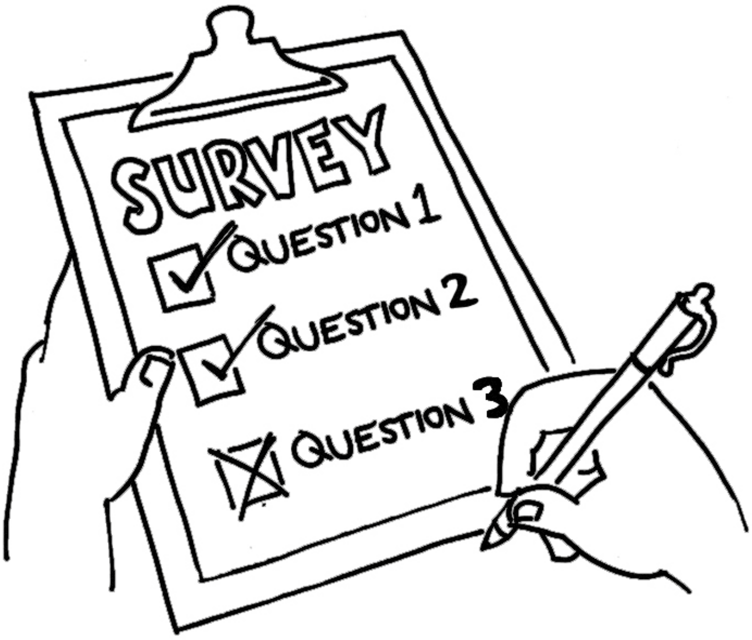
Easy Read

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

National Centre
for Social Research

Social model of disability: review of disability models and survey questions



This is an Easy Read document from the Welsh Government

July 2025

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Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg hefyd / This document is also available in Welsh
Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg / We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh

About this project

The Welsh Government want to change the way that we collect information about disabled people.

We normally ask people about being disabled using questions in surveys. These questions have been used for a long time and need to be updated.

This is because the Welsh Government has started using the social model of disability to help us meet the needs of disabled people.

Our old questions do not use the social model of disability. This means we need to make and test new survey questions that do.

National Centre
for Social Research

The Welsh Government are working with the National Centre for Social Research for this project.

About the social model of disability

The social model of disability is a way to think and talk about disabled people.

It was made by disabled people and shows the world how to include them.

The social model of disability says that a person is not disabled by their impairment or health condition.

Instead, they are disabled by barriers that makes it harder to do things.

Sometimes, we just call it the ‘**social model**’.

About this report

Before we started making any new questions, we wanted to find out what other people already know.

We did this by reading what experts have written before. Then we wrote down everything we found out for this report.

This is called a **literature review**.

We wanted to find out:

- what are the different ways of thinking about disability?

- what good and bad things have experts said about the different ways of thinking about disability?

- how do other countries collect data about disabled people?

- what things are important to have in the new questions and what should be left out?

This report is about what we did, and what we found out.

What we did

To answer our questions, we looked in 2 different places:

1. First, we looked at websites where experts save their reports to learn about the different ways of thinking about disability.

2. Then, we looked at websites that belong to other governments to see what questions are used in different countries.

There were too many reports for us to be able to read everything, so we decided we would only look at:

- reports that talked about models of disability and questionnaires

- reports that were 10 years old or younger

- reports written in English

- reports from the UK, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Europe.

This left us with 50 reports to read, which we call a **sample**.

A sample gives us a good idea of what people think and know, without us having to read every single report.

It saves us a lot of time and makes it easier for us to do our work.

But it does mean that we don't read everything, and we might miss something important.

It also makes it harder to tell when experts disagree or understand things in different ways.

What we found out about models of disability

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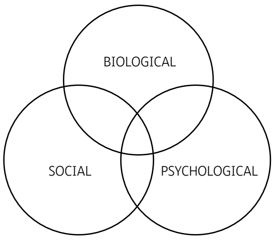
A **model** is how we think and talk about something. There are 3 main ways to think about disabled people:

- the medical model of disability

- the social model of disability



- the biopsychosocial model of disability.

The **medical model of disability** says that it is a person's impairment or health conditions that causes them to be disabled.

It has been used in a lot of surveys because it has clear answers and shows us what medical changes might help people.

But some people do not like it and feel that it says that disabled people need to be fixed.

It can also miss some people who do not call themselves disabled, like some people who use British Sign Language (BSL).

The **social model of disability** says that a person is not disabled by their impairment or health condition. Instead, they are disabled by barriers that makes it harder to do things.

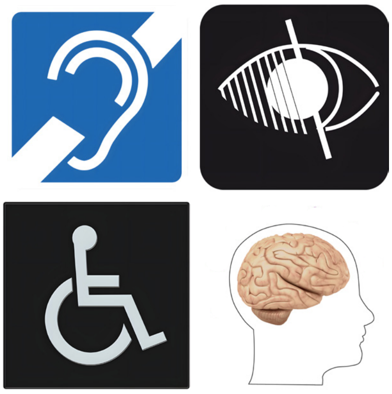
A lot of people like the social model because it says that barriers need to be fixed not disabled people themselves.

It focuses on finding out what these barriers are and understanding how we can take them away.

People have said that this helps everyone to be equal. It can put disabled people in charge of their own lives and help them to be included in the world.

But we need to make sure that we still think about how having an impairment can affect people's everyday lives, even if these barriers have been fixed.

The **biopsychosocial model of disability** tries to mix the medical model and the social model. It says that we should look at everything about a person and their life.



It has been used in some surveys to ask about people’s impairments, the world around them, their thoughts and feelings, and how they all mix together.

Some people say that it is good to use the biopsychosocial model because it could help us to understand all the different things that might make a person disabled.

Confused

But other people have said that it tries to do too much and becomes too confusing to use.

They have also said that it can make surveys too long and make it harder to find the most important information.

What we found out about surveys from the UK and other countries

To find out how other governments have collected information about disabled people, we looked at surveys used in different countries.

We found that most of these surveys used the medical model or the biopsychosocial model of disability.

A lot of the surveys did not have questions about the barriers that make it harder for disabled people to do things.

A lot of these surveys did not have questions about:

- being neurodivergent
- having a mental health condition
- having impairments that can get better or worse
- people with more than one impairment.

Lots of surveys asked questions that you could only answer “Yes” or “No” to. These did not work well for people who wanted to write their own answers.

Some of the surveys were long and some were short. This meant they could get different types of information about disabled people.

There were not many surveys that had questions just for children and young people. This meant parents had to answer questions for their children.

What we have learnt

The 3 models of disability that we looked at all think and talk about disabled people in different ways.

When the models are used for surveys, they all have good and bad parts.

Medical Model

Biopsychosocial Model

or

All of the surveys that we looked at either used the medical model or biopsychosocial model of disability.

Social Model

None of the surveys used the social model of disability. This meant that most of them did not have questions about barriers.

We can learn from what has and has not worked well in other surveys, to try and make our new questions even better.

What we will do

We can use what we have learned when we make our new questions by:

- making sure we use the social model properly when we think about disability and disabled people

- using the right words and making sure that everyone can be included

- asking about the barriers that make things harder for disabled people

- making it easier for people to answer questions in the way they want to.

More information

This is an easy read version of a Welsh Government report.

You can read the original version here: www.gov.wales/social-model-disability-review-disability-models-and-surveys

For more information about this project, you can:

- Look at our website: www.gov.wales/equality-race-and-disability-evidence-units

- Email us at: EqualityEvidenceUnit@gov.wales