

2026 Manifesto for Wales



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Who are we?

The Royal College of Podiatry (RCPod) represents qualified, regulated podiatrists across the UK, supporting them to deliver high-quality foot and lower limb care.

As the professional body and trade union representing podiatrists in the UK, we advocate for the integration of foot and lower limb health as a vital component of general health and well-being, recognising its critical role in preventing disease, reducing admissions, and embracing digital innovations.

A focus on prevention

Podiatrists provide ongoing support to patients with long term conditions and complex needs, helping them to maintain function, mobility, and independence. This is particularly relevant for older people, where reduced mobility due to foot pain or dysfunction can lead to social isolation, loss of independence, and increased reliance on care services.

Podiatry interventions, such as gait analysis, exercise prescription and provision of orthoses, address biomechanical issues that contribute to mobility challenges. These services support patients to remain active, which is critical for physical and mental health and well-being. Podiatrists also have a critical role in treating foot ulcers, particularly diabetic foot ulcers, preventing deterioration and avoidable lower limb amputations.



By keeping patients mobile and independent, podiatrists in both the NHS and the independent sector alleviate pressure on other parts of the health and social care system, including secondary care and domiciliary and residential care. By putting preventative care and patient education at the heart of treatment plans, podiatrists help individuals manage their foot and lower limb health effectively, thereby reducing their risk of complications, and hospital admissions.

Poor foot health outcomes, such as ulceration, infection, amputation, and sepsis, are closely linked to socioeconomic factors. Inequalities in access to podiatry services can lead to preventable complications and poorer health outcomes. Every citizen in Wales should have timely access to preventative podiatry services based on need. This requires a concerted investment in both workforce expansion and community-based care models, ensuring that no one, regardless of their location or circumstances, is excluded from the benefits podiatry can provide. By prioritising this, the government can reduce health inequalities, enhance care quality, and improve overall population health.

Recommendation

We call on Welsh Government to provide targeted funding for NHS Podiatry services in underserved areas to ensure that the people most at risk of poor foot health outcomes can receive timely and appropriate care.

Workforce

In contrast with overall significant workforce growth in the NHS, the number of podiatrists employed by the NHS in Wales has fallen over the past 5 years: in June 2019 there were 249.4 WTE, by June 2024 this had fallen to 218.2 WTE¹. Health Boards are reporting difficulties recruiting to vacant posts at all levels, and we know that the existing workforce is ageing - HCPC data shows that



podiatry is significantly older than other than workforce groups; 54% of podiatrists are aged over 50, compared with 28% for all HCPC regulated professions².

Simultaneously the need for preventative podiatric interventions is rising. The ageing population is presenting with increasing acuity and living longer with multiple long-term conditions. Public Health Wales has reported a 40% increase in the number of people living with diabetes in Wales in just over the last 10 years³, a significant proportion of whom will need podiatric care to reduce the risk of complications. Yet the numbers of podiatrists has contracted during this time. There appears to be a disconnect between a shrinking and ageing workforce, and the growing demand for podiatric care.

We are also seriously concerned that workforce shortages are creating huge pressures upon current staff. Feedback from our members has highlighted significant issues of stress and burnout among the workforce, ultimately causing some to leave the NHS. Patients appear to be presenting with increasingly complex needs, and staff are facing the challenge of responding to this with no additional resources, placing additional burden upon them.

The Royal College of Podiatry believe that attention is urgently needed at a national level to maximise the benefits podiatry can offer and prevent avoidable patient harms, such as amputations and deaths relating to lower limb disease. A healthy pipeline of new recruits into the profession is needed both to maintain and increase workforce numbers. Yet there have been several years where there has been no increase in the number of undergraduate places commissioned by Welsh Government. There must be a concerted effort to understand why the profession is in decline and how to attract new numbers to the profession so that the best outcomes for patients can be promoted.

Recommendation

We call on the next Welsh Government to develop a workforce strategy for podiatry, based on projected population need and supported with targeted investment in recruitment, retention and training, to build a robust pipeline for the current and future supply of podiatrists.

