

Prescriptions in Wales, 2019-20

23 September 2020
SFR 147/2020

There are two main sections in this report:

- **'GP prescriptions'** which are items primarily prescribed by GPs in Wales and dispensed within the community in Wales or elsewhere in the UK. This also includes non-medical prescribers that have prescribed on behalf of GP practices.
- **'UK comparisons'** which use slightly different data called 'prescriptions dispensed in the community' which are items prescribed by any prescribing health professionals in the UK that were subsequently dispensed in the community in Wales.

GP prescriptions data are the primary focus of this report because it demonstrates which medicines and appliances are being prescribed by Welsh GP practices. Therefore it is recommended that the majority of readers should use GP prescriptions data for their analysis.

Prescriptions dispensed in the community are secondary data, but should be used when making comparisons across countries in the UK.

A comparison between the sources is provided in [Table 1](#) and further details are provided in the [Which data should I use?](#) section.

82.1 million	25.4	£594.0 million
items prescribed by GPs	items per head	net ingredient cost

Key facts

- 82.1 million items were prescribed by GPs, and dispensed in the community in 2019-20. This is 2.0 million (2.4%) higher than 2018-19 and 2.9 million (3.7%) higher than in 2015-16.
- The increase in the most recent five year period is smaller than the increase of 6.5 million items (9.0%) in the previous five year period (2011-12 to 2015-16).
- The number of prescriptions per head of population registered with a GP was 25.4 in 2019-20. This is 0.2 items (or 0.6%) lower than the previous year but 0.5 items (or 2.1%) higher than in 2015-16.
- The net ingredient cost of the items prescribed was £594.0 million, an increase of £30.8 million (or 5.5%) on the previous year, and £ 0.5 million (or 0.1%) more than in 2015-16.

About this release

This report combines two previous reports

'[Prescriptions by GPs in Wales](#)' and '[Prescriptions dispensed in the community](#)' to provide a

more coherent analysis of prescriptions in Wales.

Data is sourced from information obtained from prescriptions sent for payment to [Prescribing Services, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership](#).

Data are presented largely in terms of 'prescription items' which refers to each item prescribed by a doctor on a prescription form. Full definitions are included in the [Notes](#) section at the end of the release.

Further data can be found on our new [Power BI dashboard](#), and [StatsWales](#).

In this release

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Information about prescriptions data in Wales

This is the second year that prescriptions data has been published in this format.

Prior to 2019, prescriptions data had been published in two separate statistical releases, [Prescriptions by GPs](#) last published on 19 September 2018 and [Prescriptions dispensed in the community](#) last published on 23 May 2018.

Combining the two datasets in one release with more contextual information aims to provide users with a clear analysis of prescriptions in Wales.

[NHS Shared Service Partnership](#) also publish data on GP prescriptions every month, based on the same data which is presented in this publication.

Changes to previous releases

We have published an [interactive data tool](#) in Power BI that allows users to search data on BNF chapters, sections, and sub paragraphs, based on GP prescriptions. Previously this data was published in only in Excel files using only prescriptions dispensed in the community data.

Which data should I use?

In general, when analysing prescriptions data for Wales, GP prescriptions should be used as the primary source. This is because the data shows what is being prescribed to people registered with Welsh GP practices and this activity is monitored and influenced by health boards. This data includes items that are prescribed in Wales by GPs and non-medical prescribers that have prescribed on behalf of the GP practice.

'Prescriptions dispensed in the community' should be used for more specific purposes where users are interested only in the items actually dispensed in Wales, and if direct comparisons are being made between different UK countries. While broadly the number of items prescribed by GPs is close to the number of items prescribed and dispensed in Wales it does not exactly match for a number of reasons including:

- prescriptions written in Wales but dispensed elsewhere in the UK (including the Isle of Man) are counted in GP prescriptions but not 'prescriptions dispensed in the community'. This is particularly common for specialist items such as stomas and incontinence appliances which are often dispensed by appliance contractors rather than pharmacies, many of which are not located in Wales
- prescriptions written in another UK country (including the Isle of Man) but dispensed in Wales are not included in GP prescriptions, but are included in 'prescriptions dispensed in the community'
- people who have had a hospital outpatient appointment and have their prescription items dispensed in their local pharmacy rather than the hospital one will not be included in GP Prescriptions, but they would be in 'prescriptions dispensed in the community'

Note that both 'GP prescriptions' and 'prescriptions dispensed in the community' capture prescriptions which are dispensed by dispensing doctors, appliance contractors and community (high street) pharmacies. Neither source contains data for items prescribed and dispensed in hospitals.

The following table shows a comparison between the items prescribed by GPs and the prescriptions dispensed in the community in 2019-20:

Table 1: Items prescribed by GPs and dispensed in the community, 2019-20

BNF Chapter	BNF Chapter Name	Items prescribed by GPs	Items dispensed in the community	Difference
01	Gastro-Intestinal System	7,509,364	7,550,631	-41,267
02	Cardiovascular System	23,771,845	23,811,595	-39,750
03	Respiratory System	6,090,992	6,115,467	-24,475
04	Central Nervous System	16,972,324	17,262,657	-290,333
05	Infections	2,512,048	2,734,620	-222,572
06	Endocrine System	8,178,327	8,214,913	-36,586
07	Obstetrics,Gynae+Urinary Tract Disorders	2,104,723	2,119,089	-14,366
08	Malignant Disease & Immunosuppression	434,938	458,609	-23,671
09	Nutrition And Blood	4,163,970	4,239,353	-75,383
10	Musculoskeletal & Joint Diseases	2,281,902	2,306,719	-24,817
11	Eye	1,282,879	1,318,229	-35,350
12	Ear, Nose And Oropharynx	972,795	1,014,211	-41,416
13	Skin	2,026,968	2,079,205	-52,237
14	Immunological Products & Vaccines	774,813	774,919	-106
15	Anaesthesia	102,130	104,611	-2,481
18	Preparations used in Diagnosis	1	4	-3
19	Other Drugs And Preparations	73,301	71,306	1,995
20	Dressings	405,258	296,539	108,719
21	Appliances	2,018,849	2,005,957	12,892
22	Incontinence Appliances	90,867	100,718	-9,851
23	Stoma Appliances	331,750	196,950	134,800
TOTAL		82,100,044	82,776,302	-676,258

Source: NHS Wales Shared Services

Key definitions

Items dispensed: A prescription item refers to a single item prescribed by a doctor on a prescription form. If a prescription form includes three items it is counted as three prescription items. A prescription item may be for a variable quantity, for example: 14, 28 or 56 tablets.

