

Welsh Government Changes to the Ambulance Performance Framework

What do these changes mean for the Welsh Ambulance Service?

Stakeholder Briefing Pack



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Gwasanaethau Ambiwllans Cymru
Welsh Ambulance Services
University NHS Trust

FOREWORD

Rachel Marsh, Executive Director Strategy, Planning and Performance /
Clinical Model Transformation Senior Responsible Officer

In March 2025, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services announced changes to the Ambulance Performance Framework for a 12-month pilot starting on 1st July 2025. You can read the announcement in full here:

[Changes to ambulance response to focus on saving more lives | GOV.WALES](#)

We welcome the changes, which mark an exciting new chapter for the Welsh Ambulance Service as we adopt performance measures focused on clinical outcomes and quality of care, rather than solely on the speed of response. This change will support us in our ambition to provide high-quality patient-focused care that will benefit communities across Wales.

This briefing pack is designed to provide you with important information about the upcoming changes to the Ambulance Performance Framework set out by Welsh Government and what this means for us. The document will also describe some of the changes we have already made to improve patient care and make services safer, and outline how our Integrated Clinical Services Model is continuing to evolve.



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History of the Red target

The eight-minute ambulance response time target was introduced in 1974 by the Department of Health and Social Security. This target was adopted by all nations across the UK as the core measure of ambulance performance and was subsequently implemented by many other countries internationally.

The eight-minute target applies to the highest acuity Red 999 calls, such as cardiac arrest or choking, where there is an immediate threat to life, requiring an urgent ambulance dispatch and 'blue light' response.

In Wales, the eight-minute response target has been in place for decades, despite no clinical evidence to support it.

Current Red ambulance response target:

Red category

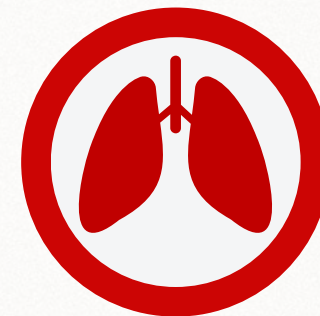
Patients experiencing an immediately life threatening illness or injury

Performance target

65% of emergency responses to arrive within eight minutes pan Wales

The types of conditions that sit in the current Red category include:

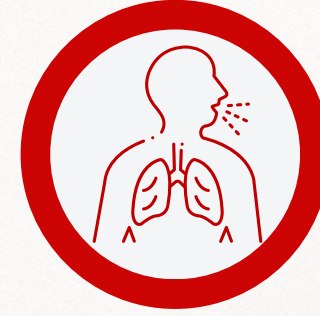
Respiratory arrest



Choking



Breathing problems



Cardiac arrest



Major haemorrhage



Changes to Red demand:

The current Red category has broadened significantly over time and now accounts for circa 15% of all verified 999 incidents.

However, it has equally become clear that not all calls currently categorised as Red require an eight-minute response, which means ambulances are being sent on 'blue lights' unnecessarily to calls, meaning that they are unable to attend life threatening emergencies in the community.



Why is the Ambulance Performance Framework changing?

During a review of ambulance performance, the Senedd's Health and Social Care Committee discussed the challenges impacting ambulance service provision and the limitations associated with the current eight-minute ambulance performance target for Red calls.

Following consideration, the Health and Social Care Committee published a series of recommendations in August 2024 to support improvements for the ambulance service.

One of the recommendations accepted by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care set out the requirement to undertake an urgent review of the existing national eight-minute target for ambulance response, and to determine whether it is still appropriate.

Key decision timelines



1974

Ambulance response times introduced

In 1974, the eight-minute ambulance response standard was introduced across the UK



August 2024

Senedd Health and Social Care Committee recommendation

In August 2024, the Health and Social Care Committee published a recommendation to review the appropriateness of the eight-minute ambulance response target



October 2024

Ambulance task review group established

A Welsh Government-led ambulance task review group was established with key broad mix of expert leads including policy leads and statisticians, ambulance commissioners, and senior clinicians with experience of ambulance and pre-hospital emergency care



November - February 2025
Review and recommendations

The ambulance task review group undertook a detailed review of the available evidence and put forward key recommendations to change the Ambulance Performance Framework

Why is the Ambulance Performance Framework changing?

