

WALES DEMANDS CHANGE:

Working with the Welsh
Government and the
Senedd to change the
future of breast cancer

WE'RE BREAST CANCER NOW

We're the UK's leading breast cancer charity. And we're combining the power of science and support to change breast cancer. Now.

We have a bold vision. That by 2050, everyone with breast cancer will live and live well.

To change the future of breast cancer in Wales, we have 2 priorities:

1

Quicker, earlier diagnosis to save and improve lives

2

Everyone getting the best care and support

We can't do it on our own. But together, working with the Welsh Government and the Senedd, we can make change happen.



BREAST CANCER IS STILL ONE OF THE BIGGEST HEALTH CHALLENGES IN WALES

In Wales, around

2,800 PEOPLE

are diagnosed each year

More people are being diagnosed with breast cancer than ever before. It's the most common cancer in women in Wales, making up 22% of all new cases.¹

Around 2,800 people (2,700 women and 20 men) are diagnosed each year in Wales. That's around 54 people every week.²

And there are around 61,000 people living with metastatic breast cancer in the UK.³ Metastatic (or secondary) breast cancer happens when breast cancer spreads to other parts of the body. It can be treated, but currently it can't be cured.

We've made progress. But too many people are still dying from breast cancer.

In Wales, breast cancer is still the second biggest cause of death from cancer in women.⁴ That's 570 people dying every year – almost all from metastatic breast cancer.⁵

And the challenge is only growing. The mortality and 5-year survival rate in the UK remains worse than in similar countries.⁶ By 2035, Public Health Wales predicts that the number of people diagnosed with breast cancer will rise to 3,449 a year.⁷

Unless we act now, the number of people diagnosed will continue to rise. And thousands will continue to lose their lives to the disease.

There are real health inequalities in breast cancer.

Some people are more likely to get the disease. Others wait longer to get a diagnosis. And others get worse treatment and care. Simply because of who they are or where they live.

Women living in the most deprived communities in Wales have poorer survival outcomes compared with women in the least deprived communities.⁸

Breast cancer can affect anyone. But it doesn't affect everyone equally. These health inequalities need to change.

1. Public Health Wales Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit (2025). Breast cancer incidence available [here](#). 2. Public Health Wales Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit (2025). Breast cancer incidence. Average figures for 2019-22. Available [here](#). 3. Based on findings from Palmieri, C., Owide, J., & Fryer, K. (2022). Estimated Prevalence of Metastatic Breast Cancer in England, 2016-2021. JAMA Network Open, 5(12), e2248069 doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.48069. This paper estimates 57,215 people living with secondary breast cancer in England in 2020/21. Combined with requested data from Public Health Scotland (2022) estimating 3,945 people living with secondary breast cancer at the end of 2020.

4. Public Health Wales Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit (2025). Available [here](#). 5. Average figures for 2021-2023, Public Health Wales Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit. Cancer mortality in Wales, 2002 – 2024. Available [here](#). 6. Walters S, Maringe C, Butler J, Rachet B, Barrett-Lee P and others, (2013), 'Breast cancer survival and stage at diagnosis in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the UK, 2000-2007: a population-based study'. British Journal of Cancer 108, 1195–208, doi: 10.1038/bjc.2013.6. Available [here](#). 7. Public Health Wales (2025) Cancer in Wales – trends and projections – Public Health Wales Available [here](#). 8. Public Health Wales Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit (2025). Breast cancer incidence in Wales Available [here](#). Public Health Wales Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit (2025). Cancer Survival in Wales, 2002-2021. 85% of women from the most deprived areas in Wales survive their cancer for 5 years vs 95% of women from the least deprived.

PEOPLE LIVING WITH METASTATIC BREAST CANCER HAVE DIFFERENT CHALLENGES

Metastatic breast cancer can be treated, but it can't be cured. Treatment aims to control the cancer, relieve symptoms and give people more time. But eventually the treatments stop working, time runs out.

We know that people with metastatic breast cancer experience delays in diagnosis. Struggle to access the support of a clinical nurse specialist. And worry about the availability of treatments in future.

