

A Vision for a Fairer Future: Priorities for the new Cabinet Secretary for Culture and Social Justice

R N I B

Cymru

Golwg gwahanol

See differently



RNIB Cymru is the largest sight loss charity in Wales. We provide support and services to blind and partially sighted people, as well as their families, friends, and carers, to help improve lives and empower people to live well with sight loss.

There are around 112,000 people living with sight loss in Wales, and this number is predicted to double by 2050.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with you in your new role on the following priority areas:

1. Help alleviate cost of living pressures for blind and partially sighted people.

Findings from RNIB Cymru's newly published [Cost of Sight Loss report](#) show that blind and partially sighted people in Wales have been hit harder by the rising cost of living than the general UK population. **99 per cent** have experienced increases in their energy bills (compared with 69 per cent for the general population) and **95 per cent** have seen increases in the cost of food (compared with 92 per cent for the general population).

Blind and partially sighted people also incur additional but unavoidable costs because of their sight loss. Reliance on taxis, assistive technology and equipment, home adaptations, specialist lenses, increased need for lighting and support with household tasks are commonly cited as reasons life costs more. When surveyed, **one in four**

(26 per cent) said they **spend over £100 per month** on additional expenses associated with their sight loss and **one in five** (22 per cent) say they **spend more than £200**.

Blind and partially sighted people are more likely to live in lower-income households, and long-standing barriers mean that only **one in four blind and partially sighted adults of working age are in employment**. As a result, blind and partially sighted people in Wales are more likely to be going without essentials to make ends meet. Survey respondents told us they are using less gas or electricity in their homes (**73 per cent** compared to 60 per cent for the general population) and spending less on food and other essentials (**61 per cent** compared to 31 per cent).



Two thirds (66 per cent) of blind and partially sighted people say the cost of living crisis has had a negative impact on their mental health. To save money, **over half (53 per cent)** of respondents in Wales told us they go out less. They spoke about the isolation, loneliness, and feelings of depression they face as a result of not being able to maintain social connections and access the activities they enjoy.



RNIB Cymru are calling on the Welsh Government to help reduce the disproportionate impact of the rise in the cost of living on blind and partially sighted people by:

1. Creating targeted and accessible campaigns to increase awareness of eligibility and uptake of financial support schemes by blind and partially sighted people.
2. Engaging closely with charities and organisations with established, trusted links with blind and partially sighted people to disseminate information in ways that meet their communication needs.

3. Ensuring that Welsh Government-commissioned advice services are accessible and understand the needs of blind and partially sighted people, so they can effectively maximise income and signpost to appropriate support.
4. Addressing the long-standing barriers blind and partially sighted people face finding and maintaining employment by:
 - Placing greater focus on addressing attitudes in the workplace and educating employers to ensure their practices and workplace environments are inclusive and accessible for blind and partially sighted people, including for employees who develop sight loss.
 - Ensuring employers have up to date and fit for purpose workplace reasonable adjustments and flexible working policies.
5. Making an integrated free-of-charge travel pass available for all disabled people in Wales, similar to the [National Entitlement Card scheme](#) in Scotland.



2. Make accessible information a reality for all blind and partially sighted people.

RNIB Cymru's [Make it Make Sense report](#) highlights the impact that inaccessible health information has on blind and partially sighted people in Wales. Despite a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 for the NHS to make "reasonable adjustments" to provide accessible information to disabled people, our report found that personal and confidential information is consistently provided to blind and partially sighted people in a standardised, written format that they cannot read.