Widening access to the profession

In Wales, the only route to qualification as a podiatrist is the full-time undergraduate course at Cardiff Metropolitan University. We believe that the reliance on a single provider in South Wales may be contributing to recruitment difficulties in some parts of Wales, while the full-time route may also deter mature students, or those on lower incomes who need to earn whilst studying. Expanding access to the podiatry profession through a variety of new routes to qualification, including part time options, postgraduate level entry and earn as you learn routes is essential for addressing workforce shortages and improving the diversity of the sector. Degree level apprenticeships already available in England offer a viable route to traditional university education, allowing individuals to gain hands-on experience while earning a living. This pathway is particularly important for those who may face financial or logistical barriers to higher education.

The next Welsh Government must take decisive action to introduce degree apprenticeship schemes within podiatry. This will not only create more inclusive routes into health and social care professions but will also support local communities by nurturing a skilled workforce that is attuned to the unique needs of the Welsh population. By increasing training opportunities in this way, the Welsh Government can enhance healthcare provision, reduce inequalities, and provide more individuals with life-changing career opportunities.

Recommendation

We call on the next Welsh Government to expand access to podiatry through exploring new routes to qualification, including degree apprenticeships.

Transformation of the NHS

The NHS is undergoing significant transformation to improve patient outcomes, enhance efficiency, and reduce pressures on acute services. NHS Podiatry services play a critical role in enabling effective acute to community care. By supporting individuals with complex foot and lower limb conditions, podiatrists help to prevent hospital admissions, facilitate early discharge, and promote long-term health and mobility.

Hospital-based podiatric services, such as multidisciplinary foot services delivering limb salvage, need to remain within an acute setting to provide the wrap-around care required for limb and life threatening foot disease. However, better integration of community health services and primary care can enable the early detection, diagnoses, and prevention required to reduce the number of people suffering from diabetic and non-diabetic foot ulceration.

Expanding podiatric services is essential for achieving person-centred care closer to home. For example, virtual wards, where podiatrists utilise telemedicine to monitor discharged patients, have potential to enhance post-acute recovery whilst reducing readmissions. Establishing such models across Wales could optimise resource utilisation and improve patient outcomes.

To enable the impact of podiatry within community health services, several steps need to be taken. Expansion of access to NHS Podiatry services within Community Health Services can help reach vulnerable populations earlier, preventing escalation of complications, which can lead to admission. Appointing podiatrists within First Point of Contact roles, would enable primary care services to ensure patients are seen in a responsive, timely manner, by the correct clinician, at the appropriate time, with full assessment and diagnostics already in place.



Podiatry is the cornerstone in delivering essential interventions that prevent admissions, facilitate timely discharge, and promote long-term health. By investing in and integrating podiatry services within the wider healthcare system, the NHS can achieve improved outcomes for patients and alleviate pressure on acute and community care resources.

Recommendation

We call on the next Welsh Government to invest in NHS Podiatry services within primary and community health services. This must include direct access to podiatrists as First Point of Contact Practitioners within primary care, as well as appropriate clinical spaces to provide this care.

We call for the next Welsh Government to commit to:

- Targeted funding for NHS Podiatry services in underserved areas to ensure that the people most at risk of poor foot health outcomes can receive timely and appropriate care
- A workforce strategy for podiatry in Wales, based on projected population need and supported with targeted investment in recruitment, retention and training, to build a robust pipeline for the current and future supply of podiatrists
- Expanding access to podiatry through exploring new routes to qualification, including degree apprenticeships
- Investment in NHS Podiatry services within primary and community health services, including First Point of Contact roles so that patients can access the right care faster and closer to home.

References

- 1) See <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/NHS-Staff/Non-Medical-Staff/othersnonmedicalstaff-by-jobtype-areaofwork-year>
- 2) See HCPC Diversity data: chiropractors/podiatrists - March 2023, accessed online at <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/resources/data/2023/diversity-data-chiropractors-2023/>
- 3) See <https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/observatory/data-and-analysis/diabetes-prevalence-trends-risk-factors-and-10-year-projection/>

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