

Better health through behavioural science:

An enabling plan for Wales



Iechyd Cyhoeddus
Cymru
Public Health
Wales

Uned Gwyddor Ymddygiad
Behavioural Science Unit

Vision

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*Activity to deliver better health and reduce health inequity is optimised through the **systematic application of behavioural science** in its development, implementation and evaluation.”*

Introduction

Activity to improve or protect health and reduce health inequity is happening continuously, and almost always relies on individuals (population, practitioners, or policy makers) doing something differently. Health interventions, from legislation to service delivery, frequently require changes in **behaviours** (defined as observable, measurable actions). By systematically applying behavioural science principles, we can ‘get what we aim for, more often’, realising a **behavioural dividend** that optimises our impact on health outcomes and equity.

This enabling plan serves as route map for how behavioural science will support Public Health Wales’s (PHW) [Long-Term Strategy to 2035](#), so **more people live longer, healthier lives and all people have fair and equal access to the things that lead to good health and wellbeing.**



Alignment with Strategic Priorities

Each priority in the PHW Long-Term Strategy involves critical behavioural components that, when addressed through evidence-based behavioural science, can yield significant improvements in effectiveness and reach:



Behavioural science can add value across these Strategic Priorities through enabling the public health system to take action on prevention and early intervention, thereby helping people to stay well and manage their own health and wellbeing.

Behavioural science has wide applicability across all domains of public health, with the potential to optimise policy, services, communications and systems approaches. This broad application ranges from actions to underpin sustainable and climate protective behaviours, increasing the uptake of health protection and screening services, adoption and adherence of health promoting behaviours for physical and mental well-being, to supporting the sustainability of public health services. Behavioural science can also compliment 'systems working' approaches, health impact assessment, prioritisation, innovation and improvement methods and other approaches in public health practice.

Informed by Best Practice

The enabling plan draws on regional and international approaches to behavioural science application in public health, and integrates lessons from successful behavioural science applications across the public health system. It recognises our operating context; serving the needs of people in Wales through supporting the ways of working described in the Well-being of Future Generations Act, the Duty of Quality, and Public Health Wales Route Maps.

A Strategic Planning Advisory Group, comprised of public health system leaders, and behavioural science experts from across Wales and beyond, provided challenge and support to the development of the plan. The seven **enabling action areas** summarised below were co-produced, with reference to primary strategies, frameworks, guides and [a system-wide assessment of capability and readiness](#).



Shorter Term Actions

The table below summarises shorter-term actions across the seven enabling areas, intended to facilitate *progression* by cultivating conditions through which longer-term objectives can be realised:

Enabling Area	Actions
Building understanding and support for behavioural science	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Deliver training, events, and publications to increase BeSci awareness, knowledge, and confidence.Map stakeholders from the behavioural science, and wider public health communities across Wales.Share evidence and research on behavioural science innovations with key decision-makers.
Prevention Integrating behavioural science into public health systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Identify and support opportunities for integrating behavioural science into strategic and operational plans.Assess and improve systems and processes to embed behavioural science in policy and service design.Expand academic-practice collaboration through fellowships and placements.
Building system-wide behavioural science capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop a multi-level training programme to increase capability and motivation for BeSci according to need.Grow the Community of Practice for continued connection, peer learning, and expert support.Foster collaboration between academia and practitioners working across policy, services and communications.

Enabling Area	Actions
Collecting and using behavioural insights and data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map available data and insights on determinants of health-related behaviours, including existing mechanisms within PHW. Explore novel data sources and methods for better understanding of behavioural determinants.
Providing technical advice and rapid feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide behavioural science services, including consultation and intervention design. Test and implement direct communication interventions at scale. Provide system-level behavioural guidance, including behavioural systems mapping. Support evaluation of interventions including mechanisms of action.
Conducting and facilitating behavioural science research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify funding opportunities for behavioural science research. Demonstrate impact through participation in national/international behavioural science initiatives.
Ensuring continuous improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an Expert Reference Group to challenge and guide BeSci application and development. Engage stakeholders in reflection, learning, and understanding impact. Report bi-annual progress against the WHO action framework and progress model. Support use of a case study template for evaluation of interventions.

Implementation Approach

This plan adopts a pragmatic, incremental approach to building capability, opportunity, and motivation for systematic behavioural science application across the public health system in Wales. To achieve this, the Behavioural Science Unit @PHW will:

1

Start where readiness exists - Working with motivated early adopters.

2

Build from strengths - Leveraging existing examples of good practice.

3

Focus on practical application - Promoting tools and approaches that are immediately useful.

4

Learn by doing - Using action learning cycles to continuously improve.

5

Scale what works - Expanding successful approaches systematically.



Measuring Success

Progression towards the systematic and routine application of behavioural science for better health will be measured through process and outcome indicators:

Short-term (1-3 years):

- Increased awareness and understanding of behavioural science principles
- Adoption of behavioural tools in planning and evaluation processes
- Growth in behavioural science capability across the workforce

Medium-term (4-7 years):

- Routine consideration of behavioural factors in all public health work
- Evidence of behavioural science improving intervention effectiveness
- Demonstrations of cost-effectiveness through the behavioural dividend

Long-term (8-10 years):

- Systematic integration of behavioural science across the public health system
- Measurable improvements in population health behaviours
- Reduction in behavioural contributors to health inequities

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By routinely and systematically deploying behavioural science we can ‘get what we aim for, more often’ from our policy development and practice endeavours – we can realise a behavioural dividend and optimise our impact on health and/or equity.”

Conclusion

The demand for applying behavioural science across the public health system is clear and present. This plan outlines practical actions to meet this demand and build sustainable approaches to routinely using behavioural science in support of Public Health Wales’s Long-Term Strategy.

By systematically understanding and addressing the behavioural components of public health challenges, we can create more effective policies, services, and interventions that truly improve health and reduce inequities. The behavioural dividend is within reach—this plan shows how we will achieve it together.



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