

# Cost benefit analysis of annual health review for people with learning disabilities

## Cost benefit analysis of an annual health review for people with a learning disability as proposed for new subordinate legislation

### 1 Background

Concern around the general health of people with a learning disability has been apparent in a number of reports in recent years and is currently the subject of a campaign by Mencap. According to the report produced by Mencap for the *Treat me right* campaign<sup>1</sup> 'it is generally accepted that people with a learning disability have poorer health than the rest of the population'. The report states that people with a learning disability experience an increased risk of early death, an increased risk of certain medical conditions such as epilepsy, mental health problems, hearing problems, poor dental hygiene and dental care and being overweight or underweight. Health screening of adults with a learning disability reveals high levels of unmet physical and mental health needs.

One way of improving these issues is to introduce annual health checks for people with a learning disability. The final report of the Learning Disability Advisory Group in Wales<sup>2</sup> stated that 'each individual should have regular health checks carried out by their primary healthcare team'.

In Wales some work has been undertaken to address the health needs of people with learning disabilities. The *P.E.A.R.L Study*<sup>3</sup> aimed to 'explore the delivery of healthcare for patients with a learning disability through identifying and addressing their health needs', including administering health checks. North-East Wales NHS Trust introduced a 2-year health screening initiative in Wrexham for people with a learning disability<sup>4</sup>, promoted and co-ordinated by a Primary Care Liaison Nurse.

### 2. Issues around the costs of introducing annual health checks for people with a learning disability

The current proposal to introduce health checks would apply to those people on the Welsh Register of People with Learning Difficulties<sup>5</sup>. There were 12,930 people on the Register at 31 March 2003, and the number of people on the Register is expected to grow by between 788 and 2,100 by 2020<sup>6</sup>.

The cost of providing annual health checks for purpose of this cost benefit analysis has been estimated on the basis of information provided by the *P.E.A.R.L Study*. The Study used a *Cardiff Health Check for People with a Learning Disability*<sup>7</sup> designed to take

---

<sup>1</sup> Information on the campaign and the report are available at:

[http://www.mencap.org.uk/html/treat\\_me\\_right/index.htm](http://www.mencap.org.uk/html/treat_me_right/index.htm)

<sup>2</sup> The report, *Fulfilling the Promises* is at:

[http://www.wales.gov.uk/subisocialpolicy/content/learning/letter\\_e.htm](http://www.wales.gov.uk/subisocialpolicy/content/learning/letter_e.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Further information on the *Primary care, Evaluation Audit and Research in Learning disabilities. (PEARL) Study*, including research reports, is available from the Members' Research Service

<sup>4</sup> Further information on the health screening initiative is available from the Members' Research Service

<sup>5</sup> The Register of People with Learning Difficulties is available at:

<http://www.lgdu-wales.gov.uk/eng/Data.asp?cat=235>

<sup>6</sup> Figures provided by Mencap Cymru

<sup>7</sup> Copies available from the Members' Research Service

approximately 1 hour to administer. GP practices were paid £44 for each health check undertaken, although this figure is considered to be the minimum level of funding required as it was set several years ago. There are a number of other issues that are likely to have an unquantifiable effect on the costs of providing annual health checks:

- ◆ Although initial health checks for people with little recent contact with primary care services may require a relatively lengthy consultation, subsequent annual checks are likely to take less time, as would those for people already in regular contact with their GP.
- ◆ A small, unquantifiable administrative cost might be incurred as GP practices identify those patients for whom health checks will be need to be arranged.
- ◆ The Welsh experience suggests that some GP practices may elect not to provide health checks, thus reducing the number of people participating, and therefore the cost of the scheme.
- ◆ The experience of the Wrexham scheme suggests that a Primary Care Liaison Nurse with specialist learning disability training, employed by the NHS Trust to support and promote the scheme amongst GP practices, is an effective way of helping to ensure GP practices undertake health checks. This would introduce an extra cost into the scheme, although in Wrexham the Primary Care Liaison Nurse undertook health checks in some practices, thus partly offsetting these costs. The minimum cost of employing such a member of staff could be estimated at approximately £30,000 for each Trust per annum, based on the experience of the Wrexham scheme.
- ◆ The identification of unmet health needs in people with learning disabilities may place an additional burden on health services in the short-term. However, this may be offset in the longer term by reduced demand for health care from people benefiting from early diagnosis.

