarter.

- Proportionately more calls are answered during the middle of the week.

Chart 4: Online enquiries, quarter ending 30 June 2012 to date

Online enquiries submitted to the NHS Direct Wales website are confidential and a reply is sent back within a maximum of three working days. People may use the symptom checkers and self assessments developed by NHS Direct rather than submit an online enquiry.
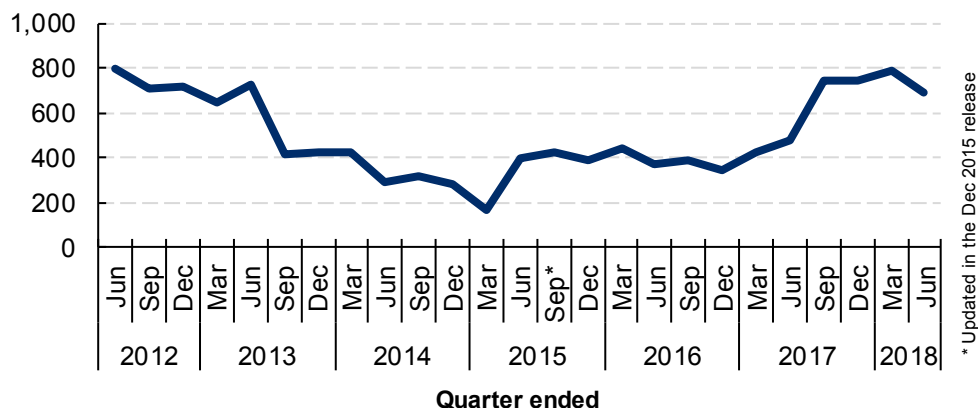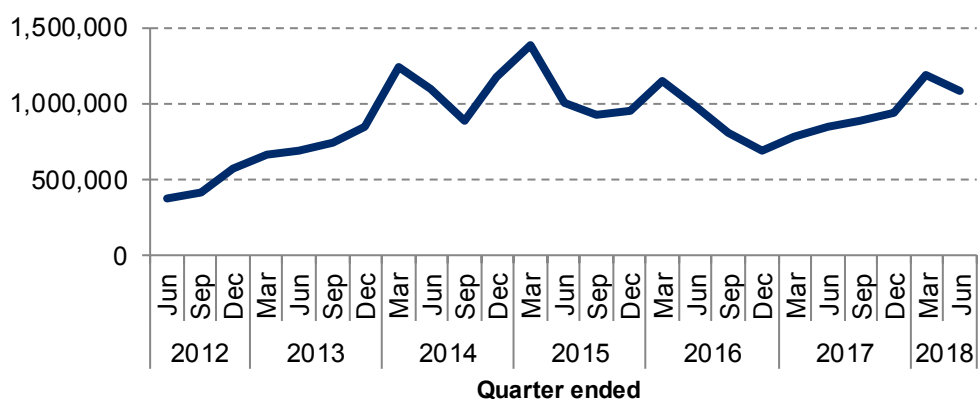

NOTE: The data underlying this chart is available on StatsWales.

- During the quarter ending 30 June 2018, 689 online enquiries were submitted, down 13% (from 793) over the quarter ending 31 March 2018, and 14% down on the number (803) in the quarter ending 30 June 2012.

Chart 5: Web hits, quarter ending 30 June 2012 to date

Web hits are a series of actions that begin when a visitor views their first page from the server, and ends when the visitor leaves the site or remains idle beyond the idle-time limit (currently 30 minutes).

NOTE: The data underlying this chart is available on StatsWales.

- There were 1,087,488 visits to the NHS Direct Wales website during the quarter ending 30 June 2018, 8% down on the quarter ending 31 March 2018, but almost three times as many as in the quarter ending 30 June 2012.