Key findings from the ambulance task review group



Wales remains the **only UK nation** to retain an eight-minute ambulance response time target.



No clinical evidence available to make the **link between an eight-minute ambulance response and improved patient outcomes**



Wide **international variation** in ambulance performance frameworks and targets



Lack of focus on **patient clinical outcomes** and the impacts of the effective application of the **'chain of survival'**



In Wales, there is a binary focus on time based targets that are not **fit for purpose**

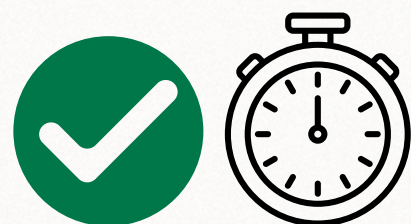
The Welsh Government-led ambulance task review group considered and reviewed the available evidence and literature across the UK and internationally.

The review found compelling evidence to support the position that the current ambulance time-based target is not fit for purpose.

Limitations of the current time based response targets

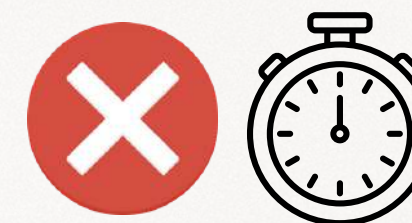
Under the current eight-minute time -based target, the focus is solely on the speed of the response and not the clinical outcome for the patient. The limitations of this approach is illustrated below:

7min 59 sec response time



An ambulance which arrives within eight minutes is considered a success based on speed of response, but the patient could have a poor clinical outcome

8min 01 sec response time



An ambulance which arrives just after eight minutes has missed the target, even if the clinical intervention saves the patient's life

What is the 'Chain of Survival'?

There is clear evidence linking improved clinical outcomes and the 'Chain of Survival'.

The Chain of Survival is a series of critical steps that improve the chances of survival for patients in cardiac or respiratory arrest.

The changes to the Ambulance Performance Framework emphasise clinical outcomes and quality measures over time-based response targets.

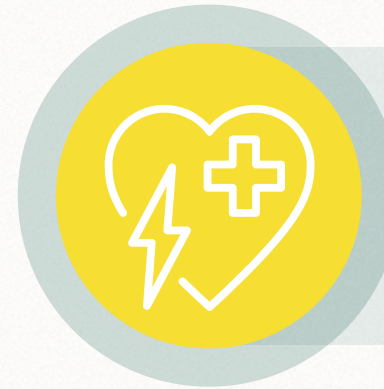
By focusing on the effective application of the Chain of Survival, we aim to save more lives in Wales by increasing the Return of Spontaneous Circulation (ROSC) rate so that we are comparable and can exceed those in leading countries like the Netherlands.



Early recognition and call for help: Prompt identification of cardiac arrest and calling 999 for emergency assistance



Early CPR: Immediate cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) with an emphasis on chest compressions. Anyone can do it – bystander action is key to building a nation of lifesavers



Early defibrillation: Swift use of defibrillators to restore a normal heart rhythm



Post-resuscitation care: Comprehensive care after ROSC to improve survival rates

The Chain of Survival transforms emergency response into a system focused on improving patient outcomes and survival rates



For more information: [CLICK HERE](#)

What are the changes to the Ambulance Performance Framework?

The ambulance task review group recommended that the current Red response category is split into two separate categories known as Purple Arrest and Red Emergency.

The primary reason for establishing two separate categories was to enable the ability to apply different clinical outcome measures aligned to the patient's presenting condition. Supporting the introduction of clinical outcomes measures aligned to the 'Chain of Survival' for the Purple Arrest category.

Further information detailing the new clinical outcome measures for the new categories is described on the next page.