**Sources:** Mencap Cymru  
 Mencap England  
 Welsh Centre for Learning Disability  
 Welsh Assembly Government, Health and Social Care Department  
 North East Wales NHS Trust

**Costs – Members’ Research Service Draft Contribution to Conservative Cost Benefit Analysis for amendment to the National Health Service (General Medical Services Contracts) (Wales) Regulations 2004<sup>8</sup>.**

<p><b>Cost Category (Total costs except where stated)</b></p>	<p><b>Option 1 - Do nothing/do minimum.</b></p>	<p><b>Option 2 – amend regulation 2 (Interpretation) of and Schedule 2 (Additional Services) so as to include in the list of additional services which may be provided under a General Medical Services Contract an annual health review for persons with learning disabilities.</b></p>
---	---	--

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.wales-legislation.hms.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2004/20040478e.htm>

<p>Direct costs (Costs falling on the Assembly which are directly attributable to the option).</p>	<p>None – would have been incurred anyway.</p>	<p>Staff costs approx. <b>£15,500</b> (around 90 days), for consulting on draft legislation and preparing legislation for consideration by the Assembly.</p> <p>Translation, printing and publicity costs unquantified but limited, likely to be less than <b>£5,000</b>.</p>
<p>Indirect costs (Costs falling on the Assembly which cannot be directly attributed).</p>	<p>None – would have been incurred anyway.</p>	<p>Accommodation costs. In-house copying, telephones, lighting etc.</p>
<p>Opportunity costs</p>	<p>None – would have been incurred anyway.</p>	<p>Plenary costs – Assembly staff time (incl. Legal, Committee Services, Chamber Sec, ROP, Translation). Costs should be fairly minimal.</p> <p>Costs of time spent on conducting the health review means that medical practitioners conducting the reviews will not be able to undertake alternative tasks during that time.</p>

**Costs – Members’ Research Service Draft Contribution to Conservative Cost Benefit Analysis for amendment to the National Health Service (General Medical Services Contracts) (Wales) Regulations 2004.**

Cost Category (Total costs except where stated)	Option 1 - Do nothing/do minimum.	Option 2 – amend regulation 2 (Interpretation) of and Schedule 2 (Additional Services) so as to include in the list of additional services which may be provided under a General Medical Services Contract an annual health review for persons with learning disabilities.
Other costs (including costs falling on other bodies and unquantified costs)	None. Would have been incurred anyway.	<p>Assuming NHS Trusts use the amendment to the contract to ensure that GPs deliver annual health reviews for all eligible individuals: unquantifiable costs of conducting the health reviews will fall upon the NHS.</p> <p>Actual costs will depend upon the nature of the health reviews, and the number of eligible people in addition to those who may currently have an annual health review. As a rough estimate, if the 12,930 individuals on the Register of People with Learning Difficulties are given an annual health review at a typical cost of £44<sup>9</sup>, then total costs may be in the region of <b>£570,000 per annum</b>, although this is a minimum figure. Future costs may rise as the number of eligible people rises. However, costs for an individual’s subsequent annual reviews may be lower than for a first review. The cost of employing a primary care liaison nurse<sup>10</sup> in each of the 12 Welsh NHS trusts to co-ordinate and ensure local delivery can be estimated at approximately <b>£360,000 per annum</b>.</p> <p>Unquantifiable costs arising from extra demand for health services in the short-term, but offset in the longer-term by likely savings from early diagnosis and treatment</p>
Total costs (including unquantified costs)	None. Would have been incurred anyway.	<p>Approximately <b>£20,500</b> in direct costs for drafting legislation. Unquantifiable minimal direct costs thereafter.</p> <p>Unquantifiable minimal indirect costs.</p> <p>Unquantifiable opportunity costs.</p>

<sup>9</sup> Taken from the *Primary care, Evaluation Audit and Research in Learning disabilities. (PEARL) Study*

<sup>10</sup> Based on North-East Wales NHS Trust 2-year health screening initiative in Wrexham

		Unquantifiable other costs, roughly estimated to be in the region of <b>£930,000 per annum</b>
--	--	--