

State of the Nation Report 2025

Voices of Wales's
learning disabled citizens

mencap Cymru

Foreword



I am pleased to be able to present to you the first of a series of State of the Nation reports that will be conducted by Mencap Cymru on behalf of the Wales Learning Disability Consortium over the coming three years.

We face a monumental change in how we are governed in Wales. Our Welsh Parliament, with a new voting system and increase in the number of Senedd members representing us, will look very different, and many of the long-standing relationships which have been developed across parties over the past 25 years will come to an end as they move on from the Senedd.

It is more important than ever that the voices of people with a learning disability and those who care for and support them are heard loudly as political parties develop their manifestos pledges for Government, and following the election in May, implementing policies to improve the lives of Wales's citizens – 70,000 of whom have a learning disability.

It will be 43 years since the development and implementation of the All Wales Strategy, which saw Wales lead the way in community-based support for people with a learning disability. Their rights to live, work and play in ordinary houses, in ordinary streets and in ordinary communities has been at the heart of Wales's approach to supporting people with a learning disability.

The aftermath of Covid and the financial and social impact linked to it has seen support services such as day and respite care diminished. This has made it much harder to live in Wales if you have a learning disability or are an unpaid carer of a person with a learning disability. There is much we must do to get back to the pioneering, person-centred spirit of the All Wales Strategy, and we will use the data and stories in this report to challenge political representatives to be as bold as those who created the All Wales Strategy back in 1983.

Wayne Crocker
Director of Mencap Cymru

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Executive Summary



From accessing public transport to navigating the health and social care system, people with a learning disability experience significant barriers in their lives. People with a learning disability have worse physical and mental health than people without a learning disability. We know that people with a learning disability in Wales are dying on average 20 years earlier than the general population [1].

It has long been recognised that there is limited data on people with a learning disability in Wales [2] and exploring the costs and benefits of establishing a National Learning Disability Observatory for Wales is included as a strategic priority area in the Welsh Government's Learning Disability Strategic Action Plan.

This report provides a snapshot of some of the issues impacting the lives of people with a learning disability in Wales. We urge all decision makers in Wales to read it and to respond appropriately in their party manifestos for the 2026 Senedd Election.

2 Methodology

2.1 Co-design

To co-design the themes of the survey, two engagement sessions were held in May. One was held with Llanfyllin Mencap, and one with Mencap Môn. Insight from these sessions shaped the questions included in the survey. A colleague with a learning disability took part in co-designing the accessibility of the survey.

2.2 Overview

Mencap Cymru launched a national survey during Learning Disability Week in June 2025. The Survey closed on 14th November 2025. The survey included 43 questions. This was an anonymous survey which included both closed and open text questions.



Launch of Survey at the Senedd during Learning Disability Week

2.3 Consent

At the beginning of the survey it was made clear that answers are confidential and the survey is anonymous. It was stated that we would not use people's names when we shared our findings.

2 Methodology

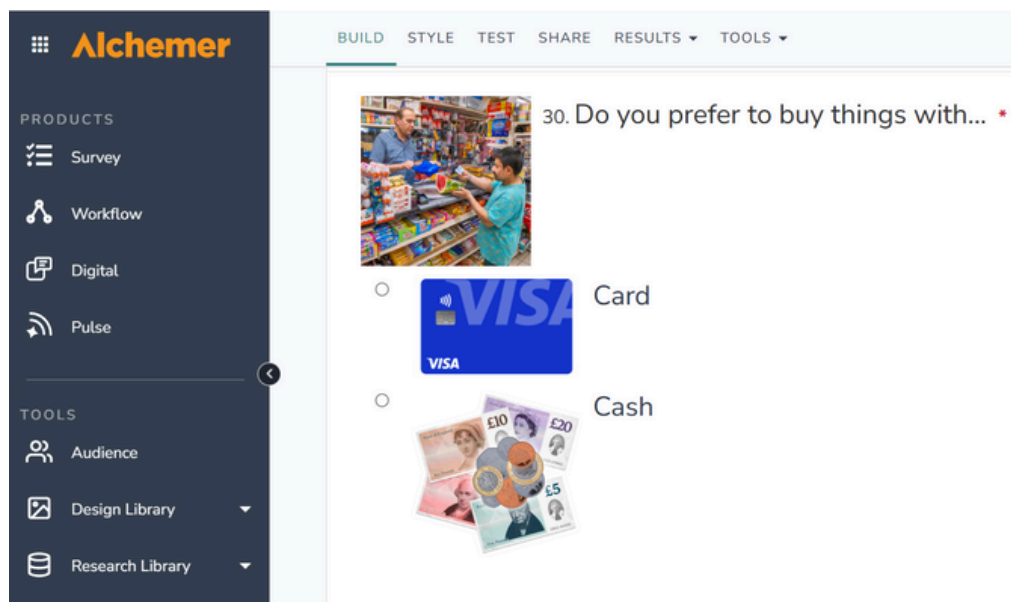
2.4 Respondents

There were a total of 427 responses to the survey. Once these responses were cleaned to remove invalid responses, a total of **236 eligible responses** have been analysed which we have used for this report.