As a prescription item can consist of a varying amount of tablets or measure for the same preparation, the cost per item refers to the cost per average measure of that preparation. It does not refer to the cost per single tablet or per pack of tablets.

Net Ingredient Cost (NIC): NIC refers to the cost of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees paid to the dispenser.

Figures quoted for net ingredient cost for all years are unadjusted for inflation. Standard adjustments for inflation are not considered appropriate as drug prices are subject to controls under the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme and to other central controls.

What does the data show?

In 2019-20 the number of items prescribed by GPs in Wales and dispensed in the community increased from the previous year and was the highest on record, with just over 82.1 million items prescribed and dispensed.

The long-term trend shows large increases in the number of items prescribed and dispensed over time; the increases had slowed down in recent years, even dropping in 2017-18, but increased by 2.0 million (2.4%) between 2018-19 and 2019-20.

In contrast the Net Ingredient Cost (NIC) of the items prescribed by GPs and dispensed in the community has been broadly stable over the past 15 years, with some year-to-year volatility.

Two of the previous three years had seen a reduction in the total Net Ingredient Cost, but NIC increased by £30.8 million (5.5%) in 2019-20 since the previous year. Note that Net Ingredient Costs are not adjusted for inflation.

The BNF chapters with the most items prescribed by GPs in Wales and dispensed in the community has been unchanged over the past three years. These are cardiovascular system, central nervous system and endocrine system and combined they cover 60% of all items.

These three therapeutic classes account for 46% of the total Net Ingredient Cost of all items, reflecting that items in other therapeutic classes are relative more expensive per item.

There are some differences between health boards in terms of both the number of items and net ingredient cost of items, which may be reflected in the different demographics between health board areas.

Cardiff and Vale had the lowest number of items prescribed per prescribing unit and the lowest net ingredient cost, but the highest cost per item. Whereas five more items per prescribing unit were prescribed in Cwm Taf Morgannwg, which cost on average £25 per person more than in Cardiff and Vale. The cost per item prescribed in Cwm Taf Morgannwg was nearly the same as the Wales average, with Aneurin Bevan having the lowest cost per item, £1.10 lower than in Cardiff and Vale.

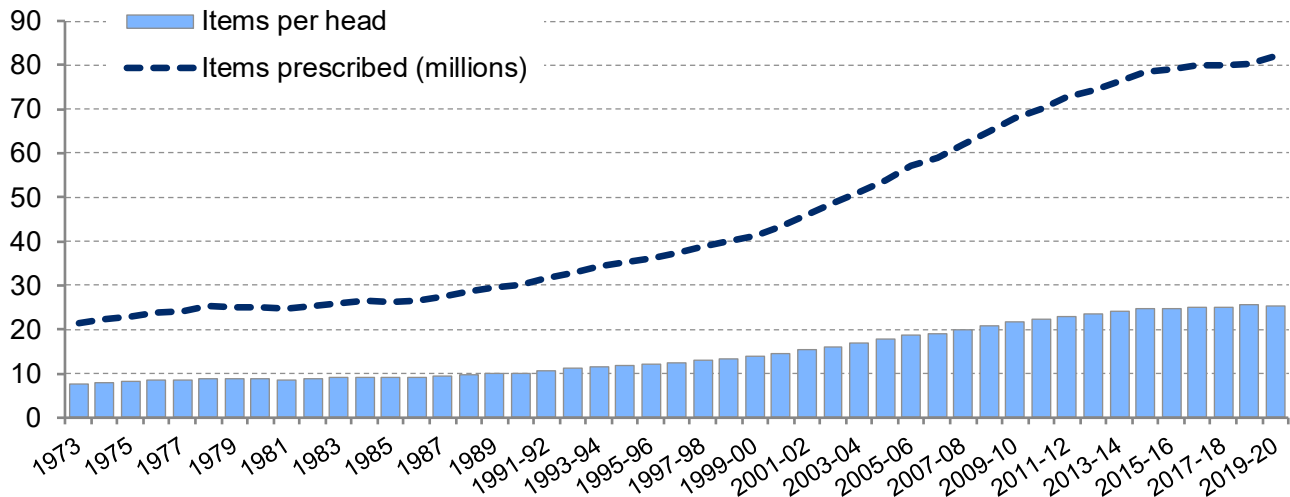
Using supplementary data for prescriptions dispensed in the community, comparisons between the four UK countries can be made. The number of items prescribed per person in Wales was higher than in the other 3 countries, with Wales having 7.1 more prescription items per person, on average, than Scotland (lowest in UK).

However, the Net Ingredient Cost per head in Wales was lower than both Scotland and Northern Ireland, but higher than England.

The Net Ingredient Cost per item prescribed was lower in Wales than all three other countries, with cost per item in Wales a third cheaper than in Scotland (highest in the UK).

GP Prescriptions

Chart 1: Prescription items issued by GPs in Wales and dispensed, since 1973



Source: NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

Latest data

In 2019-20 there were 82,100,044 items prescribed by GPs in Wales and dispensed in the community, the highest on record. This is equivalent to 25.4 items per head of the population registered with a GP in Wales.

Change since last year

Almost 2 million (1,954,091) more items were prescribed in 2019-20 compared to 2018-19, an increase of 2.4%.

This is a decrease of 0.2 items (0.6%) per head of the population registered with a GP in Wales.

Change over the last 5 years

2.9 million (2,930,342) more items were prescribed in 2019-20 than in 2015-16, an increase of 3.7%.

This is an increase of 0.5 items (2.1%) per head of the population registered with a GP in Wales.