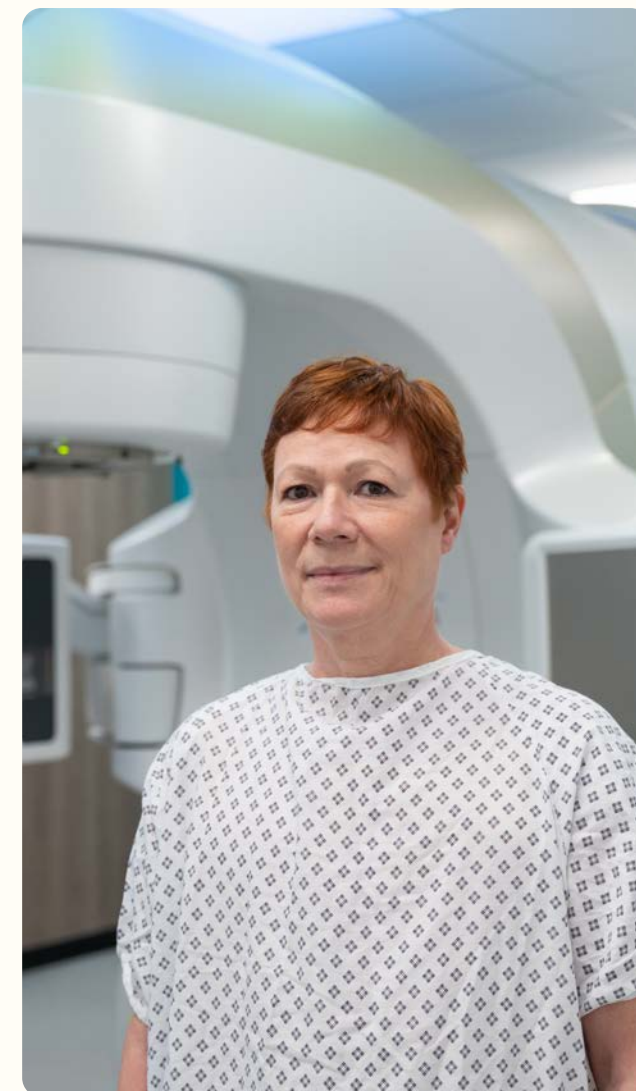
Right now, we don't even know how many people are living with metastatic breast cancer in Wales. Without proper data, we're operating in the dark.

That means the needs of people with metastatic breast cancer can't be properly planned for, they can't be sure they're getting the right support, and there's no guarantee that they'll be able to get the treatment and care they need. Often, they're left feeling like they don't count.



“My metastatic diagnosis was not particularly straight forward. All my metastasis up until the scan of my lung mets were found by me ‘feeling’ the lumps and going to my team to get them checked. I felt that it wasn’t fair for me to be responsible for finding the cancer myself. I wanted more monitoring. Having said this, I do believe my care in the NHS has been excellent. I have had good treatment and the staff I have interacted with have been supportive and mostly clear in their conversations with me. I do feel that I’ve been listened to, though sometimes they have not done all I have hoped for. I can see that the service is stretched and they do their best in the given circumstances.”

NAOMI



BREAST CANCER DOESN'T JUST AFFECT OUR LIVES – IT AFFECTS OUR ECONOMY

In 2025, the cost of breast cancer to the Welsh economy was estimated to be between £160 million and £173 million – according to the ‘Cost of breast cancer’ report we published with Demos.⁹

By 2050, this is predicted to rise to between £191 million and £206 million.⁹ Most of these costs come from productivity losses from illness and early death, instead of direct costs to the NHS of diagnosing, treating and supporting people with breast cancer.

And the total wellbeing costs associated with breast cancer in Wales are estimated at £984 million.⁹ This includes reduced quality of life from a person's illness and early death, and the impact on informal carers, partners and children. This shows the huge effect the disease has on people's lives.

As well as the human benefits, there's a clear financial incentive to prevent cases and deaths from breast cancer, and improve the quality of life for people living with or beyond it.

By prioritising and investing in prevention, early diagnosis and access to treatment and support, we could not only save and improve lives. We could also reduce costs to the NHS and boost both productivity and the Welsh economy.

