



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

**STATEMENT
BY
THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

TITLE Statement to mark the International Day of Disabled People
DATE 1 December 2020
BY Jane Hutt MS, Deputy Minister and Chief Whip

Prynhawn da

This Thursday is the United Nation's International Day of Disabled People. Since 1992 the United Nations has designated the 3rd December as a day for promoting the rights and well-being of disabled people and to celebrate their achievements across the world. The theme for 2020 is 'Building Back Better: toward a disability-inclusive, accessible and sustainable Post COVID -19 World.'

The pandemic has shone a light on, and amplified the problems within our society. Many of these are not new or specific to COVID but they have become more obvious to us all. During the pandemic, isolation, disconnect, disrupted routines and diminished services

have greatly impacted the lives and mental well-being of many disabled people.

The latest available data from ONS shows that in the period March to July, in Wales, 68%, or almost 7 in every 10 Covid related deaths came from our disabled communities. It has also been reported that people with a learning disability were disproportionately more likely to die from Covid. I am sure we are all greatly saddened by this. It is also emerging that this death rate was not the simple inevitable consequence of impairment, as many of these deaths were clearly rooted in socioeconomic factors.

Building on the admittedly slow progress made over the last twenty five years since the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act in November 1995, we must take positive action so that we can do better as we recover from the effects of COVID.

Since 2002, the Welsh Government has adopted the Social Model of Disability. A model that recognises that people with impairments are in fact disabled by the actions of our society, and not by their impairments. When we say 'actions of our society', we must remember that disabling actions are designed and carried out by people. It is people and systems that disable, people, whether that

is driven by organisational culture, ignorance, prejudice or simple indifference.

While much of our work has correctly been focused on trying to mitigate the actions of our disablist culture, I intend to explore how we can directly address disablism, in-itself.

It is important that we all understand this model as it changes the way we think. It means we focus on identifying and removing barriers to disabled people's contributions. We must build this approach into all our work developing and delivering policies across the whole of the Senedd's work.

That is why I am pleased to support the Minister for Housing and Local [Authorities' Government's](#) current consultation on the establishment of a new fund to provide support to disabled people to seek elected office for the 2021 Senedd elections and the 2022 Local Government elections. This is a proactive step to reduce some of the barriers that may otherwise prevent an individual from participating in local democracy and representing their community by standing for elected office.

I very much hope that this fund will encourage disabled people to stand as candidates in next year's elections. Their voices need to be heard in every part of society.

Disabled people also play a key part in our economic recovery, and this is why in Wales, we will soon have Disabled People Employment Champions. These Champions will support employers across Wales to create a workforce that is representative and open to all.

I am pleased to announce employers will be supported by a new tool-kit: 'A More Equal Wales: A Practical Guide for Employers employing Disabled People', which will be launched this Thursday to coincide with the International Day of Disabled People.

I regularly speak to stakeholders and representatives of Disabled People's Organisations through my Disability Equality Forum. I have chaired six meetings of this Forum since the start of the pandemic, the last meeting was held on 21 October. Their advice and guidance has helped us to understand how the pandemic is impacting on different communities, what is concerning people, and what we can do to make things better, easier, and equitable.

I also want to thank the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee cross party group on disabled people, for the part it played in exposing the inequitable impacts of Covid 19.

Disability Forum members contribute to the Welsh Government's Accessible Communication Group, who have informed us of the difficulties faced by various groups, including disabled people, when accessing information during the Covid-19 pandemic. Disability Equality Forum members also provided essential feedback on the 'Creating safer public places: Coronavirus' guidance, ensuring the inclusion of accessibility considerations when developing and adapting urban centres and green spaces.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to our understanding over the past months. In these challenging times being able to work so closely with our partners has been a huge asset.

One of the harsh side effects of the pandemic has been the impact on the economy and, in particular, third sector organisations' ability to fundraise and maintain their income. This in turn has reduced their ability to support their members and is making their future less certain.

That is why I am pleased £200,000 (two hundred thousand pounds) from the Welsh Government's Reserves for Reconstruction package has been allocated to fund disability projects across Wales. It will augment the £100,000 allocated to Wales from a UK-wide COVID emergency scheme.

This funding will be distributed as small grants to nine Disabled People's Organisations across Wales, supporting vital work, providing information and advice and developing new ways to respond to the Covid-19 needs of disabled people.

I am delighted that Professor Debbie Foster from Cardiff University has agreed to lead a project to produce a report on the impact of COVID on disabled people. Members of the Disability Equality Forum will work alongside Professor Foster to bring together information, evidence and case studies.

It is my intention that this important report will inform a refresh of the "Action on Disability" framework that I launched in 2019. By revisiting the framework in light of Covid, I am determined that we will be able to act quickly to embed the learning from this pandemic.

With such a range of important work taking place in Wales, I am pleased to invite all the Members of the Senedd to celebrate with me the contribution of disabled people in Wales on the United Nation's International Day of Disabled People.

Check against delivery

**Embargoed until after Jane Hutt MS, Deputy Minister and Chief Whip
has delivered the statement.**