Change since introduction of free prescriptions on 1 April 2007

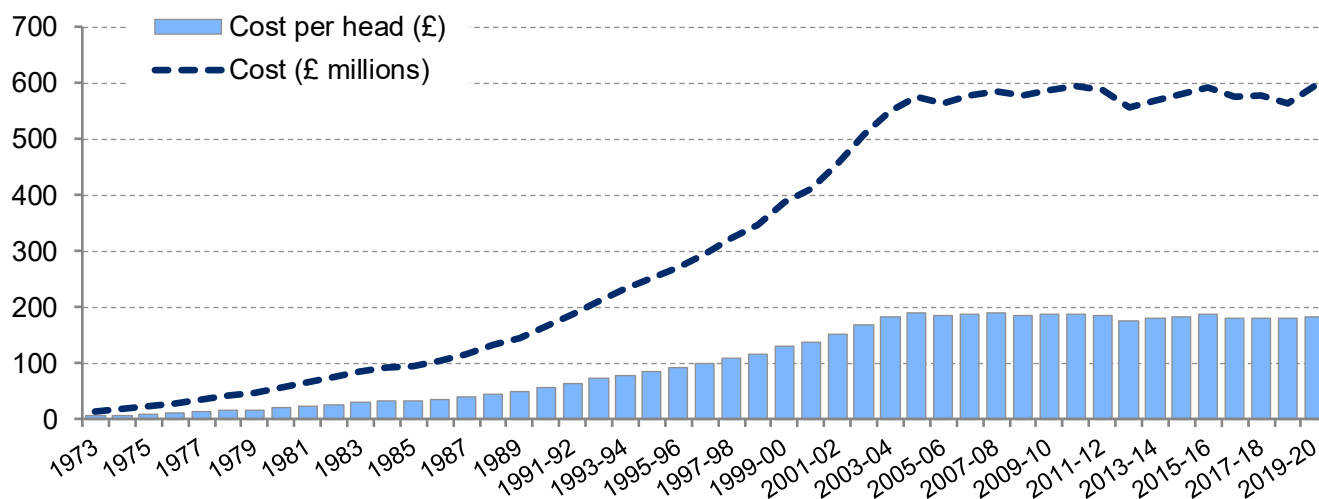
More than 20 million (20,088,869) additional items were prescribed in 2019-20 compared to 2007-08, an increase of 32.4%. This is an increase of 5.3 items, or 26.6% per head of the population registered with a GP in Wales.

The increase since free prescriptions were introduced is smaller than increase of 24.8 million (or 72.2%) items prescribed in the previous 12 year period (1993-94 to 2006-07).

Change since 1973

In 1973, the first year for which we have data, just over 21.3 million (21,332,305) items were prescribed in Wales, equivalent to 7.6 items per head of population registered with a GP. Since then, the number of items prescribed has gone up by more than 60 million (60,767,739) or 285%.

Chart 2: Net ingredient cost, since 1973



Source: NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

Latest data

In 2019-20, the total net ingredient cost was more than 593 million pounds (£593,987,018); equivalent to £183.53 per head of population registered with a GP in Wales.

Change since last year

Total net ingredient costs rose by more than 30 million pounds (£30,824,813) or 5.5% in 2019-20 compared with the previous year; the cost per head of population registered with a GP in Wales increased by £4.18 (2.3%).

Change over the last 5 years

Although total net ingredient costs rose by more than 30 million pounds in 2019-20, it was just over half a million pounds (£524,511) more than in 2015-16 (0.1%). The cost per head of population registered with a GP in Wales has gone down by £2.66 (1.4%).

Change since introduction of free prescriptions on 1 April 2007

The total net ingredient cost has increased by almost 9.6 million pounds (£9,572,404), or 1.6% since 2007-08, when free prescriptions were introduced in Wales. The cost per head of population registered with a GP in Wales has decreased by £5.36 (2.8%).

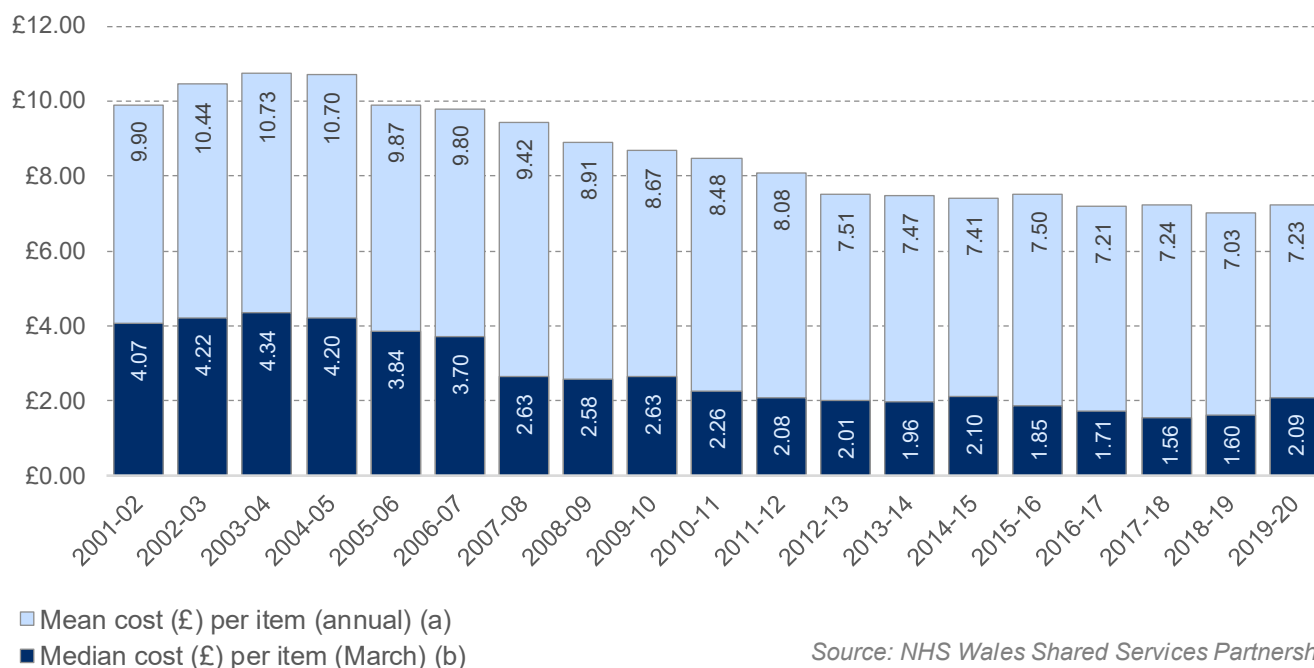
Change since 1973

In 1973, the total net ingredient cost was almost 14.5 million pounds (£14,402,992). The cost regularly went up by more than 10% each year until 2003-04 when annual increases slowed down, with costs reaching a peak of almost 600 million pounds (£594,329,295.68) in 2010-11. Since then, the annual change has ranged from a reduction of 5.1% to an increase of 5.5%, but the total costs are still 4,024% higher than in 1973.