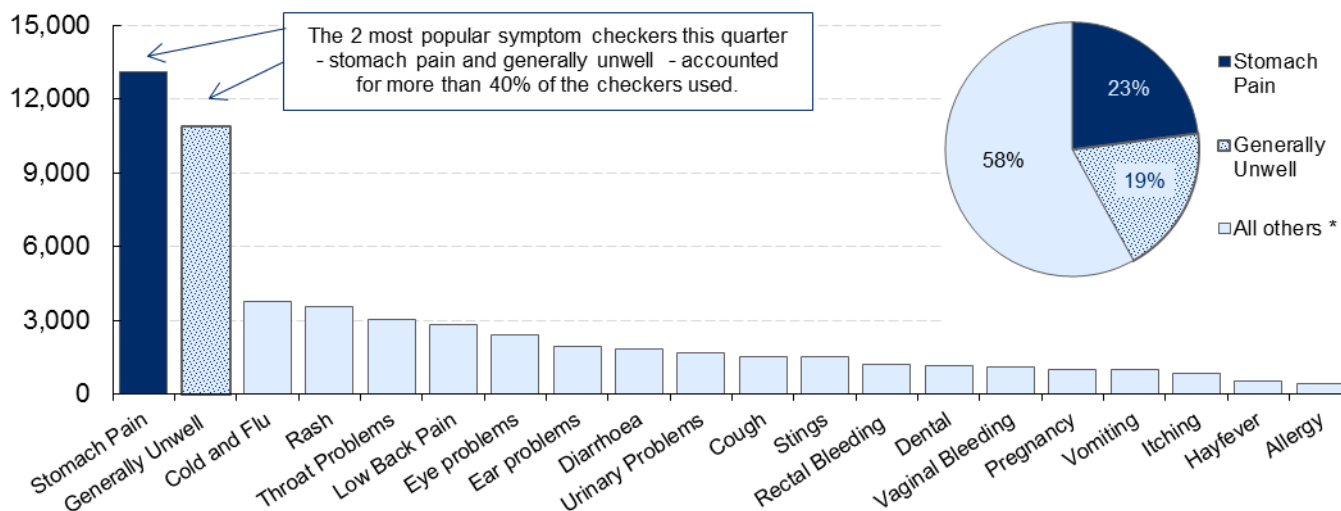## Chart 6: Daily web hits, quarter ending 30 June 2018
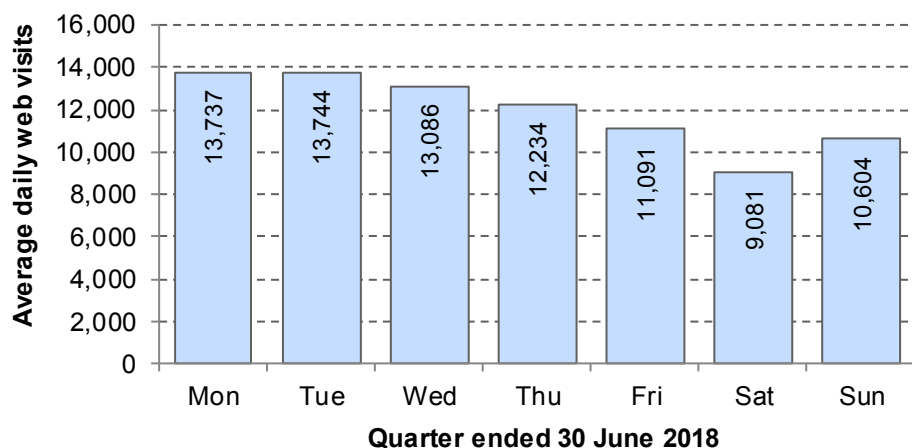
- Weekends were quieter than during the week, with Saturdays the quietest (averaging just over 9,000 hits) and Mondays and Tuesdays the busiest (with over 13,700 hits on both days).

Chart 7: Visits to the 'top 20' online symptoms checker, quarter ending 30 June 2018

Online symptoms checkers are an interactive source developed by NHS Direct Wales following requests by users.

The 2 most popular symptom checkers this quarter - stomach pain and generally unwell - accounted for more than 40% of the checkers used.

NOTE: completed symptom checks made i.e. where a person has gone through to the final step, ie the 'recommended outcome'.

- 'Stomach pain' took over from 'cold and flu' as the most common symptom checker during the quarter, accounting for more than a fifth (23%) of all the symptom checkers used, followed by 'generally unwell' (19%).

- The 'cold and flu' checker, which was the most widely used in the previous quarter (23,281), was only used 3,763 times in the latest quarter.

- Combined, 'stomach pain' and 'generally unwell' accounted for more than 4 out of 10 of the checkers used during the quarter.

