



# GP Practices in Wales

## An easy read guide for older people

This document was written by the **Older People's Commissioner for Wales**. It is an easy read version of 'GP Practices in Wales: A Guide for Older People'.

July 2024

# How to use this document



This is an easy read document. You may still need support to read it. Ask someone you know to help you.



Words in **bold blue writing** may be hard to understand. You can check what the words in blue mean on **page 42**.



Where the document says **we**, this means **Older People's Commissioner for Wales (OPCW)**. For more information contact:

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**Email:** [ask@olderpeople.wales](mailto:ask@olderpeople.wales)

**Phone:** 03442 640 670



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# Contents

<b>About us .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>About your rights.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>What GP practices in Wales must do .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>About joining a GP practice .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Services GP practices offer.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Contacting the surgery .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Making an appointment .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>The practice team .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Your appointment.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Second opinion .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Carers .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Referrals .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Leaving hospital.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Ordering medication.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Getting test results.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Getting the information you need.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Having a say .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Contact details .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Some of the main staff jobs at GP surgeries.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Hard words .....</b>	<b>42</b>

# About us



We are the **Older People's Commissioner for Wales (OPCW)**.



We stand up for the rights of older people across Wales.



We work to make Wales a good place to grow old.



We want older people to be valued and treated well.

## What this guide is about



As we get older, we may have to visit the GP more often. It can help us to stay healthy and independent.



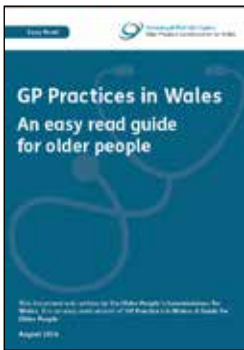
There have been lots of changes with how GP practices are run over the past few years.



We want to make sure people get the support they need.



**GP practices** are also called **GP surgeries**.



This guide will tell you:

- What you can expect from your GP
- Your rights
- What to do if you have difficulties



GPs must follow a law called **The Equality Act**. This law says people must be supported to use services if they have extra needs. For example, if they are disabled.



If you feel your GP is not treating you equally and fairly, you can get help from the **Equality Advisory and Support Service**. Their contact details are on **page 37**.



This guide is about GP practices in Wales, not England.

# About your rights

Your main rights are:



- To be registered with a GP practice.



- Have a new patient appointment within 6 months of registration.

- Use your practice in person, by telephone and online during opening hours.



- An appointment on the same day if a qualified person decides your need is urgent.

- Say if you would prefer to see a particular healthcare professional.



- Free prescriptions from a pharmacist in Wales (if you are registered with a GP in Wales).



- Access your practice's information and services in a way that suits you. For example, get information in Easy Read.



- Access your personal health information.

- Your information must be kept private.



- To have an information leaflet about the services your practice provides.



- To have information on how to get help and advice.

- To have Welsh language versions of any documents provided by the Health Board.



- Move your registration to another practice.



# What GP practices in Wales must do



- Provide services for people who have health conditions.



- Provide services at fair times.



- Offer GP services in person, on the phone and online.



- Make sure that patients can access services during their main hours in an emergency.



- Have their doors open and staff on site between 8.30am and 6.00pm.



- Tell you if there is a charge for a service.



- Think about people's experiences of using their services.



- Support your communication needs if you are living with sensory loss. For example, you are Deaf.

## Good practice



There are some things that GP surgeries should do, but they don't have to. They are called good practice. For example:

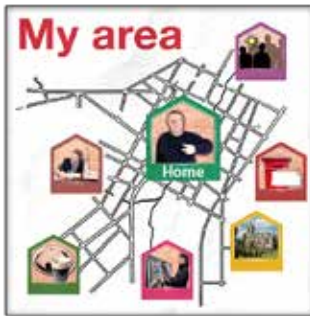


- Making a record of which language you prefer to use.



- Making a record if you are carer.

# About joining a GP practice



You have the right to be registered in a GP practice in the area you live.



If you need to know what surgeries are in your area, please call 111.

You will need to:



- give information about your health to your new surgery



- and agree to have your medical records transferred to them.



Let them know about anything else that is important. For example, if you have a learning disability or other needs.



You have the right to a new patient meeting at that surgery. This will be done within 6 months of registering. They will find out more about your health and needs.



If you move into a care home in another area, you may need a new GP practice.



If you need to change to a new surgery, contact them to register. You don't have to say why you want to change.



If the surgery says you can't join them, they should tell you why.



A GP surgery can remove you from their register if you move to another area.



They can also remove people who have been **verbally or physically abusive**. This means someone has treated someone very badly by what they have said, or their actions.



**Abuse** is when someone hurts you or treats you badly.

# Services GP practices offer



GP surgeries offer a range of services and not all the same.



But they should offer a wide range of services that support the people who go there.



They must have a leaflet about the services they offer. You can ask them for one if you want to find out more.

The main services they offer are things like:



- GP appointments. These are also called consultations.