In 1973 the cost per head of the population registered with a GP was £5.14.

NOTE: Figures quoted for net ingredient cost for all years are not adjusted for inflation. Standard adjustments for inflation are not considered appropriate as drug prices are subject to controls under the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme and to other central controls.

Chart 3: Average net ingredient costs per prescription item prescribed by GPs in Wales



(a) Mean cost per item, shows the average (mean) cost per prescription item over the whole calendar year.
 (b) Median cost per item, shows the median cost using data from March in each year. Data for a single month is used for practical purposes given the volume of prescription items issued.

- In 2019-20 the net ingredient cost per item (mean) was £7.23. This is 20p (3.0%) more than in 2018-19 and £2.66 (26.9%) less than in 2001-02.
- The mean cost per item has been on an overall downward trend over the longer term; the increase in 2019-20 is only the third year-on-year increase since 2003-04-.
- The median cost per item in March 2020 was £2.09, up 49p (30.6%) from the previous March. It has been less than £3 since 2007-08 and this is the first time it has been above £2 since 2014-15.

Mean: The mean cost per item shows the total net ingredient cost for all prescription items, divided by the total number of prescription items for the whole calendar year.

Median: The median cost per item is the middle amount when all costs per item are ranked in order from cheapest to most expensive; half of all costs are less than or equal to this amount, and the other half are more than or equal to this amount. The median is commonly used in preference to the mean as it is less susceptible to extreme values than the mean.

Therapeutic Classes, 2019-20

[Chart 4](#) shows the proportion of items prescribed in Wales, while [Chart 5](#) shows the net ingredient cost (NIC) of prescription items in Wales, by the six largest therapeutic classes (by item) during 2019-20. A list of the [therapeutic classes](#) is included in the notes section of this release.

Chart 4: Items by therapeutic class, 2019-20

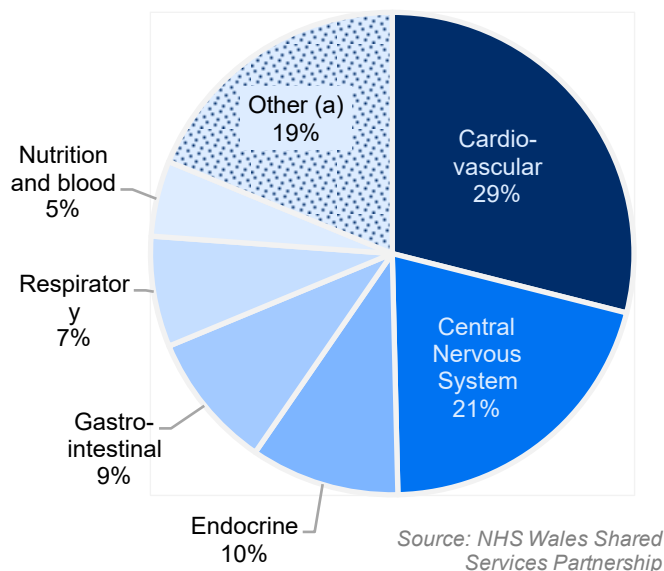
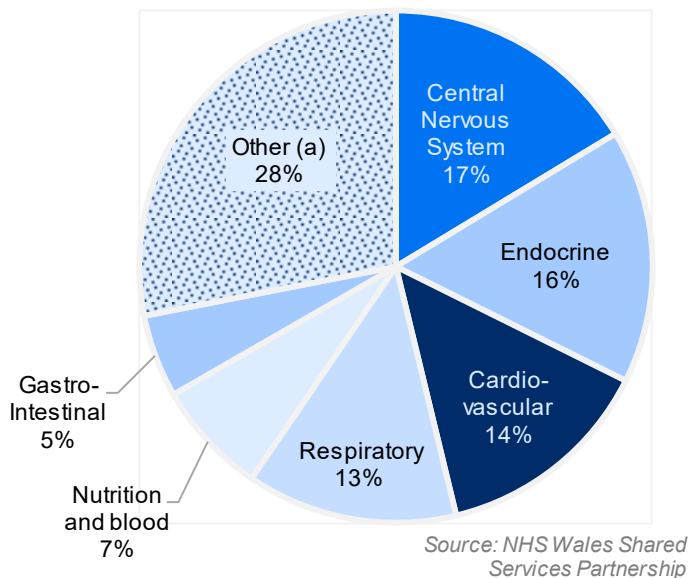


Chart 5: NIC by therapeutic class, 2019-20



(a) Includes: Infections, Musculoskeletal & Joint Diseases, Skin, Obstetrics, Gynae & Urinary Tract Disorders, Appliances, Eye, Ear, Nose And Oropharynx, Immunological Products & Vaccines, Dressings, Malignant Disease & Immunosuppression, Stoma Appliances, Anaesthesia, Incontinence Appliances, Other Drugs And Preparations, and Preparations used in Diagnosis

- Half of all items prescribed in Wales were for the treatment of conditions of the cardiovascular or central nervous systems.
- 23.8 million items were prescribed for treatment of the cardiovascular system, equal to 7.3 items per head of population registered with a GP in Wales.
- 17.0 million items were prescribed for the treatment of the central nervous system, equal to 5.2 items per head of population registered with a GP in Wales.
- Although the number of items prescribed for treatment of the cardiovascular and central nervous systems accounted for half of the total items prescribed (Chart 3), the net ingredient cost (NIC) for the same classes only accounted for 30.2% of the total (Chart 4).