By 2050, the predicted annual cost of breast cancer to the economy will rise to between

£191-£206M

⁹. Demos (2025). The cost of breast cancer to the UK: 2025 update. Available [here](#).

IMPROVING BREAST CANCER SURVIVAL ISN'T INEVITABLE

Breast cancer in Wales is not a done deal. Outcomes will not get better on their own. And without action, things could get worse.

We know what needs to happen to improve survival. But we're concerned there's complacency around breast cancer in Wales.

- The NHS breast screening minimum standard for uptake has been missed in Wales for the past 7 years.¹⁰
- People continue to experience lengthy waits for diagnosis and treatment.¹¹
- Metastatic breast cancer data collection is still incomplete.¹²
- There's an unacceptable postcode lottery in Wales for accessing treatments and services.



...BUT IT CAN BE DONE

¹⁰. Breast Test Wales (2026) Breast Test Wales annual statistical report 2023 to 2024. Available [here](#). ¹¹. Welsh Government (2026) NHS cancer waiting times: April 2005 to March 2026. Available [here](#). ¹². National Cancer Audit Collaborating Centre (2025) National Audit of Metastatic Breast Cancer State of the Nation Report 2025. Available [here](#).

OVER THE NEXT 4 YEARS, THE WELSH GOVERNMENT MUST TAKE ACTION. AND THIS IS HOW:

1. QUICKER, EARLIER DIAGNOSIS TO SAVE AND IMPROVE LIVES

If the 80% screening target was met in 2025, this would have generated an estimated

£8-£9M

in cost savings to the Welsh economy

We know that early diagnosis saves lives. So we need to make sure we diagnose breast cancer as early as possible, when it's easier to treat. When breast cancer is picked up at stage 1, almost 100% of people survive.

Screening is the route that's most likely to find breast cancer early and save lives. But when it comes to attendance, the 70% minimum standard, and the 80% target, in Wales is continually being missed.¹³

Along with saving lives, there's also economic benefits to increasing screening uptake. If breast screening met the 80% uptake target, the boost in early-stage diagnoses would deliver £8-9 million in cost savings to the Welsh economy.¹⁴

And there are inequalities in who is accessing breast screening, which must also be tackled. For example, in Wales there is an over 15% percentage point difference

in uptake for breast screening between the least deprived and most deprived communities.¹⁵ This means that opportunities to diagnose breast cancer and begin treatment early are being missed.

We know that between 5-10% of breast cancers are caused by an inherited gene alteration.¹⁶ So for women at an increased risk, access to earlier, more regular screening as well as risk-reducing treatments is vital to saving more lives.

And the quicker breast cancer is diagnosed, the sooner people can start treatment and get the care and support they need. This in turn improves people's quality of life and reduces the anxiety of waiting.

The current wait time standard from referral to treatment is 62 days. But large numbers of people are still waiting far longer than this, with variation across Wales' health boards.¹⁷



“The diagnosis came as a complete shock. Cancer was something that happened to someone else. What followed was a journey I wasn’t prepared for. Although I was diagnosed in November, my treatment didn’t begin until February – well beyond the Welsh Government target for cancer treatment timelines. That delay created enormous stress during what was already one of the most frightening times of my life. At times it felt like I was project managing my own cancer journey. I found myself chasing appointments, following up scan results and trying to piece together what was happening next.”

JULIE

13. Breast Test Wales (2026) Breast Test Wales annual statistical report 2023 to 2024. Available [here](#).

14. Demos (2025). The cost of breast cancer to the UK: 2025 update. Available [here](#).

15. 18.9% for Breast Test Wales. Public Health Wales (2022) Screening Division Inequities Report 2020-21. Available [here](#). 16. A beginner's guide to BRCA1 and BRCA2. The Royal Marsden. NHS Foundation Trust. Available [here](#). 17. Welsh Government (2026) NHS cancer waiting times: April 2005 to March 2026. Available [here](#).

