



Homecare Association Manifesto for Senedd elections Wales 2026

Homecare plays a vital role in enabling us all to live well at home and flourish in our communities. Investing in homecare helps to enhance wellbeing; increase healthy life expectancy; reduce pressure on the NHS; and save money for the health and care system.

Current projections suggest that in 40 years' time, more than a quarter of the population in Wales will be of pension age despite increases in State Pension age. The health and care system is not coping now. In Wales, the gap between policy ambition and frontline delivery has become increasingly clear. Commitments on fair pay and better care have too often failed to translate into sustainable fee rates for providers, leaving homecare services under pressure from rising costs, inconsistent commissioning, and growing demand. To meet this challenge, we must transform how we fund, provide, and ensure access to care. Early support and preventative approaches in the community will help to shift the dial on demand. We must harness the power of innovation while cherishing the irreplaceable human elements of hands-on care.

Homecare is essential infrastructure. Supporting people at home must be at the heart of government policy. For Wales, this means moving beyond aspiration to implementation: aligning national policy, local commissioning, workforce expectations, and funding so that homecare providers can deliver high-quality, sustainable support in every part of the country.

Our manifesto for homecare highlights seven areas of focus.

1. Home at the Heart

- Increase public awareness of the value of homecare and ensure "home first" is the default option
- Create enabling home environments with adaptations and technology solutions to support independent living
- Make homecare accessible and affordable for all

2. Power in Partnership

- Foster collaboration across social care, health, housing and voluntary sectors
- Give homecare providers a voice in regional discussions and in the National Office
- Amplify the voices of those who need and give care so they can contribute to policy and service development

4. Care as a Career

- Develop workforce strategy to meet rising demand
- Fund the Real Living Wage and workforce costs to avoid unintended consequences
- Ensure this funding reaches providers
- Improve pay and terms and conditions in the sector
- Parity of esteem with health colleagues

6. Commission for Value

- Enforce National Commissioning Framework
- Address fragmentation
- Commission for long-term value and outcomes, not short-term price. Stop purchasing homecare zero hours, by the minute at low fee rates
- Legislate for a National Contract for Care Services to ensure public sector commissioners cover the true cost of quality sustainable care services, with fair pay and T&Cs for care experts

3. Innovate to Improve

- Create models of homecare that prioritise prevention and address social factors to extend healthy lifespan
- Combine technology solutions and data with in-person care to personalise services, improve outcomes and evidence the value of homecare

5. Invest in the Future

- Provide a multi-year funding settlement for social care, to meet future demand, improve access to care and cover the full cost of care
- Address the deficit - in 2025/26 homecare required an additional £130.6 million to deliver sustainable services
- Pool risk and find new ways to cover costs to create a simpler, fairer system that protects individuals and families

7. Regulate to Protect

- Ensure rigorous, consistent, timely standards for registration and inspection
- Ensure that commissioners do not purchase unregulated care, like micro-care, primarily to reduce costs
- Register personal assistants and micro-carers with Social Care Wales





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What success looks like - by 2030, a reformed homecare system in Wales would mean:

- A stable, skilled workforce paid fairly for all working time
- Consistent, outcome-based commissioning across Wales
- Sustainable provision able to invest in quality and innovation backed by a national fee methodology and National Contract for Care Services
- Clear accountability for councils, Health Boards, and national bodies in setting fair fee rates
- Welsh Government funding that reaches frontline providers in full and on time
- Better alignment between funding, commissioning, workforce policy, and regulation
- Fewer delayed discharges and avoidable hospital stays
- Earlier support to help people stay well for longer at home

1. Home at the Heart

Older and disabled people prefer to draw on support and care at home rather than in hospitals or care homes. They value their independence, autonomy, and community connections. We need increased public awareness of the value of homecare and for “home first” to become the default option. The Welsh Government, Health Boards, and councils must provide accessible information to help people understand their choices, ensure timely assessment, and support people with adaptations, technology-enabled care, and sustainable local homecare services. Commissioners must work together to develop integrated care pathways that promote homecare. In Wales, stronger support at home is essential to reducing delayed discharge, avoiding unnecessary admissions, and helping people recover safely and independently after illness. The Welsh Government must see homecare not as a peripheral service, but as a core part of the health and care system’s capacity. The Welsh Government must also find new and fairer ways to cover the costs of care, ensuring universal access regardless of ability to pay.

