

Learning Disability Wales Manifesto 2026:

Background and further information

Wales is a nation built on the belief that everyone deserves to live with dignity and be included. Yet too many people with a learning disability and/or autistic people still face barriers.

According to Mencap Cymru, there are around 70,000 people with a learning disability living in Wales, with only 1 in 4 people known to social services. This means that many people are falling through the gaps, unable to access the support they may need, their voices remaining underheard, their independence limited, and opportunities restricted. Their perspectives are not only valid but vital and deserve to be acknowledged to help shape the Wales we live in.

With the learning disability sector in Wales in crisis and many services ceasing to exist, we urge the new Welsh Government to listen, understand and show support for people with a learning disability and their families/carers across Wales.

About us

Learning Disability Wales is a membership organisation representing the learning disability sector in Wales. We work with people with a learning disability and their families, Welsh Government, local authorities, disabled people's organisations and the third sector to make Wales the best country in the world for people with a learning disability to live, learn, love and work.

Our vision

We not only want Wales to be the best country in the world for people with a learning disability to live, learn, love and work, but a Wales where people with a learning disability are fully included and accepted in every part of society.

Our asks

To ensure that people with a learning disability are supported, we want the next Welsh Government to:

1. Promote the importance of accessible information

Accessible information is not just a 'nice-to-have' – it's a necessity.

It helps people with a learning disability to understand information presented in a clear, jargon-free way. The Welsh Government's ['Accessible Communication and Information Standards in Healthcare'](#) emphasises the legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 for all public bodies to make reasonable adjustments. This includes providing accessible formats for people with a learning disability and others with communication barriers.

Although accessible formats, including Easy Read, are being utilised by the Welsh Government, there are times when this information has been delayed. The Easy Read version of the Draft Disabled People's Rights Plan was delayed, despite calls from disabled people's organisations across Wales to publish at the same time as the full-length report.

Our ask: We want to ensure that all public facing information, especially in areas such as health, education, social care, and housing, is available in accessible formats such as Easy Read, plain language, BSL, bilingual Welsh/English versions, and more.

2. Support the Stolen Lives campaign

The Stolen Lives Campaign is a group of Welsh families advocating for the release of people with a learning disability and autistic people from long-term detention in specialist hospitals and mental health units. They have campaigned tirelessly to secure community-based support for loved ones who have been locked away, highlighting the trauma, isolation and long-term harm being caused and urging the Welsh Government to improve local services to stop institutionalisation.

Reports such as [From Hospitals to Homes: Learning Disability Inpatient Services](#) (2026), produced by the Stolen Lives Homes Not Hospitals Task and Finish Group, highlight ongoing human rights concerns around people with a learning disability and autistic people being inappropriately sectioned and hospitalised due to lack of care and support in the community. The report stresses that Wales is currently failing in its human rights obligations, with the current First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, describing it as a 'human rights scandal'.

Our ask: We want the Welsh Government to publish a clear, funded plan on how people with a learning disability and/or autistic people will be moved out of hospitals/mental health facilities and back into their local communities.

3. Close the disability employment gap

Disabled people in Wales face one of the highest disability employment gaps in the UK. In September 2024, the estimated disability employment gap was at 31% meaning disabled people were [31% less likely to be employed](#) than non-disabled people.

However, for people with a learning disability, that figure looks starker with just [4.8% in paid work](#) in the UK. These figures highlight the need for evidence based interventions, which the [Engage to Change project](#) demonstrated until its end in March 2025.

The Engage to Change project aimed to support young people aged 16-25 with a learning difficulty, learning disability and/or autism into meaningful employment. Between 2016 and 2023, we worked with young people, their families, employers, and supported employment providers and as a result, helped 1300 young people with a learning disability and/or autism into meaningful work, with 41% of young people securing a paid job.

Members from the project gave evidence to the Welsh Parliament Equality and Social Justice Committee and in March 2025, the committee released its '[Anything's Achievable with the Right Support: Tackling the Disability Employment Gap](#)' Report.

Engage to Change has proven that by removing some of the systemic barriers to employment that keep people with a learning disability from joining the workforce, employment is possible and anything is achievable.

Our ask: We want the Welsh Government to commit to creating a National Job Coaching Strategy to ensure people with a learning disability have access to supported employment and job coaching.

4. Reduce health inequalities

In Wales, people with a learning disability not only experience poorer health outcomes, but they also sadly die significantly younger, with a [median age of death around 67 compared to 87](#) for non-disabled people. Worryingly many of these deaths could have been prevented, which highlights the serious health inequalities facing people with a learning disability.