Analysis by local health board

The following charts show the numbers of items prescribed by GPs contracted to Welsh health boards together with the associated net ingredient cost (NIC). Rather than comparing items per **head** of population registered with a GP, the charts show items and NIC per **Prescribing Unit**. Prescribing units (PUs) are calculated by giving a greater weight (by a factor of three) to the registered population aged 65 or over. They have been adopted to take account of elderly patients' greater needs for medication and so to make more meaningful comparisons between health boards. The remaining differentials may be related to relative need and local culture and practice.

The 2019 mid-year estimates show that 21.0% of the population in Wales were aged 65 or over. This varied between health boards, with a relatively greater percentage of older people in Powys (27.5%), Hywel Dda (24.8%), and Betsi Cadwaladr (23.3%); and a relatively smaller percentage of older people in Swansea Bay (20.2%), Aneurin Bevan (20.1%), Cwm Taf Morgannwg (19.6%) and Cardiff and Vale (16.1%).

Chart 6: Analysis per prescribing unit (PU), by local health board, 2019-20

Chart 6a: Items per PU

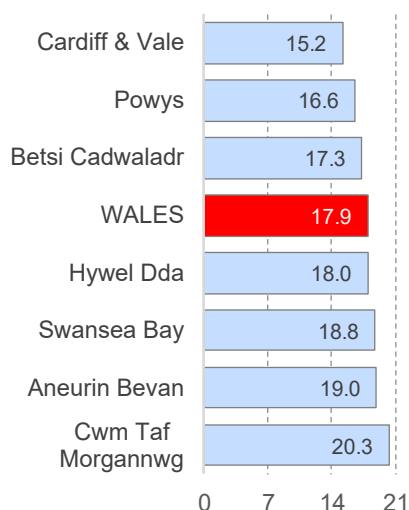


Chart 6b: NIC (£) per PU

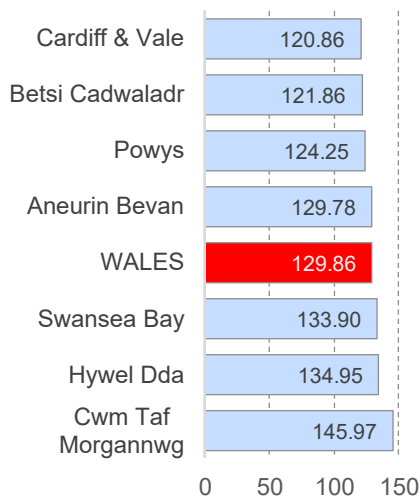
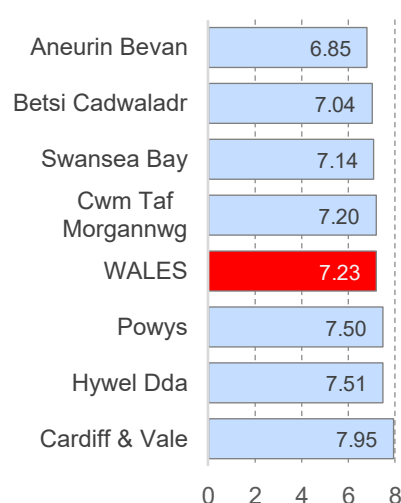


Chart 6c: Cost per item (£)



Source: NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

- The number of items prescribed per prescribing unit in 2019-20 was 17.9 for Wales, and varied across the health boards from 15.2 in Cardiff & Vale to 20.3 in Cwm Taf Morgannwg.
- The net ingredient cost per prescribing unit in 2019-20 was £129.86 in Wales, and ranged from £120.86 in Betsi Cadwaladr to £145.97 in Cwm Taf Morgannwg.
- Cost per item averaged £7.23 across Wales, and ranged from £6.85 in Aneurin Bevan to £7.95 in Cardiff & Vale.
- GPs in Cardiff & Vale prescribed fewer items per prescribing unit than in other health boards but at a higher cost per item. In contrast, Cwm Taf had the highest rates per prescribing unit for both items and NIC but the fourth lowest cost per item.

Table 2: The 25 items most frequently prescribed by GPs, 2019-20

BNF Chemical Name	BNF Chapter Name	BNF Section Name	Items
Atorvastatin	Cardiovascular System	Lipid-Regulating Drugs	2,869,692
Omeprazole	Gastro-Intestinal System	Antisecretory Drugs+Mucosal Protectants	2,614,304
Levothyroxine Sodium	Endocrine System	Thyroid And Antithyroid Drugs	2,545,176
Ramipril	Cardiovascular System	Hypertension and Heart Failure	2,363,394
Amlodipine	Cardiovascular System	Nit	2,208,594
Bisoprolol Fumarate	Cardiovascular System	Beta-Adrenoceptor Blocking Drugs	1,856,230
Simvastatin	Cardiovascular System	Lipid-Regulating Drugs	1,821,683
Salbutamol	Respiratory System	Bronchodilators	1,819,626
Co-Codamol (Codeine Phos/Paracetamol)	Central Nervous System	Analgesics	1,804,590
Lansoprazole	Gastro-Intestinal System	Antisecretory Drugs+Mucosal Protectants	1,749,203
Aspirin	Cardiovascular System	Antiplatelet Drugs	1,577,686
Metformin Hydrochloride	Endocrine System	Drugs Used In Diabetes	1,473,490
Sertraline Hydrochloride	Central Nervous System	Antidepressant Drugs	1,419,202
Citalopram Hydrobromide	Central Nervous System	Antidepressant Drugs	1,310,046
Paracetamol	Central Nervous System	Analgesics	1,204,772
Amitriptyline Hydrochloride	Central Nervous System	Antidepressant Drugs	1,104,580
Furosemide	Cardiovascular System	Diuretics	918,156
Beclometasone Dipropionate	Respiratory System	Corticosteroids (Respiratory)	882,310
Mirtazapine	Central Nervous System	Antidepressant Drugs	859,193
Ergocalciferol	Nutrition And Blood	Vitamins	811,795
Colecalciferol	Nutrition And Blood	Vitamins	805,905
Bendroflumethiazide	Cardiovascular System	Diuretics	769,197
Losartan Potassium	Cardiovascular System	Hypertension and Heart Failure	767,598
Clopidogrel	Cardiovascular System	Antiplatelet Drugs	682,938
Lisinopril	Cardiovascular System	Hypertension and Heart Failure	671,510

Source: NHS Wales Shared Services

Atorvastatin was the most prescribed item in 2019-20, with 10.1% more items prescribed than in 2018-19.