As not all respondents answered every single question, some of the statistics are based on the responses from less than 236 people.

2.5 Accessibility

The survey was available to complete on-line in either English or Welsh and was created in an Easy-Read format. Paper copies were also made available and provided on request. The Survey was delivered using Alchemer which is an online survey platform.



Picture of the State of the Nation Survey on Alchemer.

The survey was promoted with a wide range of organisations across Wales and within our existing networks. This included in person sessions with Network Partners including Chepstow Mencap to promote the survey with people with a learning disability and their families.

2 Methodology

Mencap Cymru's Policy and Engagement team attended several events to promote the survey with external stakeholders. These included:-

- **National Eisteddfod for Wales**
- **Gofod 3**
- **Viva Festival**
- **Learning Disability Wales Conference**

We would like to thank everyone for taking the time to share their views with us. We would also like to express our thanks to members of the Wales Learning Disability Consortium for supporting this work and sharing the survey across their networks.



Mencap Cymru Policy and Engagement Team attending Senedd Event



Mencap Cymru stand Learning Disability Wales's Conference



Mencap Cymru stand at Viva Festival

3 Analysis

3.1 Key Findings

- **One in five (21%)** people with a learning disability do not feel a part of a community.
- **One in five (22%)** people with a learning disability told us that they do not choose where they live or who they live with.
- **More than one in four (26%)** people with a learning disability had not been offered an annual health check in the past 12 months. From those who stated that they had not, **over half (57%)** had not been offered one within the last five years.
- **Four in ten (42%)** people with a learning disability found it hard to get their Annual Health Check.
- **Nearly a third (31%)** of people with a learning disability don't have a bus pass.
- **Two-thirds (68%)** of people with a learning disability prefer to buy things with cash.
- **Over three quarters (78%)** of people with a learning disability who responded do not have a romantic partner.

3 Analysis



3.2 My Home

Living in a home that is safe is as important for people with a learning disability as everyone else. However **one in five** (22%) people with a learning disability told us that they do not choose where they live or who they live with. **One in six** (15%) told us that they were unsure.

Some told us that whilst they were happy with where they lived, they did not have a choice regarding who they lived with:-

“ Love the area but didn't have a choice on who to live with”

Most people with a learning disability (81%) told us that they were happy where they live. Some of the reasons why included:-

“ I'm with my family”

“ It is a close community I have lots of friends where I live”

“ Like the staff. Making my own choices. I like the area I live in”

“ Because I get to live independently”

However, almost **one in five** (19%) told us that they are not happy where they live.

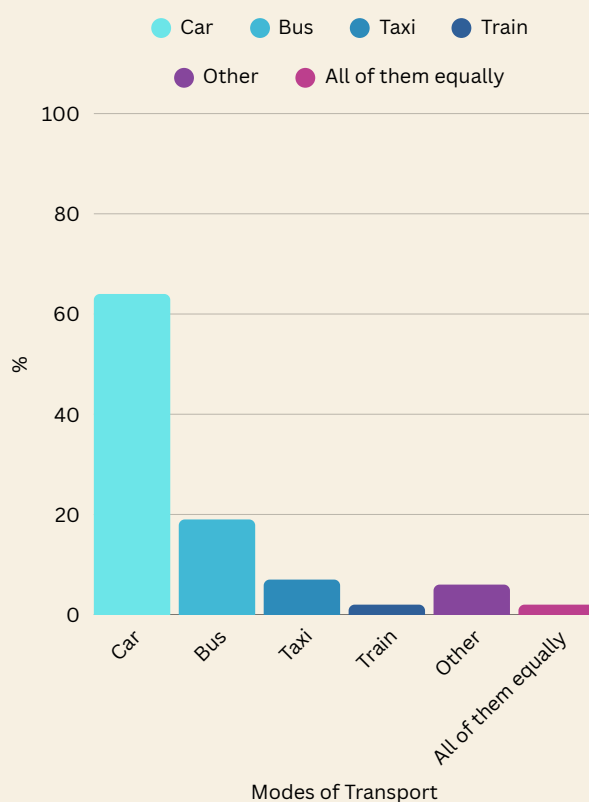
3.3 My Transport

Existing research shows that people with a disability travel less than people without a disability; a report published by Mencap in August 2025 discovered that only 42% of people with a learning disability agreed that they feel safe using public transport [3]. The **Welsh Government's Learning Disability Strategic Action Plan** [4] lists working towards a Wales where people with learning disabilities have improved access to public transport across Wales which meets their needs as a strategic priority area.

