

# Barriers to healthcare for deaf communities in Wales

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Deaf people in Wales face serious challenges in getting the health care information and services that they need, according to a recently published report. ([Health and Wellbeing for Deaf Communities in Wales: Scoping for a Wales-Wide Survey](#)).

The report focused on Deaf individuals with a capital "D." These are people who are culturally Deaf, were typically born deaf, and use a signed [language](#), such as British Sign Language (BSL), as their first or preferred language. In contrast, deaf (lowercase "d") refers to the audiological condition of deafness.

While the Deaf community is relatively small, they face substantial health inequalities with increased barriers to health information and [health services](#).

The study, which included interviews conducted in both North and South Wales with Deaf participants, indicates that a number of factors contribute to this situation. These included a lack of consistently available British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters and a general lack of understanding and awareness of sign languages and Deaf culture by healthcare providers and personnel.

Michelle Fowler-Powe, Access and Inclusion (Advocacy) Coordinator, for the British Deaf Association noted that BDA Cymru welcome this report.

She said: "the findings in the report tally with what we have found through our own surveys; in particular, the finding where members of the Deaf community are potentially at greater risk of under-diagnosis and under-treatment of chronic diseases. We very much hope that this report leads to a more detailed examination of how Deaf people's health and wellbeing can be improved."

The report was funded by Public Health Wales with research undertaken by Bangor University and the University of Graz in Austria to explore the barriers and enablers to staying healthy in Deaf communities and to identify potential actions for different professional groups.

Report co-author Dr. Christopher Shank of the School of Languages, Literatures & Linguistics commented:

"To date there has been little Wales-specific data, such that the number of Deaf adults is actually unknown, making it difficult to make the case for improving services. This report and its findings will provide the information base for decision makers, so that we can all move towards a healthier cohesive and more equal Wales, addressing the aspirations of the Wellbeing of Future Generation Act."

Paul Redfern, General Secretary for British Society for Mental Health & Deafness added:

"We were delighted to see this report as it is the first Wales-centric evidence based piece of work that demonstrates the need to develop systems for data gathering and in turn, ensure that services are accessible for this linguistic and cultural group which do not have the same access to services in comparison to the rest of the population."

The literature review conducted by experts at Bangor University's School of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics and the Institute of English

Studies at the University of Graz in Austria revealed that Deaf people overall had poor health literacy. Major problems are that there is still relatively little [health information](#) available in BSL and that there is a lack of consistently available interpreters.

Dr. Christopher Shank added:

"Overall the results from the literature review suggest that Deaf people have similar lifestyles to the general UK population, but report being less healthy. It is likely that Deaf people's poorer [health](#) is not due to an unhealthy lifestyle, but to poorer diagnosis, treatment and management of illness. One of the reasons is likely to be poor communication with their [healthcare providers](#). For example, not having enough time during appointments for the doctors to explain their condition, or the medication to them."

This report has highlighted that further in-depth studies need to be undertaken to identify the barriers and enablers affecting the Deaf community across Wales.

Provided by Bangor University

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