Current performance framework



The previous Red category includes a broad range of incidents including cardiac or respiratory arrest, choking, major haemorrhage and breathing problems

Future performance framework



Purple Arrest category includes all incidents where a person is in **cardiac or respiratory arrest**



Red Emergency includes incidents where a person is **at high risk of cardiac or respiratory arrest**

Additional RCSO Category



While outside the scope of the new performance framework, an additional category known as **RCSO (Rapid Clinical Screening Level 0)** has been introduced that includes the remaining conditions from the previous Red category that are suitable for Rapid Clinical Screening – where a clinician may listen live or review the call immediately to decide on further assessment or a face-to-face response.

What are the changes to the Ambulance Performance Framework?

The way patients access the service and how 999 calls are managed by the call handler will not change.

The new performance framework makes the important shift towards adopting patient clinical outcomes as the primary measure of quality, safety and effectiveness.

In addition to the new clinical outcome measures, a set of secondary response based measures will remain.

PURPLE Arrest

RED Emergency



PRIMARY MEASUREMENT CLINICAL OUTCOMES

- % of people to have a heartbeat restored after a period of cardiac arrest which is subsequently retained until arrival at hospital (**Return Of Spontaneous Circulation**)

Other measures linked to the Chain of Survival include:

- Time of call handler to **commence CPR instructions**
- Time to **defibrillator at scene /patient side**

- A number of additional clinical performance indicators will report metrics specific to patients and conditions within the red category, such as pain management.



SECONDARY MEASURES

Both the Purple Arrest and Red Emergency categories are **equally prioritised** and an ambulance response will be **dispatched in time order**.

The response times that will be monitored for both categories are the same and include:

- **Median ambulance response time target range of six to eight minutes**
- **90%** receive an ambulance response within **20 minutes**

How can you help?

To improve cardiac survival rates, we must create a nation of lifesavers.

Community involvement is essential – when people are equipped and empowered to act in an emergency, they become vital links in the chain of survival.

Bystander CPR and early defibrillation can mean the difference between life and death in the critical minutes before professional help arrives.

Our aspiration is for Wales to become a **NATION OF LIFESAVERS**

Here's how you can get involved:

- **Learn CPR:** Equip yourself with the skills to save a life in an emergency.
- **Raise awareness:** Encourage friends, family, and colleagues to learn life-saving skills.
- **Register your defibrillator:** Make your Public Access Defibrillator visible to emergency services by registering it on the British Heart Foundation's The Circuit [{Link - Click Here}](#)
- **Join GoodSAM:** Register on the GoodSAM app if you are a qualified first aider to get an alert if there is a cardiac arrest in your area and start the 'chain of survival' before an ambulance arrives. [{Link - Click Here}](#)
- **Volunteer with us:** Support your community and help improve outcomes by joining our volunteer network as a Community Welfare Responder or Community First Responder [{Link - Click Here}](#)

We're working closely with partners across Wales to strengthen all of the links in the chain of survival.

As part of this commitment, we are excited to share the news that **Save a Life Cymru** will be joining the Welsh Ambulance Services to help in our shared mission of saving more lives in all communities across Wales



Important timelines and forward look

We are pleased to confirm that the recommendations to the Ambulance Performance Framework were approved by Welsh Government.

In recent months, we have undertaken extensive preparatory work to ensure that we are ready to implement the changes for an initial 12-month pilot period to test the changes which will be subject to a comprehensive evaluation to understand the difference and impact the changes have made.