3 Analysis

Our survey found that **nearly a third** (30%) of people with learning disability who responded don't use public transport.

What type of transport do you use the most?



People with a learning disability in Wales who meet the eligibility criteria are entitled to a Concessionary Travel Card (Bus Pass), meaning that they can travel for free on most bus services in Wales. Our survey found that **nearly a third** of people with a learning disability who responded don't have a bus pass (31%).

We asked respondents to share why they no longer had a bus pass:-

“*Because I have my own car*”

“*Because I haven't got enough points to claim for one*”

“*I have had taken off me*”

3 Analysis



“ ***Scored low PIP***”

“ ***Because it is not accessible to apply***”

We found that **most people** with a learning disability (52%) **did not** have a Companion Travel Card (Companion Pass). We asked respondents to share why they no longer had a companion card:-

“ ***In the process of trying to get one***”

“ ***Process too complex and bus services poor***”

“ ***All my staff drive my car***”

Finally, we encouraged people to share their experience of public transport in Wales. Some respondents were concerned about the frequency of public transport, particularly in rural areas:-

“ ***I live in the country, we have 2 buses a week so I use my car most days to access the community***”

“ ***We don't have many buses in my village. We are just over 3 miles from nearest town***”

“ ***I am unable to use public transport on my own and we are also very rural with few bus services***”

3 Analysis



Many also raised concerns about the accessibility of public transport:-

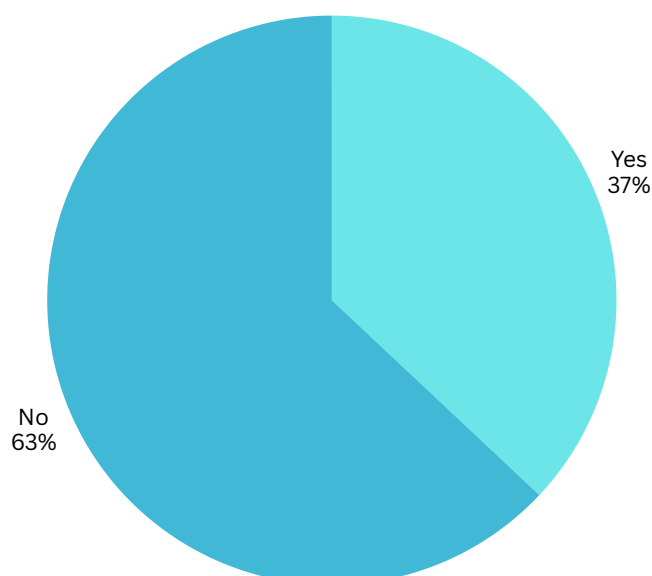
- “*Transport not accessible for my wheelchair*”.
- “*If using a wheelchair bus drivers helpful with ramp but difficult to move wheelchair in such tight space*”.

3.4 My Community

Our survey found that **one in five** (21%) people with a learning disability do not feel a part of a community.

We also asked people whether they attended a day service.

Do you attend a day service?



3 Analysis

We also included a question around self-advocacy. Self-advocacy is about speaking up for yourself, understanding your rights, making your own decisions and working together to make better policy to achieve equality for people with learning disabilities [5].

Over one in ten (13%) respondents told us that they could not make choices and decisions that affect their lives, with another 14% telling us that they were unsure.

We asked people what support they would like to feel a part of a community:-

- “ ***Not enough support to fulfil the activities that I want to do***”
- “ ***People to have the right attitude and making sure people with LD are involved in the community***”
- “ ***Better transport***”
- “ ***Support for medical appointments***”
- “ ***Support with money***”
- “ ***I sometimes feel part of a community. I prefer company to go out as it's lonely without***”

3.5 My Health

People with a learning disability continue to experience significant barriers within the health system. The average life expectancy of a person with a learning disability in Wales is 20 years less than the wider population [6].