2. Power in Partnership

Collaboration across social care, health, housing, and voluntary sectors is crucial for addressing people's complex needs efficiently and effectively. Developing integrated care pathways, promoting joint training, and sharing data all support team-working.

If the new Welsh Government restructures existing Regional Partnership Boards, homecare providers must have a voice in discussions and decision-making at all levels. Statutory partners must involve local homecare providers in developing plans and listen to their feedback. National discussions should include meaningful engagement through structures such as the National Provider Forum and the Expert Reference Group on Domiciliary Care, so that



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providers' operational experience informs national and local policy, and homecare providers have a real voice in decisions about service design, hospital discharge, prevention, workforce planning, and the use of technology and data.

3. Innovate to Improve

Social factors such as where we live, our education, lifestyle, social support, and financial stability strongly influence our health and well-being. With the use of data and predictive analytics, we can now identify those at higher risk and take action early to maintain health. We need to create models of homecare that prioritise prevention and address social factors to extend healthy lifespan. Public Health Wales and Health Boards should commission homecare as part of proactive care and public health services. By combining technology, data analysis, and in-person care, we can enhance the quality and efficiency of homecare services. Innovation should support, not replace, human relationships and hands-on care. Used well, technology can help identify changing needs earlier, target support more effectively, and improve outcomes. In Wales, innovation must work for rural and urban communities alike, and systems should judge success by whether it improves outcomes, supports the workforce, and strengthens rather than weakens human relationships in care.

4. Care as a Career

To meet rising demand for care, the sector will need [20,000 more workers](#) in 2030 compared to 2022. Growth in the older population is happening more in peripheral, rural, and coastal areas than in urban centres. This requires systematic planning and resource allocation to meet future workforce requirements. This challenge is particularly acute in Wales, where some areas face a combination of rurality, travel time pressures, and limited labour supply. Our data also suggest that Wales has fewer homecare workers per 10,000 adult population than any other UK nation. Recruitment and retention of care workers is a challenge. In 2024, the vacancy rate was [5.5 percent](#) and turnover was high. The sector can no longer recruit internationally, and retention of existing sponsored staff is becoming more expensive, risky, and complex. While the Welsh Government has established a National Advisory Service to support international workers affected by sponsor licence revocations, this will not compensate for the closure of international recruitment as a source of workforce growth. Wales needs a credible domestic workforce plan for homecare.

The Welsh Government has not consistently funded its Real Living Wage pledge through commissioned fee rates. Some providers could not pay all careworkers the Real Living Wage. Others have done so only by reducing mileage payments or unsocial hours enhancements, leaving some workers no better off overall. Wales must learn from this experience. Any future Fair Pay Agreement or Pay and Progression framework will succeed only if the Welsh Government fully funds it and the money reaches frontline providers through sufficient fee uplifts.

The Welsh Government must match fair pay with fair funding. Rights without resources create risk. If government wants better pay, more secure work, and improved terms and conditions, commissioning and fee rates must make those possible in practice.

Improving understanding of and respect for care work as a skilled role is also key. We support the [WLGAs call for social care staff](#) to have parity of esteem with healthcare.



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5. Invest in the Future

In Wales, the immediate priority is not another abstract debate about reform, but closing the gap between the real cost of care and what public bodies pay. Recent budgets have not safeguarded the sustainability of homecare. Funding linked to the Real Living Wage has not been reliably ring-fenced through to providers, and the Welsh Government excluded commissioned homecare from support to offset increases in employers' National Insurance Contributions.

We estimated that in 2025/26 the homecare sector in Wales (not including residential care) needed an additional £130.6 million to cover sustainable delivery costs and pay the Real Living Wage. This underfunding is not just a provider issue. It creates risks for careworkers, unpaid carers, hospital discharge, and the people who rely on care at home. It follows years of underfunding and does not yet account fully for rising demand.