- Managing certain conditions. For example, asthma.



- Vaccines. For example, for COVID.



- Some screenings. For example, a smear test that women have.



- Some minor surgeries.





They can give information about other issues you might need support with. For example, if you are being **abused**.



Some GP surgeries have services like counselling and other things too.

## Opening hours



Most surgeries are open from 8am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday. Some will be closed at times. For example, if there is staff training.

## Out of hours services



If you need a GP after surgery hours ring them. They should have a recorded message about who to call. Or you can call 111.

# Contacting the surgery



You can go into the surgery yourself.

You can call the surgery.



If you are not happy with the phone call you can contact the practice manager and tell them. Or go through a process called **Putting Things Right**. Details of this are on **page 33**.



Patients can also access some services online. These are for things that are not urgent.



There is also an **NHS App** for your phone. This can be used to manage prescriptions and sometimes appointments.

# Making an appointment



The surgery should give you an appointment if they think you need it.



If they decide it is urgent they should offer it on the same day.



If it is less urgent you should be able to arrange an appointment for the next few weeks.



Surgeries should no longer be releasing all appointments at 8am for that day.

## Types of appointments



There should be a range of appointments including face to face, phone and video.



Appointments last around 10 to 15 minutes. You can ask for a double appointment if there are difficult issues that may take longer.



If you have a severe illness, disability or other issue you may be able to ask for a home visit.



Give the surgery as much information as you can about this.

## The practice team



The GP surgery is run by a range of healthcare staff. For example, doctors, nurses, therapists. You will be seen by the right person for your health needs.



There is more info about the different roles on **pages 39 and 40**.



The surgery may have staff who work at a range of other surgeries too. For example, a speech and language therapist.



You can also get help from a pharmacist about some health conditions.



If you would prefer to see a certain GP or nurse let the surgery know. They should try and help with this but may not always be able to.



You can ask to see a female or male member of staff. But you may need to wait longer.



You can also ask for an extra member of staff to come to the appointment. Or a family member, friend or carer.

# Your appointment



Most GP surgeries send out text messages to remind people of their appointment.



You can tell them if you don't want this.



It is important to let the surgery know if you need to cancel your appointment. And to give as much notice as possible.



If you need help to get to the surgery, call them. There may be local services that can help.



It is useful to plan for your appointment. For example, think about what you want to say and give them enough details.



Sometimes you may need to give the same information again. This is still important.



If you don't understand what they are saying:

- ask them again



- or ask them to write things down.



It is ok to ask questions.



If you think you can't follow their advice, tell them. Maybe they can offer extra support from someone else.



## Second opinion



If you have doubts about what the health staff have said to you, you can ask for a second opinion.

## Carers



Tell the surgery if you are a carer. If you are under a lot of pressure, they will be able to give you advice and support about this.



You can also give someone permission to speak about your health care. You should put this in writing for your GP.

# Referrals



Some health issues need the support of other health care staff in the NHS. They will refer you to them when they need to.



You may have to wait for this appointment. You should get a letter from them.



If things get worse in the meantime, let your GP know. If you want to use private health care, talk to your GP surgery.

# Leaving hospital

**If you had to be in hospital:**



After you have stayed in hospital, you will then be back under the care of your GP.



If you are worried that you should have heard from your GP, give them a call.

# Ordering medication



In Wales you do not have to pay for prescriptions.



If you take medication regularly you will be given a **repeat prescription**. This means you get a prescription again and again without having to see the GP.



Sometimes this may need to be reviewed.



If you get a prescription from the hospital, you should get the medication from the hospital pharmacy.

# Getting test results



If you have tests at the GP surgery, you should be told when the results should come back.



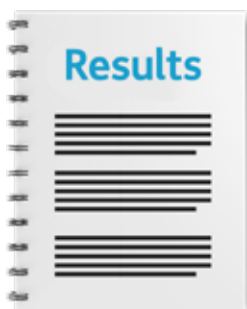
You may need to call the surgery for the results.



If the tests were part of a hospital visit, they will tell you the results. Not the GP.



Staff at the GP surgery can sometimes give results of tests. But they may not be qualified to talk about them.



You may need to make an appointment with your GP about the results.

# Getting the information you need



GPs must have a leaflet about their services and times.



They must also provide information in a way you can understand. For example, in Easy Read.



Tell your GP surgery about any needs you have including **sensory loss**. **Sensory loss** means issues with seeing and hearing.



They should give this information to the hospital too.

## Language



The surgery should also ask and record which language you would prefer to use.



You can ask for **interpretation services**. These are free services that can support with language needs.



All information should be in Welsh and English.



Different health board areas have different rules about the Welsh language. Please contact the **Welsh Language Commissioner** for more information. Details are on **page 37**.

## Online services



Not everyone can use a computer or smartphone well. You should still get the same information and service as people who do.

## Health records



You have the right to see your health records. Sometimes people are allowed to see the health records of someone who has died.