We found that most people with a learning disability (87%) had seen their GP or Practice Nurse in the past 12 months. This compared to 9% who hadn't (5% were unsure).

3 Analysis



We asked those who answered 'no' when was the last time they had seen their GP or Practice nurse:-

Two years ago	55%
Three years ago	14%
Four years ago	3%
More than five years ago	28%

People with a learning disability in Wales are entitled to an Annual Health Check. Research shows that having a health check is associated with reduced deaths, especially for people with Down's syndrome or people with a learning disability and Autism [7].

Annual Health Checks became part of the General Medical Services (GMS) Contract in Wales in April 2025. This means that they should now be offered by every GP practice. All practices are now required to provide:-

1. The total number of patients on the Learning Disability register;
2. number of health checks offered and;
3. number of health checks completed [8].

We found that **almost a quarter (24%)** of people with a learning disability lacked clarity about what an annual health check is (17% did not know what an annual health check was, and 7% were unsure).

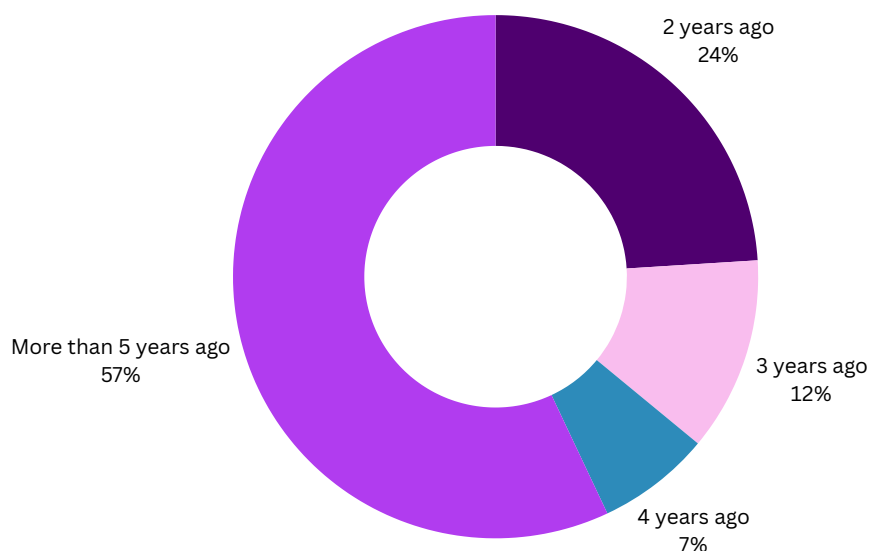
We also found that **over a quarter (26%)** of people with a learning disability who responded had not been **offered** an annual health check in the past 12 months (14% were unsure).

From those who answered no, **over half (57%)** told us that the last time they had been offered an annual health check was **over five years ago**.

3 Analysis



If you answered 'No', when was the last time you were offered an Annual Health Check?



We also asked people whether they had **received** an annual health check in the past 12 months. We found that **24%** had not received an annual health check in the past 12 months (17% unsure).

From those who answered no, **over half (51%)** reported that the last time they received an annual health check was over five years ago (28% 2 years, 13% 3 years, 8% 4 years).

Four in ten (42%) people with a learning disability found it hard to get their annual health check.

3.6 My Money

Our survey asked people whether they could buy what they wanted in their communities. Whilst the majority (75%) could do so, we found that one in ten (12%) could not (13% were unsure).

We also asked people whether they prefer to use cash or card when buying things. **Two-thirds** of people with a learning disability who responded prefer to buy things with cash (68%) as opposed to using a card (33%).

3 Analysis

We found that **nearly a third (30%)** were not able to use cash to buy a ticket, food or drink on public transport.

- “ *Only card to buy refreshment from the trolley*”
- “ *Trolley on the trains is card only*”
- “ *People want the choice, it should suit the person. One person has been told they have to pay by cash in a taxi. Some of our members tried to get drinks on the train with cash but got refused. It’s wrong and both should be accepted*”
- “ *I don't understand the value of cash due to my learning disability and need support*”