Chart 8: Outcomes for calls to the NHS Direct 0845 number, quarter ending 30 June 2018
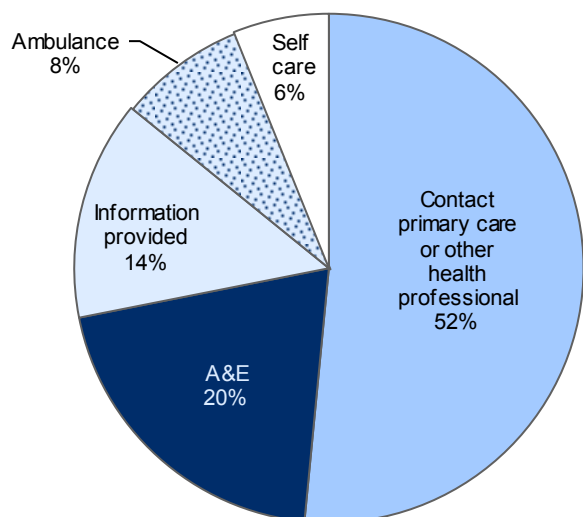
- 52% of the 0845 calls where a final outcome was recorded during the quarter ending 30 June 2018 were directed towards primary care (GP, dentist), other healthcare professionals or to minor injury units.

- 20% were directed towards A&E departments, and an ambulance was called in 8% of calls.

- Self care was advised for 6% of calls and information was provided for a further 14%.

NOTE: Only 0845 calls where a final outcome was recorded for the patient are included; calls where the patient chose not to proceed, for example, are omitted.

Key quality information

Source

The data is provided by the Health Informatics Department of the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust.

Description

NHS Direct Wales answers calls in English, Welsh and over 120 other languages via a language line. In addition to the main telephone helpline (0845 46 47), they handle triage calls transferred from A&E departments and the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust (WAST), and provide a dental information line.

NHS Direct Wales also provides ad hoc information lines to support public health campaigns. The number of calls will be affected by ad-hoc services provided at points in time. The table below gives details of services, other than the main 0845 health helpline. Some of these have not been operational in the period covered by the release. Calls to other services include all recorded messaging services.

This table provides information on the various ad-hoc public health information lines that have been run by NHS Direct Wales. These lines are set up to support national and local public health campaigns, and remain in use for as long as necessary. Callers to closed lines will receive a message directing them to an appropriate alternative service; for a limited period after the closure of a line there will still be calls recorded as 'made' although these calls will not be answered.

Details of Non-0845 services and operation dates

Service	Operation dates
GP out-of-hours	24 April 2001 to 3 July 2011
A&E (including Minor Injuries Units)	15 November 2001 to date
Dental information line	8 November 2003 to 20 January 2012, re-opened 20 April 2012 until 30 January 2013, and re-opened during the quarter ended 30 September 2016
Other:	
Health Information Wales	May 2001
Category C (Ambulance triage calls)	January 2004 – February 2005 Re-opened 2 September 2009
Health Challenge Wales	31 January 2005 – 30 June 2005
Cryptosporidium Helpline	24 November 2005 – 10 February 2006
HPV Helpline - automated message facility only	11 August 2008 to date
HPV Helpline	15 September 2008 to date
Public Health Wales - childhood height & weight campaign	5 January 2009 – December 2009
Smoking Line	1 April 2009 to date
H1N1 (Swine Flu)	30 April 2009 to date
Cold & Flu Line	26 February 2010 (seasonal). Dedicated line closed 20 January 2012. From December quarter 2012, cold and flu information available as an option from the main 0845 helpline number but still shown here separately for information
Air Alert	30 January 2013 to date
Patient Pathway	30 January 2013 to date
NHSDW Control (test calls)	April - June quarter 2013 only
Gwent out-of-hours (Aneurin Bevan) - caller can choose option to speak to NHS Direct Wales	24 March 2014 onwards

To improve patient experience and ensure that emergency 999 calls receive an appropriate level of assessment and response, WAST has implemented a system to pass a significant number of its non immediately life-threatening calls to NHS Direct Wales nurse advisors for clinical triage. The triage model was established as a pilot in South East operational region on 2nd September 2009, and phased into the

other two operational regions (North and Central & West) in October 2010. These calls are not included in any of the tables and charts in this release as they are no longer part of the NHS Direct Wales telephony system. An indication of the number of these calls is provided in footnotes.

NHS Direct Wales was not responsible for any GP out-of-hours services in Wales from 3 July 2011.

111 Wales

111 Wales is a new, free way to contact the NHS from landlines and mobiles. The service is an amalgamation of NHS Direct Wales and the GP out-of-hours service and is currently being piloted in the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board (ABMU) area, and Carmarthenshire. The 111 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and can be used both for health information and advice and to access urgent care.