March 2025

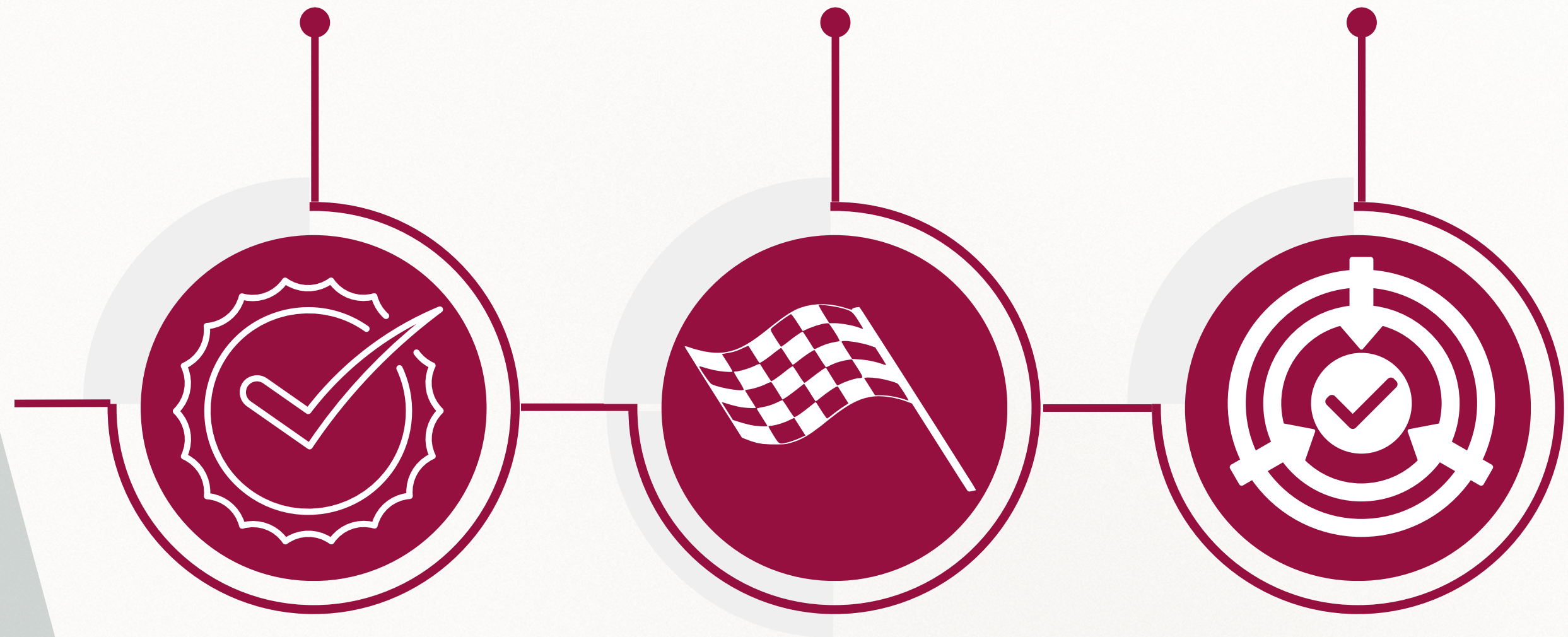
The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care **approved the recommendations** made by the ambulance task review group

July 2025

A **12-month pilot** will commence from the **1st July** to test the new performance framework

Evaluation & Next Steps

The new ambulance framework will be **independently evaluated** following the 12 month pilot period. The findings of the evaluation will be used to support the permanent implementation of the framework.



Changes we have made to improve our services

We recognise that we haven't always delivered the level of service our patients, communities, and staff expect.