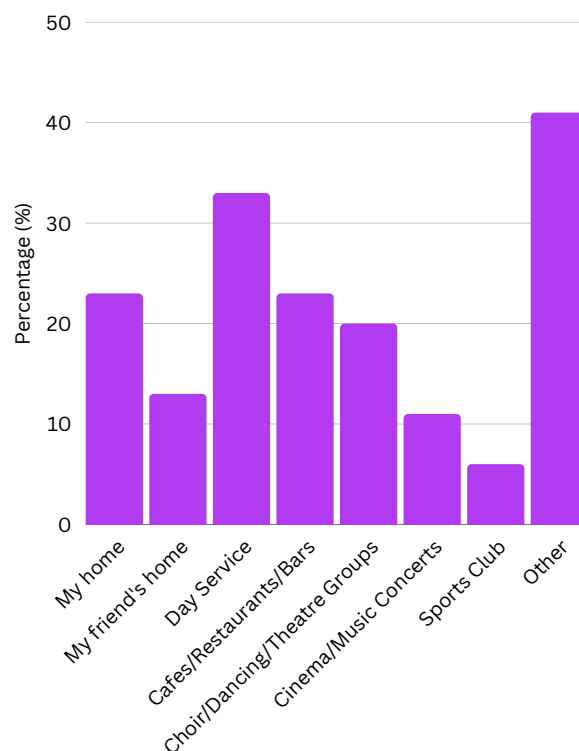
3.7 My Relationships

Friendships and relationships are an important part of everyone’s lives. We found that the **majority** of people with a learning disability who responded have friends who they can spend time with (77%). When asked how often they see their friends:-

A few times a week	47%
Once a week	29%
Once a month	8%
Less than once a month	16%

3 Analysis

Where do you spend time with your friends?



Whilst most respondents had friends who they could spend time with, we found that **most** people with a learning disability who responded (78%) **do not** have a romantic partner compared to 15% who do (8% prefer not to say).

3.8 My Education

Nearly a third of people with a learning disability (31%) did not receive the support they needed in school or college (23% were unsure). We asked people to tell us more about the support they received:-

“It wasn't the right environment and my mental health declined rapidly, my behaviours became physically challenging and I got kicked out of school and special schools and residential colleges”

“Needed more one to one support”

3 Analysis



- “ *They couldn't provide a 1:1 for me in college as I wasn't diagnosed ASD. Since my diagnosis I still can't have the help to do day to day things*”.
- “ *Was diagnosed late in adult life*”.
- “ *Funding finished after 2 years*”.
- “ *Nothing from age of 19-22 - left with no support*”.
- “ *There was no support for me*”.
- “ *I had to attend mainstream and struggled*”.

3.8 My Future

We asked people what is the most important thing that would make their lives better. We also asked people what Welsh Government should do to make Wales a better place to live for a person with a learning disability and their families. Both questions were listed as open text questions, providing people with the opportunity to share their experiences.

We received a **wide range of responses** to these questions, covering areas such as transport, housing, and health and social care.

We will be undertaking thematic analysis of these responses which we will categorise into themes. This will be published in the new year and will be shared with all political parties ahead of the **2026 Senedd Election**.

We will also be sharing this report with key partners and people with a learning disability to co-design a discussion section which will identify people's key areas of concern.

4 Closing Comments

This report highlights that people with a learning disability continue to face barriers in our daily lives.

I am part of Mencap's Voices Council, a group of people with a learning disability who speak up, share our views, and help guide Mencap's work. We make sure that real voices and real experiences are heard.

I go to a day service in Llanfyllin, and many of the issues raised in this report happen in my everyday life.

Over the last few months, people like me have shared our stories. It is important that everyone listens to them and takes action. It is important that we are heard because we know what affects us, what we need, and what helps us. Our experiences can help make things better for everyone.

If Wales is going to be a better place for people with a learning disability and for our families, then the people in charge need to listen to us and act.

Please remember;

I have opinions.

I have rights.

I have dreams.

Listen to me. Respect me. Include me.

My voice matters.

Kylie Williams

Self-Advocate and Member of Mencap's Voices Council

5 References



- [1] <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2024-06/an-overview-of-mortality-amongst-people-with-a-learning-disability.pdf>
- [2] <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/learning-disability-improving-lives-programme-june-2018.pdf>
- [3] https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-08/Mencap_Motability_Research_Report.pdf
- [4] <https://www.gov.wales/learning-disability-strategic-action-plan-2022-2026-html>
- [5] <https://allwalespeople1st.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/FINAL-Manifesto-2026-1.pdf>
- [6] <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2024-06/an-overview-of-mortality-amongst-people-with-a-learning-disability.pdf>
- [7] <https://www.improvementcymru.net/en/2022/05/25/annual-health-checks/>
- [8] <https://www.bma.org.uk/media/zi1fw0gx/guidance-gms-contract-implementation.pdf>