

# Introduction

'Giving every child the best start in life is crucial to reducing health inequalities across the life course. The foundations for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual and emotional – are laid in early childhood.

What happens during these early years (starting in the womb) has lifelong effects on many aspects of health and well-being – from obesity, heart disease and mental health, to educational achievement and economic status. To have an impact on health inequalities we need to address the social gradient in children's access to positive early experiences. Later interventions, although important, are considerably less effective where good early foundations are lacking'.

*Fair society, healthy lives: Marmot review<sup>1</sup> (p.22)*



## Background

The importance of promoting and protecting the health and well-being of children and young people cannot be underestimated.<sup>2</sup> Giving every child the best start in life is the highest priority recommendation from *The Marmot Review*<sup>1</sup> and giving every child a healthy start is one of the seven principles identified by the Welsh Government in the strategic action plan to reduce health inequities.<sup>3</sup> *Building a brighter future* describes the early years as 'the foundation on which society depends for its future prosperity and progress'<sup>4 (p.6)</sup> and sets out the commitment of Welsh Government to improve the life chances and outcomes of all children in Wales. From May 2014 the Welsh Ministers must, when exercising any of their functions, have due regard to the requirements of Part I of *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.<sup>5,6</sup> These rights have been adopted as seven core aims within Wales, including that children and young people enjoy the best possible health, are listened to, treated with respect, have a safe home and a community which supports physical and emotional wellbeing, and are not disadvantaged by poverty.<sup>7</sup>

**'In all actions concerning children... the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration'.**

*The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3.1*

A wealth of information on children and young people is provided by the Welsh Government in their triennial publication *Children and young people's wellbeing monitor for Wales*.<sup>8</sup> The monitor contains analysis of a range of factors at the all-Wales level. This profile aims to complement the Welsh Government's publication primarily by providing more detailed analysis at the sub-Wales level. It has been produced to describe and highlight public health issues for children and young people to both encourage and inform action.

For the purpose of this publication children and young people are defined as those aged 0-24 years. Where possible, data is presented for this age group; however, for some indicators more appropriate age ranges may be used for example statutory school age. This profile covers important child health topics for which data is available. The most recent data as at June 2013 is included.

Comparative data has been included for other European countries and/or the United Kingdom where possible. In some instances England-only comparisons are used; this is due to differences in data collection, definitions or availability in other countries. Although some trend data is included within this document, more extensive trend information is provided in the accompanying 22 local authority profiles.

Summary information on evidence based interventions is included. Efforts have focused around identifying evidence based interventions to meet the priority outcomes set out in *Our healthy future*, the Welsh Government strategic framework for public health.<sup>9</sup> The evidence included relates primarily to multi-agency action to improve the health and well-being of children and young people. The sources used to determine interventions are limited to National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance and systematic reviews from the Cochrane and Campbell Collaborations where these are more recent than, or differ in scope to, NICE guidance. Evidence available as of March 2013 is included. More detail on each intervention can be found in the link provided.

This report is one of a series of products that comprise the *Health of children and young people*. The other products are:

- 22 local authority profiles containing summary information on key indicators
- A series of PowerPoint files for those wishing to present the charts and maps from this report
- Data files containing the charts and tables
- A technical guide explaining the data sources and methods used

These can all be accessed on the Public Health Wales Observatory website at:  
[www.publichealthwalesobservatory.wales.nhs.uk/childprofile](http://www.publichealthwalesobservatory.wales.nhs.uk/childprofile)

## How to use this document

A guide entitled *Health of children and young people: technical guide* has been produced to describe the methods, indicators, data sources and terms used in this report. The guide also provides definitions, notes for interpretation and details of where to find further information.

### Interpreting charts and maps

To aid interpretation, the charts and maps have been coloured consistently throughout the document for persons, males and females. The charts have been ordered geographically i.e. larger geographies first (for example countries, health boards, local authorities) and each geographical group is ordered from the north west to south east. When interpreting a chart or map it is important to consider why a rate may be high or low, for example it could be due to high/low prevalence or it could be (in part) due to differences in data completeness. Further information to aid interpretation of specific charts and maps is included in the supporting technical guide (see link above).

### Confidence intervals

Many of the charts in this document contain confidence intervals. Confidence intervals (CIs) are indications of the natural variation that would be expected around a rate and they should be considered when assessing or interpreting a rate. The size of the confidence interval is largely dependent on the size of the population from which the events came. Generally speaking, rates based on small populations are likely to have wider CIs. Conversely, rates based on large populations are likely to have narrower CIs. In this document 95% CIs are used. This represents a range of values that we can be 95% confident contains the 'true' underlying rate.

### Statistical significance

A result may be deemed statistically significant if it is considered unlikely to have occurred by chance alone. The basis for such judgements is a predetermined and arbitrary cut-off, usually taken as 5% or 0.05. In some circumstances this cut-off may be lowered to 1%, for example where there is a greater need for certainty over the safety of a drug or procedure. In this document, a rate is described as statistically significant if its 95% CI does not cross the Wales rate. Statistical significance is not the same as public health significance. A result may have public health significance whilst not being statistically significant and vice versa.

## References

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3. Welsh Government. Fairer health outcomes for all. Reducing inequities in health strategic action plan. Cardiff: Welsh Government; 2011. Available at: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/publications/health/reports/fairer/?lang=en>
4. Welsh Government. *Building a brighter future: early years and childcare plan*. Cardiff: Welsh Government; 2013. Available at: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/building-a-brighter-future/?lang=en>
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6. United Nations Children's Fund. *The United Nations convention on the rights of the child*. London: UNICEF; 2004. Available at: [http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC\\_PRESS200910web.pdf](http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC_PRESS200910web.pdf)
7. Welsh Government. *Seven core aims for children and young people*. [Online]. 2009. Available at: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenyoungpeople/rights/sevencoreaims/?lang=en>
8. Welsh Government. *2011 Children and young people's wellbeing monitor for Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Government; 2011. Available at: <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/caecd/research/110328cypmonitoren.pdf>
9. Welsh Government. *Our healthy future - technical working paper*. Cardiff: WAG; 2009. Available at: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/publications/health/guidance/technical/?lang=en>