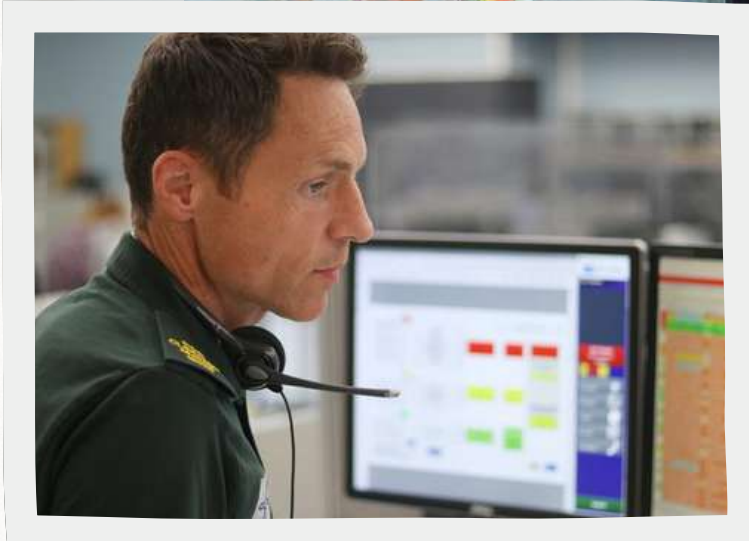
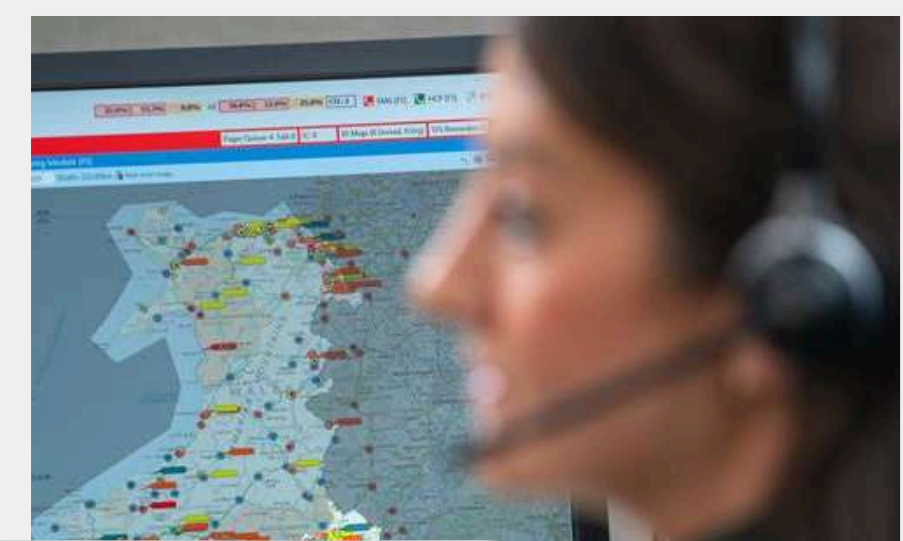
We've taken a close look at how our services are delivered and considered opportunities to enhance our Integrated Clinical Services Model to better meet the needs of those we serve.

Improving patient outcomes and ensuring safe, effective care are at the heart of our plans to evolve the Integrated Clinical Services Model. That's why we're working with the wider health system to reshape it, so we can deliver the right care, in the right place, at the right time.



RAPID CLINICAL SCREENING

We have introduced a Rapid Clinical Screening process to screen 999 calls earlier to better understand clinical needs so we can choose the most appropriate care options for each patient.



REMOTE CLINICAL ASSESSMENT

We have expanded our remote clinical assessment offer across Wales, providing comprehensive remote clinical assessment and support to keep patients safely at home without the need for an ambulance response or conveyance to hospital. The introduction of remote diagnostic equipment has supported our clinicians to make more informed clinical decisions by having access to clinical observations and information from the patient's home. The introduction of a Care Planning team has enabled our clinicians to better support and meet the needs of patients with more complex health conditions.



Changes we have made to improve our services



COMMUNITY WELFARE RESPONDERS

We have introduced a new volunteering role, trained by the ambulance service to provide an 'eyes on' patient monitoring in the community. Volunteers are trained to take observations from the patient, including heart rate and oxygen levels. This information can then be shared with our remote clinicians to make more informed clinical decisions.



CLINICAL COLLABORATION

We are working more closely with Health Board clinicians to enhance clinical decision making to resolve more care remotely. We have also worked collaboratively to expand the range of care pathways available to patients.