In the short term, the priority is clear: public bodies must pay rates that reflect the full cost of sustainable, compliant care. Over time, Wales also needs a fairer and more sustainable settlement for social care funding overall.

6. Commission for Value

It is critical that commissioning approaches develop quickly. The existing National Commissioning Framework was welcome, but is not being enforced. Providers continue to report that some commissioners set fee rates without sufficient transparency, provider engagement, or clear accountability for how they make decisions. This undermines confidence in the system and drives responsible providers out of the market. Councils and Health Boards must commission for long-term value and outcomes, not short-term price, which risks substandard care. The Employment Rights Act 2025 will make current commissioning models harder to sustain. If Wales wants more secure work and better employment standards, it must move away from by-the-minute, time-and-task commissioning now. We cannot end zero-hours work without both fair funding and an end to zero-hours commissioning.

The number of homecare providers in Wales has risen by 26% since 2020/21. This is driven by some local authorities opening framework agreements and fragmenting work between providers. This drives down costs to unsustainable levels and undermines providers' ability to provide good working conditions – each provider needs a minimum number of hours (around 2,000 per week) in a locality to provide a regular working pattern for staff. The Welsh Government must address hyper-fragmentation.

Wales needs consistency. The National Office for Care and Support should complete and publish a transparent national fee methodology for homecare, and the Welsh Government should require all commissioning bodies to use it. Transparent cost analysis and engagement with providers must inform this work. The Welsh Government must legislate to introduce a National Contract for Care Services, including a mandatory fee-rate floor, and ensure public bodies cover the full cost of sustainable care services.

Commissioning reform is the bridge between ambition and delivery. Without it, the Welsh Government will not realise policy commitments on fair pay, security of work, quality, prevention, and innovation in practice.



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7. Regulate to Protect

Effective regulation is essential for protecting the rights and well-being of those who draw on homecare services. By ensuring all providers of personal care meet rigorous standards and dealing swiftly with poor performance, regulators can drive up the quality of care and give people confidence in the services they rely on. The Welsh Government must ensure regulators are well-led and resourced to fulfil their responsibilities. As Care Inspectorate Wales rolls out published ratings, it is even more important that the regulatory and commissioning systems work together. Providers are being asked to meet rising expectations on quality and transparency while many remain funded below the cost of sustainable delivery. The Welsh Government must set performance standards and hold regulators accountable. Commissioners must not purchase unregulated care simply to reduce costs. The expansion of choice and control through mechanisms such as direct payments must not become a route to steering people toward cheaper, unregulated provision without appropriate safeguards. All providers of personal care should be subject to oversight, including micro-carers. Social Care Wales' professional register should extend to personal assistants and micro-carers.

With Senedd elections approaching in 2026 and the prospect of political change, there is an opportunity to reset the relationship between government, commissioners, and providers. Whichever parties shape the next Welsh Government, they must treat homecare as a strategic priority.

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The [Homecare Association](#) is a national membership body for homecare providers, with over 2,100 members across the UK. Our mission is to ensure society values homecare and invests in it, so all of us can live well at home and flourish within our communities. We lead the way in shaping homecare and provide practical support for our members.



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Facts and figures

- ➔ **26% increase in the number of homecare agencies registered** with Care Inspectorate Wales from 593 in 2020/21 to 750 in 2024/25, suggesting significant and rising market fragmentation
- ➔ **20,310 adults receiving support via homecare or supported living** in 2023/24 compared to 13,320 in care homes.
- ➔ **310,000** people providing informal unpaid care at home in Wales
- ➔ **23,666 domiciliary care workers** registered with Social Care Wales in March 2026
- ➔ **25.9% homecare workers on zero-hours employment contracts**, driven by zero-hours commissioning of homecare by councils and the NHS
- ➔ **£27.14 per hour**, weighted average price paid by public bodies in Wales for homecare for people aged 65 years and over in a sample week during April 2025
- ➔ **£37.13 per hour**, the fee rate needed to ensure care workers receive the Real Living Wage in Wales in 2026/27
- ➔ **£135.1 million per annum**, the additional money needed in 2025/26 to ensure that homecare workers in Wales could be paid the same as NHS healthcare assistants at Band 3 with 2+ years' experience

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Shaping homecare together

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