The ten most prescribed items in 2019-20 were the same ten items as in 2018-19. The five most prescribed items also remained in the same order as in 2018-19.

Nine of the ten most prescribed items were prescribed more times in 2019-20 than in 2018-19; Simvastatin was the only item to have fewer items prescribed in 2019-20.

UK Comparisons, 2019-20 (a)

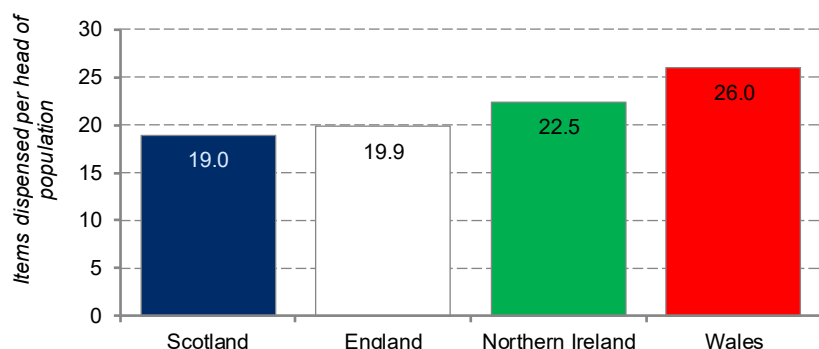
Charts 11-13 show the number of prescription items dispensed and the costs¹ per head of population, and the cost per prescription item, in Wales compared with the other countries of the UK.

The prescription data for these charts is based on prescriptions dispensed in the community in Wales, rather than prescriptions issued by GPs in Wales so the figures for Wales will differ from those presented in the other charts in the release. Prescriptions dispensed data is the only available data for comparison purposes in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The population data used is the mid-year population estimates for 2019 rather than the population registered with a GP.

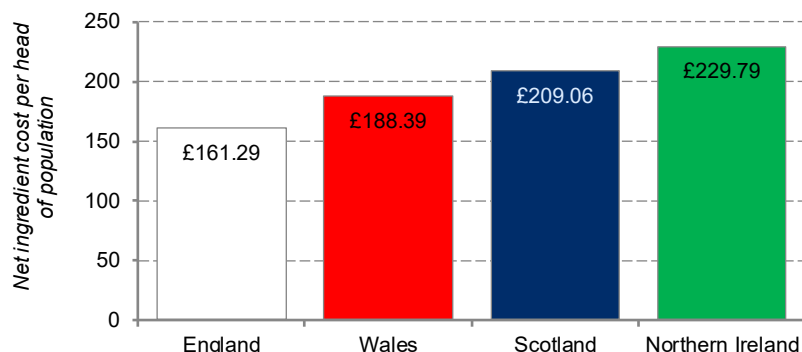
¹ Net ingredient cost – see notes section at the end of the release.

Chart 11: Prescription items dispensed per head of population, UK countries



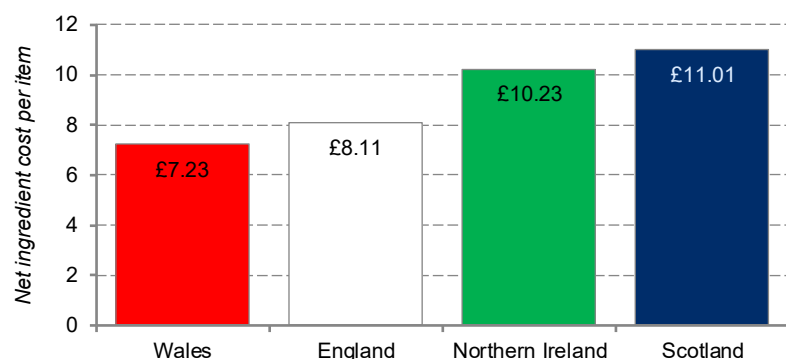
More prescription items per head of population were dispensed in Wales than any of the other UK countries: 26.0 in Wales, compared with 19.0 in Scotland, 19.9 in England and 22.5 in Northern Ireland.

Chart 12: Net ingredient cost per head of population, UK countries



The net ingredient cost (NIC) per head of population in Wales was higher than in England, but lower than in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Chart 13: Net ingredient cost per prescription item, UK countries



Wales has the lowest NIC per prescription item, at £7.23 compared with £8.11 in England, £10.23 in Northern Ireland and £11.01 in Scotland.

(a) The PCA data covers all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacies, appliance contractors and dispensing doctors in Wales including items personally administered by GPs. The data refers to the financial year 2019-20 for Wales, 2018-19 for Scotland, and the calendar year 2019 for England and Northern Ireland. These are the latest and most comparable data available. Please see notes on the use of PCA data in the Notes at the end of the release.

Key Quality Information

Accuracy and coverage

Source

The data are obtained from Prescribing Services, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership and are based on information obtained from prescriptions sent to Prescribing Services for payment.

From April 2013, monthly prescribing data by individual GP practices is also available via the [Prescribing Services](#) website.

The main source of data in this statistical release covers prescription items prescribed by GPs in Wales and dispensed in the community. Excluded from this release are prescriptions which were prescribed but, for a variety of reasons, have not been dispensed. It also covers prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered. Analysis by UK country can only be provided using the supplementary data for prescriptions dispensed in the community in Wales (but written by a GP or other qualified practitioner anywhere in the UK or Isle of Man).

The statistics are based on the data provided by Prescribing Services following their payment processing. Prescribing Services, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership have stated that due to the complex and manual processes involved there may be inaccuracies in capturing prescription information which are then reflected in the data. Internal quality assurance processes exist and currently the prescription processing activity is internally audited at around 99% accuracy (i.e. at least 99% of prescriptions are processed accurately).

Accessibility and clarity

Alt text is provided for all charts and tables so that they can be read with a screen-reader.

Data for individual drugs are published in accompanying spreadsheets and data by BNF chapters is published on [StatsWales](#).

An interactive dashboard was first published in 2019 alongside this statistical release which allows users to easily view detailed data and produce bespoke analysis to meet their needs.