MENTAL HEALTH RESPONSE

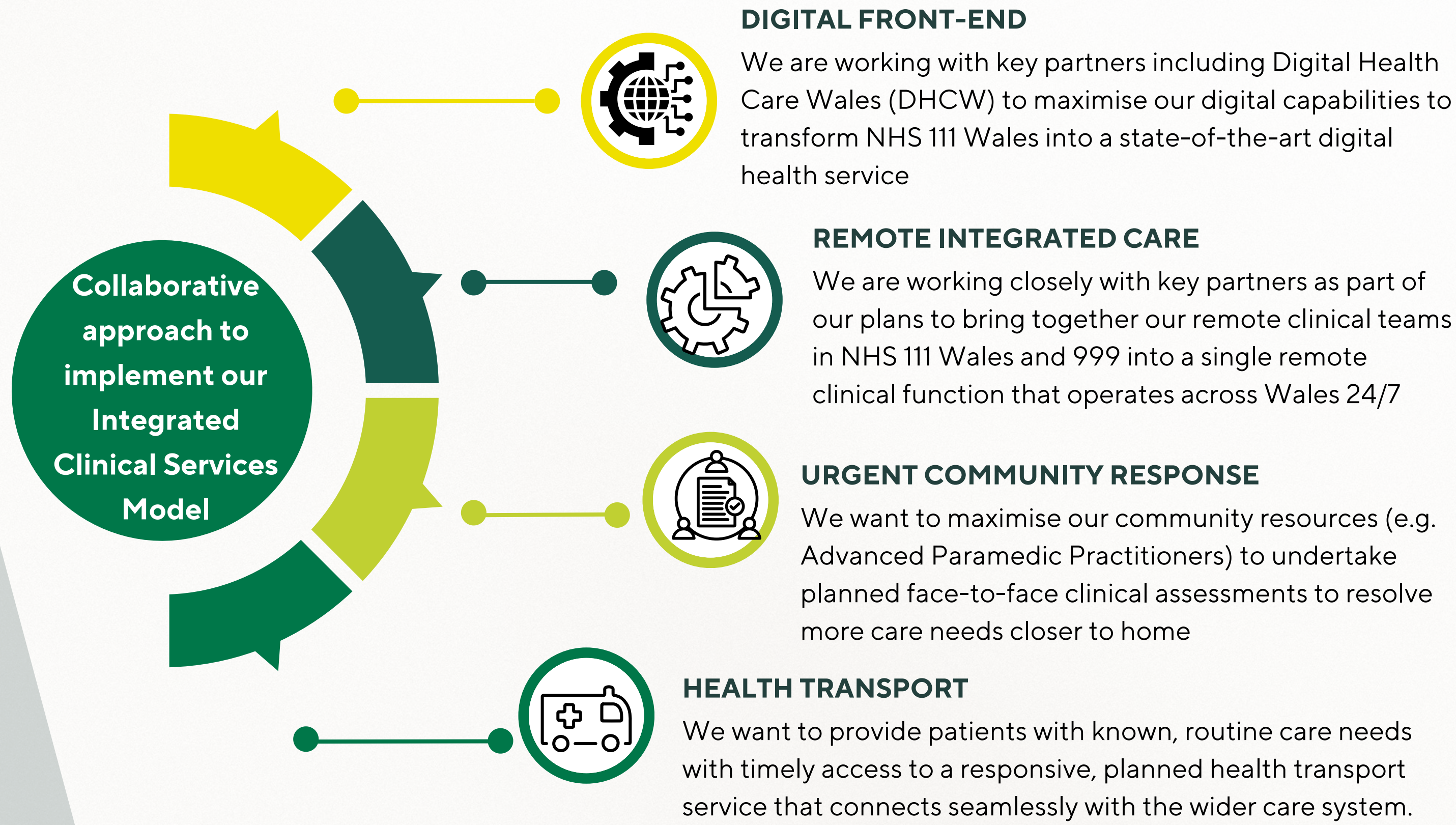
We have expanded our remote clinical assessment and consultation offer to people, in south east Wales, calling 999 while experiencing a mental health crisis. This now includes the option to allocate a face to face response from a registered mental health clinician supported by an emergency medical technician. The opportunity to expand the hours of this service and the range of the face to face response is linked to investment or resource reallocation.

How we are continuing to improve our services

We know there is still more to do to improve our clinical services.

That's why we're actively focusing on key areas where we can make the greatest impact – working collaboratively with our partners across the NHS, Welsh Government, and wider health and care system.

Together, we're identifying opportunities to strengthen our services, enhance patient outcomes, and ensure that care is safe, effective, and sustainable. This partnership approach is essential to shaping a clinical model that truly meets the needs of our communities – now and into the future.



What does this change mean for patients and the wider system?

The changes to the ambulance performance framework and work we are continuing in response to evolve and improve our clinical services model, underpin our unwavering ambition to provide the best care possible for all of our communities across Wales.

By focusing on what matters most we want to ensure that patients today and future generations receive the best and most appropriate care in their time of need.



Safer care: To provide the safest care to all of our patients we have to use our precious resources as effectively as we can to meet the different needs of the people who contact us for help.



