

Welsh Government

Consultation Document

Content and Timing of Official Statistics on Health

Date of issue: **1 October 2012**

Action required: Responses by **31 December 2012**

Overview	This consultation will be examining the publication arrangements for official statistics on health to ensure they add value.
How to respond	<p>Please send your responses to stats.healthinfo@wales.gsi.gov.uk or send to</p> <p>Ruth Studley Knowledge and Analytical Services Welsh Government Cathays Park Cardiff CF10 3NQ</p>
Further information and related documents	Large print, Braille and alternative language versions of this document are available on request.
Contact details	<p>For further information:</p> <p>Ruth Studley Knowledge and Analytical Services Welsh Government Cathays Park Cardiff</p> <p>Email: stats.healthinfo@wales.gsi.gov.uk</p> <p>Telephone: 029 2082 5080</p>

Data protection

How the views and information you give us will be used

Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about. It may also be seen by other Welsh Government staff to help them plan future consultations.

The Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. This helps to show that the consultation was carried out properly. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then blank them out.

Names or addresses we blank out might still get published later, though we do not think this would happen very often. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 allow the public to ask to see information held by many public bodies, including the Welsh Government. This includes information which has not been published. However, the law also allows us to withhold information in some circumstances. If anyone asks to see information we have withheld, we will have to decide whether to release it or not. If someone has asked for their name and address not to be published, that is an important fact we would take into account. However, there might sometimes be important reasons why we would have to reveal someone's name and address, even though they have asked for them not to be published. We would get in touch with the person and ask their views before we finally decided to reveal the information.

Content And Timing Of Official Statistics On Health

Current Position

Welsh Government publishes a large number of official statistics on health¹. Many of these statistical series are published monthly or quarterly such as those on NHS Performance. These products are Statistical First Releases and Statistical Bulletins. They provide access to the data and also provide context on the specific topic. They are placed in the public domain some time after the reference period, ranging from several weeks to several months later. Concurrently, much of the data on which these statistical releases are based is also routinely used by Welsh Government and others to manage the health service in the form of management information.

Together for Health is the overarching policy for health in Wales covering a wide range of policies on different service areas. Of particular interest to this consultation is the reference to absolute transparency of performance and the drive for Government and the NHS to increase the availability of information. This has prompted us to re-examine the publication arrangements to ensure official statistics add value.

Pilot of new approach

During the last few months Welsh Government has taken a different approach to publishing 'NHS Time Spent in A&E Departments in Wales'².

A&E performance data is collated by NHS Wales Informatics Service (NWIS).

Under previous arrangements this data was extracted by Welsh Government both to produce the official statistics and to manage the health service. The management information was widely used within the Welsh Government and the NHS, but it was only following additional validation and quality assurance that the official statistical series was published some time later. As data quality has improved we are increasingly finding there is little difference between the management information and the official statistics. The delay between the period it is relating to and the production of official statistics meant that information being used for management purposes is far more timely than the official statistics available to all users.

Under our new approach the official statistical publication of NHS Time Spent in A&E Departments in Wales³ was last published on 30 August 2012. Since then the management information underpinning these statistics has been made available on the internet around two weeks after the end of the month, by the NHS Wales Informatics Service. This includes links to both the latest official statistics and the associated quality reports⁴ and the change was pre-announced in the monthly statistical release.

¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/health/?lang=en>

² <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2012/1208301/?lang=en>

³ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2012/1208301/?lang=en>

⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/accidentquality/?lang=en>

We have observed press coverage on this topic some 10-14 days earlier using this approach. We have not received any negative feedback on the approach to date.

Proposal for the future

Our intention is to now investigate how we can broaden the scope of this approach. Statistical series that could be considered for such an approach may include:

- Delayed Transfers of Care statistics⁵
- Ambulance performance statistics⁶
- NHS Staffing statistics⁷
- NHS Activity statistics⁸

It is important to note that there would not be a reduction in the frequency with which the data was made available, albeit in the form of management information rather than official statistics. It is also important to note that although the official statistics would be published less frequently they would still continue to present the data relating to the same time periods, i.e. an existing monthly statistical series would continue to present monthly data.

Instead the official statistical series would present an authoritative perspective on activity over the previous time period, and would include the monthly information. It would be prepared and published in full compliance with the principles of the code of Practice for Official Statistics.

The benefits of taking such an approach will be to free up capacity of statisticians within Welsh Government to allow a more considered and holistic analysis and reporting on a topic area. For example, the statistical product could include an analysis of revisions of the management information to test for systematic bias; it could include an improved assessment of longer term trends, better commentary, it could include results from seasonal adjustment of the data and generally add more value. It could also allow the opportunity of triangulation of the situation using a variety of coherent and comparative data sources.

To progress this approach we will need to work collaboratively with our partners on feasibility and appropriateness.

⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/health/nhsperformance/delayed-transfers/?lang=en>

⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/health/nhsperformance/ambulance/?lang=en>

⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/health/nhsworkforce/staff-employed/?lang=en>

⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/health/nhshospitalfacilities/?lang=en>

What do we want to know from users?

The purpose of this consultation is to allow users of Welsh health statistics the opportunity to comment on the general direction of travel and to provide some specific feedback on the content and timing of future statistical outputs.

We would like you to answer the following questions.

For users of 'NHS Time Spent in A&E Departments in Wales'

- Have the changes we have been piloting caused you any difficulties? If yes, what are these?
- What would you like to see contained within the official statistics output and why?
- How frequently would you need the official statistics to be published and why?

For all users

- Would you find the proposed approach useful and why?
- Would the proposed approach cause you any difficulties or concerns? If yes, what are these?
- What would you like to see contained within the official statistics outputs and why?
- How frequently would you need the official statistics to be published and why?

Your feedback is important to us. Thank you in advance for your input.

Please send your responses to stats.healthinfo@wales.gsi.gov.uk or send to

Ruth Studley
Knowledge and Analytical Services
Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