The statistical releases in 2019 and 2020 combine two previous statistical releases. Previously two sets of prescriptions data were published (one called GP prescriptions and the other called prescriptions dispensed in the community (including PCA data)). The new release aims to improve on data clarity to users, providing clearer messages about which data source should be used for different purposes.

Timeliness and punctuality

Data is published as soon as is practicable. This statistical release is published in the autumn including data for the new financial year, ending in March. The short time lag allows data to be validated before being published.

Comparability and coherence

Using the supplementary data for prescriptions dispensed in the community, data can be compared across UK countries. BNF definitions are consistent across the UK.

Data for other UK countries

Data for other UK countries can be accessed via the following webpages:

England:

[Prescription Cost Analysis, England](#)

Scotland:

[Dispenser Payments and Prescription Cost Analysis, Scotland](#)

Northern Ireland:

[Prescription Cost Analysis, Northern Ireland](#)

Note that varying prescribing practice may affect the interpretation of UK country comparisons.

Relevance

Users and uses of these statistics

The key users of prescription statistics are:

- ministers, members of the Senedd and the Members Research Service in the Welsh Parliament
- policy makers of the Welsh Government
- other government departments
- National Health Service and Public Health Wales
- students, academics and universities
- General Medical Council and other professional organisations
- individual citizens and private companies.

The statistics are used in a variety of ways. Some examples of the uses include:

- advice to Ministers
- inform the public
- to inform debate in the Welsh Parliament and beyond.

A quality report on 'Prescriptions by GPs in Wales' statistics will be published in due course. It will include additional information on definitions and coverage, and details of our users.

Definitions

Items dispensed

A prescription item refers to a single item prescribed by a doctor on a prescription form. If a prescription form includes three items it is counted as three prescription items. A prescription item may be for a variable quantity; for example. 14, 28 or 56 tablets. A prescription item can consist of a varying amount of tablets or measure for the same preparation, therefore the cost per item refers to the cost per average measure of that preparation. It does not refer to the cost per single tablet or per pack of tablets.

Net Ingredient Cost (NIC)

Net Ingredient Cost refers to the cost of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees. It does not include any adjustment where the patient has purchased a pre-payment certificate.

Figures quoted for net ingredient cost for all years are unadjusted for inflation. Standard adjustments for inflation are not considered appropriate as drug prices are subject to controls under the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme and to other central controls.

Notes on Net Ingredient Cost

Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme

The [Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme](#) is a voluntary agreement between the Department of Health and the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry. The scheme places some control on the costs of medicines to the NHS and applies to branded licensed medicines.

Category M

The [category M scheme](#) is an arrangement where the net ingredient cost for selected generic formulations is controlled, with the aim of reducing costs overall. Medicines subject to these arrangements are classified as category M in Part VIII of the Drug Tariff. The majority of these formulations have fallen in price, although some formulations have increased in price. These price adjustments have contributed to shifts in the relative positions of drug and affect overall cost per item.

Falling costs

Several factors have contributed to the fall in costs, notably changes to the price of many medicines under the category M scheme. Adjustments to prices under this scheme have seen dramatic changes to costs across therapeutic areas over recent years.

Other factors which have lowered costs include:

- decreased use of some medicines, in particular some of the more costly formulations
- generic versions of some medicines becoming available
- the fall in the price of some medicines outside of the category M scheme

Free prescriptions

Prescription charges were frozen on 1 April 2001 and gradually reduced each year until free prescriptions were introduced in Wales on 1 April 2007. Before 2007 prescriptions were free for those people under 16, 16-18 year olds in full-time education, over 60, pregnant women and those who had had a baby within the previous 12 months, those who were on certain benefits, or on a low income, or who had certain medical conditions. These exemptions accounted for around 90% of the population, leaving only around 10% to pay for their prescriptions.

Generic Prescribing

A prescription item prescribed generically refers to a prescription which has been written using the British Approved Name (BAN), International Non-proprietary Name (INN) or the scientific name of the

active ingredient rather than the proprietary name. In general, generic items are cheaper than non-generic equivalents.

Population registered with a GP

This is the number of people registered with a GP in Wales. In 2009 this was at 1 October, otherwise this is at 30 September. The data is sourced from NHS Shared Services Partnership.

Prescribing units (PUs)

PUs are calculated by giving a greater weight (by a factor of three) to the population aged 65 or over (used as the denominator). They have been adopted here to take account of the greater need of elderly patients for medication and so to make more meaningful comparisons between health boards.

As an example for 2014-15:

Total prescription items: 78,512,726

Total population age 0-64, 2014 population registered with a GP: 2,555,500

Total population aged 65 or over: 617,494

PUs: $4,407,982 (2,555,500 + (3 * 617,494))$

Items per PU: 17.81

The British National Formulary (BNF)

The British National Formulary (BNF) is a joint publication of the British Medical Association and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. It is published biannually under the authority of a Joint Formulary Committee which comprises representatives of the two professional bodies and of the UK Health Departments.

Therapeutic classification

PCA data are based on the therapeutic grouping used in the British National Formulary (BNF). The classification in this report is based on the September 2019 BNF.

NHS Prescription Services have created pseudo-BNF chapters, for items that cannot be found in BNF chapters 1 to 15. The majority of these items are dressings and appliances, which NHS Prescription Services have classified into four pseudo-BNF chapters (20 to 23). However some gel and colloid dressings that are classified as drugs are included in a pseudo section within BNF 13 (13.13). NHS Prescription Services have produced a booklet on [BNF classifications](#) and the pseudo classifications used.