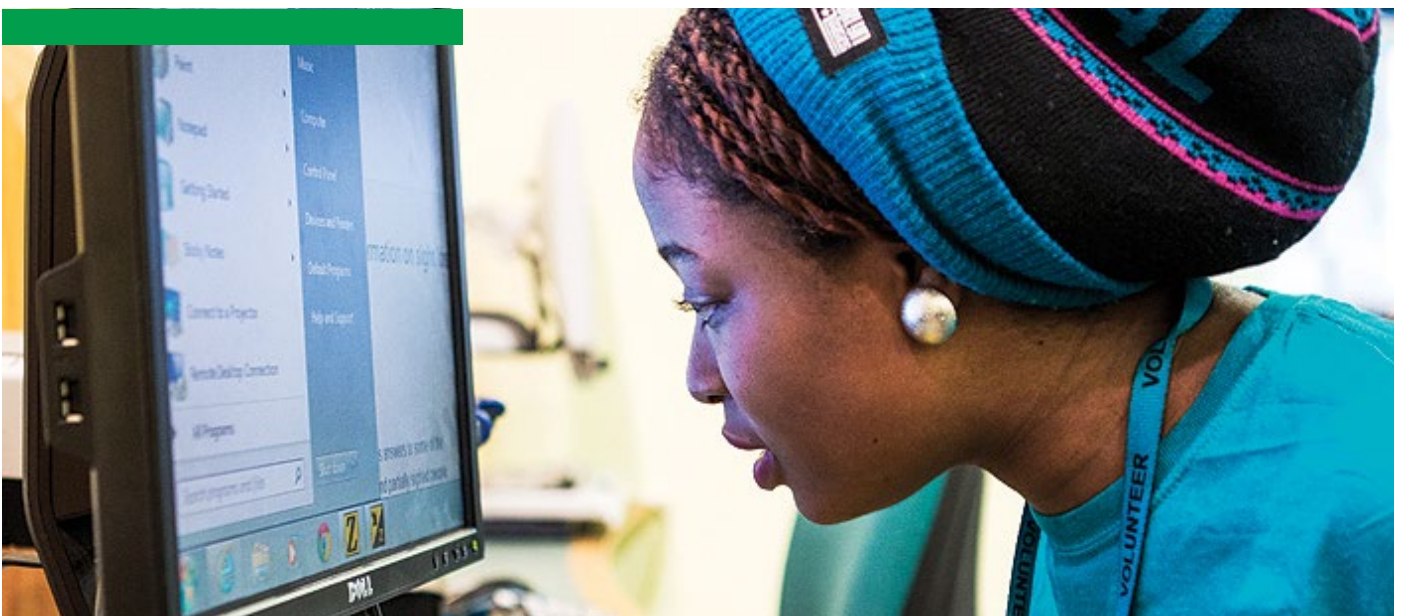
More than **one in two** blind and partially sighted people in Wales said they had received information about their healthcare in a format they could not read. **One in three** have missed an appointment or had their healthcare affected as a result. **Nine out of 10** have never been asked about their required accessible format by their GP surgery or hospital.

This is a health inequality and a patient safety issue. It can be the difference

between making or missing an appointment, finding out the results of a test or diagnosis or understanding how to use a home screening kit. It also impacts people's right to privacy, with many forced to rely on friends, family members or even complete strangers to read sensitive medical information for them.

The former Minister for Social Justice, Jane Hutt MS, showed her commitment to tackling this issue by launching our report in June 2023. We have since worked with officials across the health and social justice departments to develop a national action plan for ensuring the communication and information needs of people with sensory loss are met.

We would be grateful for a public statement affirming your commitment to continuing this important work and to ensure the full implementation of the [All Wales Standards for Accessible Communication and Information for People with Sensory Loss](#).