## Having a say



GP surgeries have a duty to listen to patients and any concerns they have.



But it is important that patients are polite and respectful to staff.



All surgeries have to carry out surveys to find out what patients think of their services.



They are also meant to find out what people think if they are making changes. For example, by having meetings about changes.



Some GP surgeries have a group of patients who meet up regularly to give their views. This may be called a **Patient Participation Group**.



**Llais** is the name of an organisation who support people to have a say about health and social care services. Their contact details are on **page 38**.

## Making a complaint



If you have concerns about your GP surgery, you should talk to them.



Talk to them as soon as possible. If you feel you can't talk to them, the local Health board have a team who deal with complaints. Contact details are on **pages 35 and 36**.



If something goes wrong with your care, they should say sorry. And say how they will improve.



There is also a way to make complaints to the NHS. This is through a process called **Putting Things Right**.



If you do want to complain, you should do so within 12 months of the issues happening.



You can ask someone to make a complaint on your behalf if you want to. **Llais** can also support you.

# Contact details

## Health information and advice

### **NHS 111**

**Phone:** 111

For urgent mental health support call 111 and press option 2.

**Website:** [111.wales.nhs.uk](https://111.wales.nhs.uk)

### **NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership**

**Phone:** 01443 848585

**Website:** [nwssp.nhs.wales](https://nwssp.nhs.wales)

## Health Boards

### **Aneurin Bevan University Health Board**

**Phone:** 01873 732732

**Website:** [abuhb.nhs.wales](https://abuhb.nhs.wales)

### **Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board**

**Phone:** 01248 384 384

**Website:** [bcuhb.nhs.wales](https://bcuhb.nhs.wales)

### **Cardiff & Vale University Health Board**

**Phone:** 029 2074 7747

**Website:** [cavuhb.nhs.wales](https://cavuhb.nhs.wales)

## **Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board**

**Phone:** 01443 744800

**Website:** [ctmuhb.nhs.wales](http://ctmuhb.nhs.wales)

## **Hywel Dda University Health Board**

**Phone:** 01267 235151

**Website:** [hduhb.nhs.wales](http://hduhb.nhs.wales)

## **Powys Teaching Health Board**

**Phone:** 01874 711661

**Website:** [pthb.nhs.wales](http://pthb.nhs.wales)

## **Swansea Bay University Health Board**

**Phone:** 01639 683344

**Website:** [sbuhb.nhs.wales](http://sbuhb.nhs.wales)

## **General advice and support**

### **Older People's Commissioner for Wales**

**Phone:** 03442 640 670

**Website:** [olderpeople.wales](http://olderpeople.wales)

### **Age Cymru**

**Phone:** 0300 303 4498

**Website:** [ageuk.org.uk/cymru](http://ageuk.org.uk/cymru)

### **Carers Wales**

**Phone:** 029 2081 1370

**Website:** [carersuk.org/wales](http://carersuk.org/wales)

## Concerns and complaints

### Llais

**Phone:** 02920 235 558

**Website:** [llaiswales.org](http://llaiswales.org)

In Your Area regional team contact details: [llaiswales.org/in-your-area](http://llaiswales.org/in-your-area)

### Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

This is an organisation who you can go to if you are not happy with how the NHS dealt with your complaint.

**Phone:** 0300 790 0203

**Website:** [ombudsman.wales](http://ombudsman.wales)

### Welsh Language Commissioner

**Phone:** 0345 6033 221

**Website:** [welshlanguagecommissioner.wales](http://welshlanguagecommissioner.wales)

### Equality Advisory and Support Service

**Phone:** 0808 800 0082

**Website:** [equalityadvisoryservice.com](http://equalityadvisoryservice.com)

# Organisations who check services run properly

## General Medical Council

Phone: 0161 923 6602

Website: [gmc-uk.org](http://gmc-uk.org)

## Nursing and Midwifery Council

Phone: 020 7637 7181

Website: [rcn.org.uk](http://rcn.org.uk)

## General Pharmaceutical Council

Phone: 020 3713 8000

Website: [pharmacyregulation.org](http://pharmacyregulation.org)

## Health and Care Professions Council

Phone: 0300 500 6184

Website: [hcpc-uk.org](http://hcpc-uk.org)

# Some of the main staff jobs at GP surgeries



**Receptionist** – They are normally the first person patients speak to when they phone or visit the surgery.



**GP** – This stands for General Practitioner. They are the doctor at the surgery.



**Practice Nurse** – These are the nurses that provide care and treatment at the surgery. There are other types of nurses too.



**Pharmacist** – Some GP surgeries have a pharmacist on site. They manage medication.





**Physiotherapist** – They support people with movement.



**Occupational Therapist** – They support people to be independent and look at what they need to support them. For example, extra equipment at home.



**Social prescribing** – This is a service some surgeries have. They support people to find community services that help improve health and wellbeing.

# Hard words

## Abuse

Abuse is when someone hurts you or treats you badly.