SO WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

- Everyone in Wales at increased risk of breast cancer due to family history or genetics should be aware of their risk, and be able to access additional screening and risk-reducing treatments.
- People in Wales should be aware of the signs and symptoms of primary and metastatic breast cancer, to help them get diagnosed quickly and get access to the treatment and support they need.
- The breast screening programme should achieve the 80% target of women invited to a breast screening appointment taking up their invitation.
- Initiatives to improve breast screening uptake must be introduced. This includes a breast screening awareness campaign focusing on low-uptake areas and communities.

More convenient, flexible routes into breast screening services should also be provided – including multiple options to arrange appointments. This should be outlined in the next Screening Equity Strategy.

- Uptake data needs to be regularly published, including attendance rates specifically for minority ethnic communities and other underserved groups. This will improve accountability and transparency and help show whether interventions focused on addressing health inequalities are working.
- The programme needs to be modernised in ways that allow the actions above to be delivered, and to prepare for innovations currently being trialled that could improve screening further.
- The 75% target for the 62-day Suspected Cancer Pathway (Wales' cancer waiting times target) must be met consistently for breast cancer. Health boards must be supported to identify and address the underlying causes of delays. Long-term, there need to be new standards, and data needs to be collected and published, measuring key stages of the cancer pathway. This should include more ambitious standards for breast cancer to drive improvements.



“In November 2022, I attended a routine mammogram. I had no symptoms, felt completely healthy, and was running every day. I nearly didn’t go due to work being busy and me feeling so well. Yet that routine appointment saved my life. The mammogram revealed a tumour buried so deep in my breast that I couldn’t feel it myself. It was invasive cancer. To this day I sometimes reflect on what might have happened if I had decided to skip that appointment.”

JULIE



“In October 2018, following a routine screening appointment I was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was a bit of a shock finding out. Fortunately, the lump was fairly small, and the mammogram caught it early. It was right behind my nipple so I couldn’t feel it, and the doctor said he wouldn’t have been able to either, so the mammogram was an absolute lifesaver as far as I’m concerned. I had a lumpectomy in November 2018, and in February I commenced radiotherapy & finished my course 2 weeks before lockdown. If my breast cancer hadn’t been picked up at my routine screening it could have meant a mastectomy and chemotherapy as well.”

SHELIA

2. EVERYONE GETTING THE BEST CARE AND SUPPORT

Across Wales, there are inconsistencies in what treatment and care people with breast cancer can access. This includes limited breast reconstruction options. People also need support to decide what treatment or services are right for them.

There are exciting new developments on the horizon that could improve diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer. We need to make sure that new treatments reach people quickly, with everyone having equal access across the UK.

People living with incurable metastatic breast cancer also need access to the treatments, care and support that can help them live well for as long as possible.

Wales has made progress with an innovative national pathway for metastatic breast cancer. But we know that data for



metastatic breast cancer is still not being consistently collected and reported across Wales, despite Wales participating in the National Audit of Metastatic Breast Cancer (NAoMe).¹⁸

Accurate data is key to all elements of someone's diagnosis, treatment and care. Without data, it's almost impossible for services and support to be tailored to people's needs.

SO WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

- There should be no delays in getting drugs approved and rolled out for use on the Welsh NHS – so people can get access to new, personalised and effective treatments as soon as possible.
- Everyone with breast cancer should be able to access the different types of treatment and services available. This means reducing variation in treatments available across Wales and unnecessary delays to accessing them.
- The NHS in Wales must routinely capture data on all metastatic and primary breast cancer patients' experiences – including on their diagnosis, treatment and support – and use it to improve services and outcomes. This should include improving the quality of the data and providing it quarterly to the National Audit of Metastatic Breast Cancer (NAoMe).

JOIN US

We can save more lives from breast cancer. But it will take prioritisation. Investment. And renewed political ambition.

We stand ready to work with the Welsh Government and Members of the Senedd to deliver for people affected by breast cancer.

We're asking you to **act now** to change the future of breast cancer in Wales.

Find out how you can be involved by emailing us at publicaffairs@breastcancernow.org

Breast Cancer Now is a charity registered in England and Wales (1160558),
Scotland (SC045584) and the Isle of Man (1200).