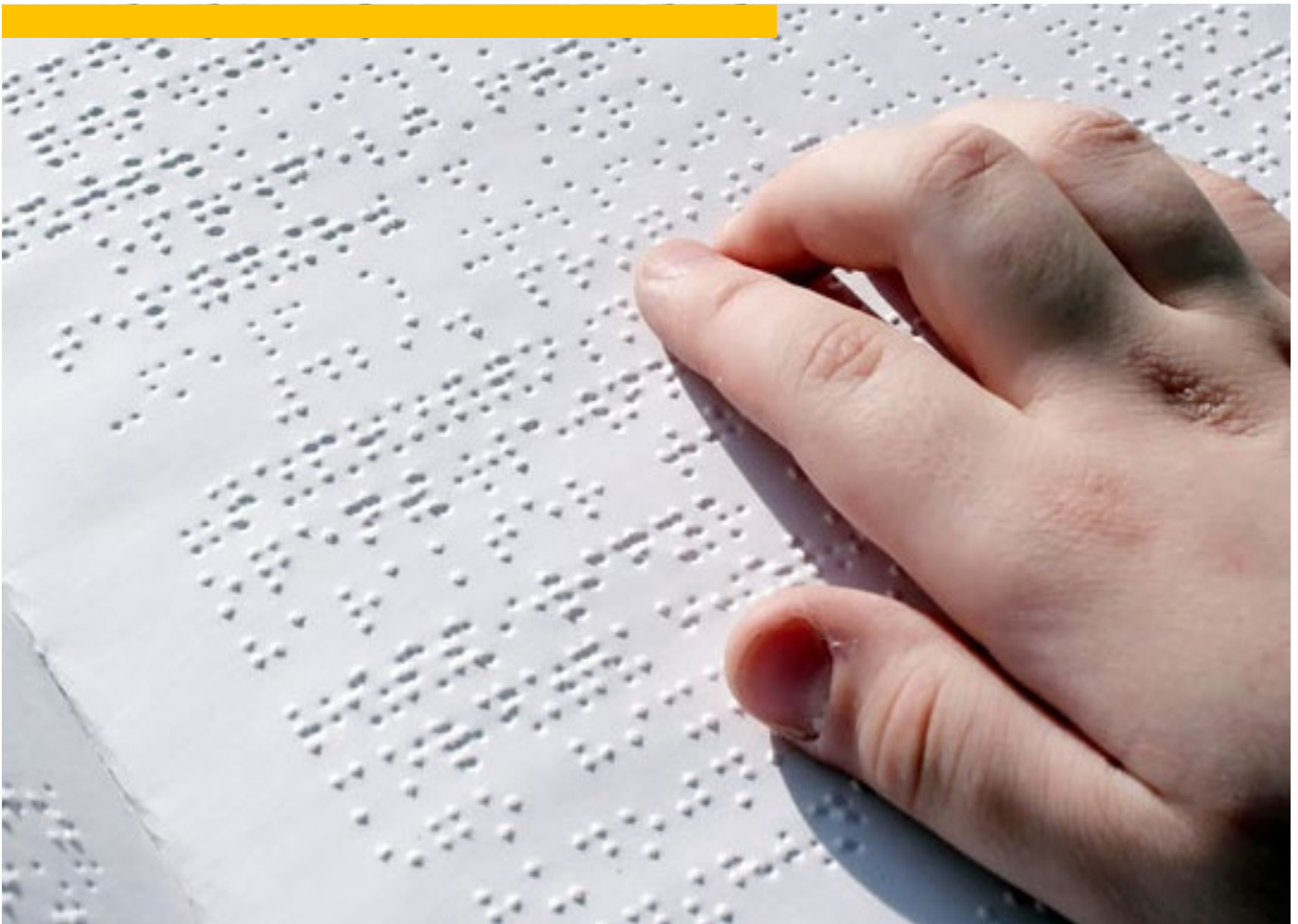


We also call on you to:

- Use the upcoming incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (UNCRPD) into Welsh law to guarantee the rights of disabled people to receive information on an equal basis through the format of their choice.
- Ensure that health service IT systems have the functionality to automatically and routinely record and action a patient's required format, for example sending patient communications via email, text message, large print or braille.

- Ensure accessible communication for blind and partially sighted people forms a key part of the upcoming Disability Rights Action Plan.

RNIB Cymru is always happy to assist the Welsh Government to undertake meaningful engagement with blind and partially sighted people. We would be delighted to work collaboratively with you in your new role as Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, as we have with your predecessor, to co-produce solutions towards realising a more equal Wales.



We have an opportunity to make Wales a place that blind and partially sighted people are proud to call home, that supports their ambitions and allows them to live a full and active life.

We look forward to working with you to make this vision a reality.