Improving clinical outcomes: The changes that we are making are focused upon improving clinical outcomes for all patients who use our service.



Care closer to home: More episodes of care will be provided and resolved in the patient's home or in their local communities, avoiding potentially unnecessary hospital visits.



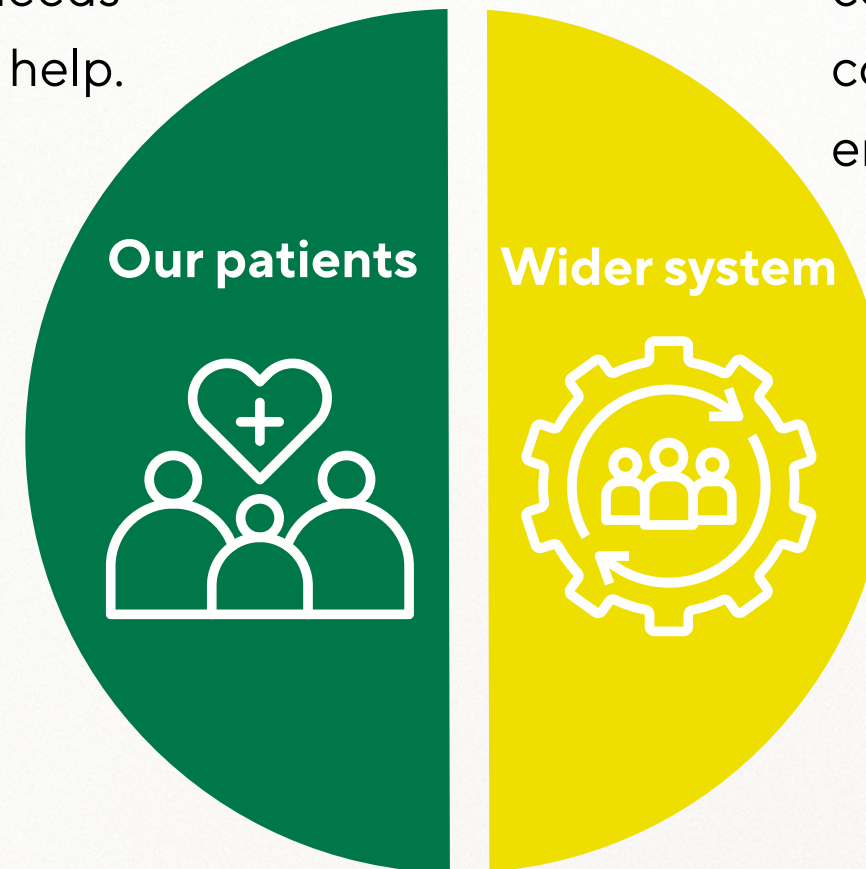
Reduction in hospital conveyances: Enhanced clinical assessment and care options to safely manage more patients at home or in the community will mean less patients will be conveyed to hospital reducing pressure on emergency departments.



Enhanced collaboration and joint working: By working in a more joined up and collaborative approach with our partners, we will be able to better determine clinical needs to provide the right care in the right place for our patients.



Effective utilisation of resources: Patients will be able to access the most appropriate clinical services to best meet their needs at the earliest point in the care episode.



Forward look - what's happening next?



Ambulance Performance Framework Review Phase 2

The Ambulance Target Review Group is nearing completion of a **second phase** to review the performance framework for the remaining **Amber** and **Green** 999 categories.

This review will conclude shortly and the findings are expected to be announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care imminently.

This is part of a phased and collaborative approach to evolving the Ambulance Performance Framework, ensuring it remains relevant, evidence-based, and focused on delivering the best possible outcomes for patients.

We will continue to work closely with our partners across the NHS and Welsh Government to explore opportunities for improvement and deliver meaningful change.

MORE INFORMATION

If you would like more information about how we are responding to the changes to the Ambulance

Performance Framework , please visit our website:

[Click Here](#)

Or contact us at:

- Email: [**amb_wasttransformation@wales.nhs.uk**](mailto:amb_wasttransformation@wales.nhs.uk)

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