Annual Health Checks are a key intervention and a potentially preventative measure to help tackle this inequality. These checks are vital in highlighting any medical issues earlier on so that treatment can be provided and more serious issues developing.

However, from what we know and from [Improvement Cymru's analysis](#), uptake has varied between 30% and 60%. This could be due to lack of knowledge, promotion, staff understanding, or a clear process.

What we do know is that Annual Health Checks are associated with reduced deaths, especially among people with Down's syndrome and autistic people with a learning disability. This is why they are crucial and more needs to be done to ensure understanding and uptake improves.

Our ask:

For Welsh Government to commit to helping increase both uptake and quality of Annual Health Checks for people with a learning

disability by funding primary care, specialist training, and improve monitoring of both uptake and quality of assessments.

5. Support parents with a learning disability

Parents with a learning disability and their children experience significant discrimination and disadvantage. While there is established positive practice in supporting these parents, provision is still poor.

The good practice that does exist is threatened by the current financial climate, lack of consideration of parents' needs in policy and a lack of awareness by professionals of the specific support needs of parents with a learning disability. All these factors contribute to an unacceptably high percentage of families where one or more parents has a learning disability having their children removed by social services.

[Welsh Government guidance](#) reinforces the need for early intervention, effective communication, and accessible decision-making processes for parents. Many parents with a learning disability can successfully raise their families if the right support is provided. However, many social workers are either not aware of the guidance or are failing to implement it correctly thus denying parents the support they need and increasing the risk of having their children taken away.

Our ask: Improve support for parents with a learning disability to enable more families to stay together safely.

6. Reduce loneliness and social isolation

People with a learning disability are at a higher risk of loneliness and social isolation. This is due to several societal barriers including inaccessible activities, lack of support when socialising, communication challenges, and difficulties accessing education or employment. These barriers can therefore limit opportunities to form meaningful connections in communities.

According to Mencap Cymru's [State of the Nation Report 2025](#), 1 in 5 people with a learning disability do not feel part of their community, with one person sharing "I prefer company to go out as it's lonely without [it]".

Many people with a learning disability find it difficult to attend events and social activities, especially at night, due to a lack of support, issues with transport and fears over safety. This is why innovative projects like [Gig Buddies Cymru](#) are so important. Gig Buddies matches adults with a learning disability and/or autistic adults with a volunteer buddy who shares the same interests so they can enjoy social activities together. It also addresses serious issues such as loneliness and social isolation, whilst improving people's confidence, independence and wellbeing.

Our ask: To ensure people with a learning disability can develop and maintain friendships and relationships and socialise in the community without barriers.

7. Prioritise adequate funding for the learning disability sector

The Learning Disability sector in Wales is in crisis. This crisis threatens the wellbeing, rights and systems of support for thousands of people with a learning disability and their families. We have become increasingly concerned at the number of closures and operational scale backs within the third sector in Wales that support people with a learning disability.

Since May 2025 we have been reporting on regular closures of a variety of organisations whose purpose it is to support people with a learning disability. From activity-based charities, self-advocacy organisations to supported living providers there is a surge in much needed services closing.

Recent rises to National Insurance Contributions (NICs) and the Real Living Wage have led to registered charities and other third sector providers being forced to use their reserves to plug holes and subsidise contracts. Negotiations with local authorities and Welsh Government are ongoing but the realities of the Real Living

Wage and the National Insurance hike are leaving organisations with very few options. Other challenges faced by support living providers in Wales include fire regulation changes and difficulties with staff recruitment and retention, all of which are contributing to an extremely difficult situation.

Without urgent, coordinated action, the progress made since the introduction of the [All Wales Strategy in 1983](#) risks being undone. The Welsh Government must act decisively to protect rights, sustain services, and ensure that people with a learning disability can live full, supported lives in their communities.

Our ask: To ensure learning disability organisations are properly funded to support people to live their lives and thrive in their communities.

8. Support the All Wales People First Manifesto

All Wales People First is the national voice of self advocacy for people with a learning disability in Wales and is the only national organisation in the country led by people with a learning disability. In its 2026 Manifesto, the organisation is calling for strengthened self advocacy rights, housing reform, employment support, and an end to unnecessary hospital placements.

Alongside our manifesto asks, we support the work of All Wales People First and encourage your support for them and their manifesto.

Find out more

For more information or to have a conversation with us about this manifesto, visit our website www.ldw.org.uk or email policy@ldw.org.uk