The 111 Wales service went live in part of the ABMU Health Board area on 4 October 2016 and was extended to cover the whole of the ABMU area by 28 October 2016. The pilot was further extended on 2 May 2017 to include the Carmarthenshire area of Hywel Dda LHB. Since then, between 50,000 and 60,000 calls have been made to the service each quarter. These included calls for information and advice under the NHS Direct remit as well as those requiring GP OOHs. As such, the comparison with the previous NHS Direct call volume is not comparable within the ABMU or Hywel Dda areas, or with the Wales totals.

On 5 April 2018, the Cabinet Secretary for Health & Social Services announced that the 111 service will be rolled out to the rest of Wales over the next 2-3 years.

Definitions

To provide an accurate picture of calls activity at NHS Direct Wales, the data used represents the number of calls 'made' to NHS Direct Wales and the number of 'answered' calls.

Calls 'made' are those where the caller has listened to all of the welcome messaging and stayed on the line to be answered. '**Answered**' calls are those in which the caller speaks to an NHS Direct operative or receives information from an automated service. The difference between the number of 'calls made' and the number of calls 'answered' is abandoned calls.

NHS Direct Wales also provides information to the public via its website. The main features of the website include a bilingual health encyclopaedia, an online enquiry service and the facility to search for other NHS services, such as dentists.

Web visits are a series of actions that begin when a visitor views their first page from the server, and ends when the visitor leaves the site or remains idle beyond the idle-time limit (currently 30 minutes). Visitor numbers exclude all known spiders: a spider is a program that trawls the internet looking for web pages, and adding them to a database in order for search engines to be able to find the page.

A **web-based enquiry service** accessed via the NHS Direct Wales website enables visitors to send their health enquiries via email to the health information team at NHS Direct Wales. A response is sent back within a maximum of 3 working days. All online enquiries are confidential.

A 'Cold and Flu' symptoms checker was first introduced on the NHS Direct Wales website in September 2010. A symptoms checker 'family' was introduced at the end of November 2013 following which the Cold & Flu symptoms checker was refined & re-launched on 9 December 2013. Visits to the web pages are defined as 'completed symptoms checks made' i.e. where a person has gone through to the final step, ie known as the 'recommended outcome'.

Age and gender of patients: the analysis is based on calls which have been answered and assessed and where the patient is recorded as resident in Wales. These are a similar but not identical number as that derived from the telephony software which is the source of the 'calls answered' data. A small proportion of the records do not have age and/or sex recorded. It is not known if some of these calls related to patients resident in Wales. The data is presented as rates per 1,000 Welsh resident population using Office for National Statistics (ONS) mid year estimates of population.

Outcomes of calls: The analysis is of 0845 calls where a final outcome was recorded for the patient. Calls where the patient chose not to proceed, for example, are omitted.

Users and uses

The aim of these statistics is to present data which is available from a routine administrative source in an accessible format providing a summary of NHS Direct Wales call statistics over time. Some of the key potential users are:

- Ministers and the Members Research Service in the National Assembly for Wales

- other areas of the Welsh Government

- other government departments

- National Health Service and Public Health Wales

- students, academics and universities

- Royal College of Nursing and other professional organisations

- individual citizens and private companies.

The statistics are used in a variety of ways. Some examples of the uses include:

- advice to Ministers

- to inform debate in the National Assembly for Wales and beyond

- to monitor and evaluate performance and activity in the NHS.

Related statistics

Ambulance quality indicators

More detailed, contextual information about the Welsh Ambulance Service has been published quarterly (since January 2016) by the Emergency Ambulance Services Committee (EASC). EASC has developed a Quality and Delivery Framework for Emergency Ambulance Services and a five-step ambulance patient care pathway. A number of the Ambulance Quality Indicators (AQIs) which have been developed relate to NHS Direct Wales, specifically to web hits and the reasons why people get in touch with the service. These are now also available on StatsWales.

Other statistical releases relating to unscheduled care:

Ambulance services in Wales – an annual release is available, and data is included in the monthly summary release on NHS activity and performance.

Unscheduled care services in Wales, 2011/12

Flu statistics are published on the Public Health Wales website.

Welsh Health Survey

Well-being of Future Generations Act:

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act puts in place seven well-being goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators ("national indicators") that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the Well-being goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before the National Assembly. The 46 national indicators were laid in March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the well-being goals and associated technical information is available in the Well-being of Wales report.

Further information on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local well-being assessments and local well-being plans.

Further details

The document is available at: http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/nhs-direct-wales/?lang=en

Next update

31 October 2018

We want your feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics which can be provided by email to stats.healthinfo@gov.wales

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