Examples of the conditions covered by each group (unless group is self-explanatory) are given below:

- ◆ **Gastro-intestinal system:** including preparations for the management of indigestion, diarrhoea, constipation, haemorrhoids, ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease
- ◆ **Cardiovascular system:** including preparations for the management of arrhythmia (irregular heart rhythm), hypertension (high blood pressure), heart failure and high cholesterol
- ◆ **Respiratory system:** including preparations for the management of asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cystic fibrosis, allergies, cough and congestion

- ◆ **Central nervous system:** including preparations for the management of anxiety, sleeplessness, depression, pain, epilepsy, substance misuse, Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease
- ◆ **Infections:** including preparations for the treatment of infection
- ◆ **Endocrine system:** including preparations for the management of diabetes, an under or over active thyroid gland and other hormonal conditions
- ◆ **Obstetrics (formerly obstetrics, gynaecology and urinary tract disorders):** including contraceptives and preparations used in obstetrics
- ◆ **Malignant disease and immunosuppression:** including preparations for the treatment and management of cancer and conditions affecting the immune system
- ◆ **Nutrition and blood:** vitamins, minerals and prescribed foods
- ◆ **Musculoskeletal and joint disorders:** including preparations for the management of rheumatoid arthritis and gout, myasthenia gravis, spasticity and topical treatments for pain
- ◆ **Eye:** including preparations for the treatment and management of eye infections and glaucoma
- ◆ **Ear, nose and oropharynx:** including preparations for the treatment and management of conditions affecting the ear, nose and throat
- ◆ **Skin:** including preparations for the treatment and management of eczema, psoriasis, acne, warts and verrucae
- ◆ **Immunological products and vaccines:** including preparations for the treatment of anaemia, vitamin preparations and supplements
- ◆ **Anaesthesia**
- ◆ **Preparations used in diagnosis**
- ◆ **Other drugs and preparations**
- ◆ **Dressings**
- ◆ **Appliances**
- ◆ **Incontinence supplies**
- ◆ **Stoma appliances**

A full list of the therapeutic classes (BNF chapters) and their sub groups are shown in the following table.

Therapeutic Class

Gastro-intestinal System

Antacids
 Antispasmodic and other drugs altering gut motility

 Ulcer healing drugs
 Antidiarrhoeal drugs
 Treatment of chronic diarrhoeas
 Laxatives
 Preparations for haemorrhoids
 Stoma care
 Drugs affecting intestinal secretions

Cardiovascular System

Positive inotropic drugs
 Diuretics
 Anti-arrhythmic drugs
 Beta-adrenoceptor blocking drugs
 Antihypertensive therapy
 Nitrates and other vasodilators, and

Malignant Disease and Immunosuppression

Cytotoxic drugs

 Drugs affecting the immune response
 Sex hormones and hormone antagonists in malignant disease

Nutrition and Blood

Anaemias and other blood disorders
 Fluids and electrolytes
 Oral nutrition
 Minerals
 Vitamins
 Bitters and tonics
 Metabolic disorders
 Foods
 Compound vitamin / mineral formulations
 Health supplements
 Other health supplements

calcium channel blockers
Sympathomimetics
Anticoagulants and protamine

Antiplatelet drugs
Antifibrinolytic drugs and haemostatics

Lipid-lowering drugs
Local sclerosants

Respiratory System

Bronchodilators
Corticosteroids
Cromoglycate and related therapy
Allergic disorders
Oxygen
Mucolytics
Aromatic inhalations
Cough preparations
Systemic nasal decongestants

Central Nervous System

Hypnotics and anxiolytics
drugs used in psychoses and related disorders
Antidepressant drugs
Central nervous system stimulants
Appetite suppressants
Drugs used in nausea and vertigo
Analgesics
Antiepileptics
Drugs used in parkinsonism and related disorders
Drugs used in substance dependence
Drugs used in Alzheimer's disease

Infections

Antibacterial drugs
Antifungal drugs
Antiviral drugs
Antiprotozoal drugs
Anthelmintics

Endocrine System

Drugs used in diabetes
Thyroid and antithyroid drugs
Corticosteroids
Sex hormones
Hypothalamic and pituitary hormones and antioestrogens
Other endocrine drugs

Obstetrics

Drugs used in obstetrics
Treatment of vaginal and vulval conditions
Contraceptives
Drugs used for genito-urinary disorders

Musculoskeletal and Joint Disorders

Drugs used in rheumatic diseases and gout
Drugs used in neuromuscular disorders
Drugs used for relief of soft tissue inflammation

Eye

Anti-infective eye preparations
Corticosteroids and other anti-inflammatory preparations
Mydriatics and cycloplegics
Treatment of glaucoma
Local anaesthetics
Miscellaneous ophthalmic preparations
Contact lenses

Ear, Nose and Oropharynx

Drugs acting on the ear
Drugs acting on the nose
Drugs acting on the oropharynx

Skin

Vehicles and emulsifying agents
Emollient and barrier preparations
Local anaesthetics and antipruritics
Topical corticosteroids
Preparations for eczema and psoriasis
Preparations for acne
Preparations for warts and calluses
Sunscreens and camouflagers
Shampoos and some other scalp preparations
Anti-infective skin preparations

Disinfectants and cleansers

Antiperspirants

Wound management products

Topical circulatory preparations

Miscellaneous topical preparations

Immunological Products and Vaccines

Vaccines and antisera

Immunoglobulins

Anaesthesia

General anaesthesia

Local anaesthesia

Preparations used in Diagnosis

X-ray contrast media

Other Drugs and Preparations

Dressings

Appliances

Incontinence Supplies

Stoma Appliances

NOTE: some preparations have multiple indications and may therefore be classified under more than one therapeutic class.

Pharmacy and Appliance Contractor Dispensing Data

Data on [Pharmacy and Appliance Contractor Dispensing Data in Wales](#) is available from NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership, Primary Care Services.

National Statistics status

The [United Kingdom Statistics Authority](#) has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

The continued designation of these statistics as National Statistics was confirmed on 29 September 2011 following a [compliance check](#) by the Office for Statistics Regulation. These statistics last underwent a full assessment against the Code of Practice in 2011.

Since the latest review by the Office for Statistics Regulation, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

- added more value by providing more detailed breakdowns, including maps and infographics
- enhanced trustworthiness by reducing pre-release access

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is Welsh Government's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

Well-being of Future Generations Act

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act puts in place seven well-being goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators ('national indicators') that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the Well-being goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before the National Assembly. The 46 national indicators were laid in March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the well-being goals and associated technical information is available in the [Well-being of Wales report](#).

Further information on the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local well-being assessments and local well-being plans.

Further details

This release is available at <https://gov.wales/prescriptions-wales>

Next update

The next release covering 2020-21 is planned for publication in autumn 2021.

We want your feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics, which can be provided by email to stats.healthinfo@gov.wales

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