

Open letter to the Minister for Health and Social Services, Eluned Morgan MS

Dear Minister,

Today, Tuesday 1st August 2023 is World Lung Cancer Day - the eleventh since the awareness day was launched in 2012 to raise awareness of one of the most common kinds of cancer.

Lung cancer is a cancer that takes more lives than any other. It takes a terrible toll on the people and communities of Wales, claiming around 1,800 lives every year, which is by far the biggest cause of cancer death in the country.

This World Lung Cancer Day is the first since the UK National Screening Committee published its recommendation that "the 4 (UK) nations move towards implementation of targeted lung cancer screening with integrated smoking cessation service provision." The recommendation was published last autumn.

Targeted lung cancer screening is one of a number of innovations designed and developed to tackle lung cancer, yet progress in Wales is painfully slow. We call on you to commit the Welsh Government to developing and rolling out a targeted lung cancer screening programme. It would become Wales' fourth cancer screening programme following breast screening, cervical screening, and bowel cancer screening.

Wales cannot risk falling behind. NHS England started to phase in their Targeted Lung Health Check programme across more than 40 areas following successful pilots in cities like Manchester. Risk assessments have been carried out in nearly half a million people with a history of smoking. More than 130,000 screening scans have been undertaken, and more than 1,300 cancers have been detected, three-quarters at an earlier stage*. Alongside evidence from large international trials, the UK Government announced in June that it will roll out its targeted lung cancer screening programme to millions of people who used to smoke or currently smoke and aged between 55 and 74 years old, across England.

Not one person in Wales has benefited, and we fear that access to specialist staff and equipment will become more difficult as the phased introduction of targeted lung cancer screening accelerates across England. That must change.

We welcome the targeted lung health check pilot that will soon start in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board area, a partnership between the NHS, the third sector and industry. This must become the opening phase of a screening programme in Wales, drawing lessons from England and beginning to replicate what we know will work.

The time has come to commit Wales to deliver its own targeted lung cancer screening programme and start laying the foundations, working with communities, and listening to the people who will benefit from spending more time with their loved ones.

Too many people die from lung cancer because of late diagnosis. Almost half of people with lung cancer are diagnosed at the latest stage when the cancer has spread around the body and there are fewer viable treatment options. Less than 2 in 10 (17%) of people diagnosed with lung cancer in Wales will survive their disease for five years or more.

Yet, despite its seriousness, a lung cancer diagnosis need not be a death sentence. When lung cancer is caught early there is a better chance of survival – 86% of people diagnosed with lung cancer at the earliest stage survive their disease for one year or more. Screening people based on their risk of lung cancer picks up more cancers at an earlier stage and saves lives from lung cancer.

Screening can find lung cancer early, before people realise anything is wrong. If people do spot anything unusual for them or they think they are experiencing a symptom of lung cancer, they should speak to their doctor immediately.

We owe it to future generations to make next year - World Lung Cancer Day 2024 – the first in which Wales is committed to rolling out targeted lung cancer screening, giving more people precious time to enjoy life, family and friends.

Yours sincerely

Judi Rhys MBE, Chief Executive, Tenovus Cancer Care

Michelle Mitchell, Chief Executive, Cancer Research UK

Paula Chadwick, Chief Executive, Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation

Anna Jewell, Chair, Less Survivable Cancers Taskforce

Gemma Peters, Chief Executive, Macmillan Cancer Support

Lowri Griffiths, Chair, Wales Cancer Alliance

Kieran Harris, Chief Executive, Cancer Research Wales

Professor Mick Peake MB, ChB, FRCP, OBE, Chair, UK Lung Cancer Coalition

Professor Robert Rintoul PhD FRCP, Chair, Clinical Advisory Group, UK Lung Cancer Coalition

Professor Keir Lewis, President Elect, Welsh Thoracic Society and Medical Director, Respiratory Innovation Wales

Dr Olwen Williams OBE, Vice-President for Wales, Royal College of Physicians

Professor Luis A. J. Mur, Aberystwyth University

Joseph Carter, Head of Devolved Nations, Asthma + Lung UK

Debra Montague, Founder and Chair, ALK Positive UK

Professor John K Field, The University of Liverpool (personal capacity)

Angela Terry, Chair, EGFR Positive UK

Suzanne Cass, Chief Executive, ASH Wales

*Figures from the Targeted Lung Health Check programme biannual report Jan 2023