



National Federation of Women's Institutes-Wales

Manifesto for the 2026 Senedd election



Introduction to the WI

The WI is the largest women's organisation in the UK with around 180,000 members in over 5,500 WIs across England, Wales, and the Islands. In Wales, there are around 11,000 members belonging to close to 500 WIs based in towns and villages across the country.

The WI's vision is to create a world where women come together to learn, share skills and work together to become active citizens, influencing change to improve lives in their local, national and global communities.

Over the last 110 years, the WI has been instrumental in achieving positive change for women and for society campaigning on a range of issues from modern slavery to climate change, mental health, and violence against women.

This manifesto is based on the current campaign priorities of the WI. We call on all political parties and candidates to support our asks.



Delivery of an NHS Dental Health Service that is fit for purpose

The NHS Dental Health Service is in crisis. The shortage of NHS dentists and the operation of the current dental contract is causing significant distress and inconvenience for countless individuals and families. The situation has also put immense pressure on those few NHS dental practices that remain, resulting in long waiting times and reduced availability of appointments.

Research by the NFWI has highlighted that a lack of access to NHS dental care is hitting women hardest and deepening a uniquely gendered health crisis. The report casts a stark light on the hidden experiences of women who are often the designated primary caregivers for their families and yet are left battling to access dental care, often sacrificing their own health in order to support their loved ones. It also reveals the unique oral health challenges women face compared to men.



Experiences shared by WI members in Wales have included developing chronic pain, being forced to go to A&E due to dental pain, travelling 200 miles to access an NHS dentist, self-medicating, self-extraction of teeth and failing to find any dentists willing to see their children as NHS patients.

This crisis is not only a health issue but also a socioeconomic one. Those who cannot afford private dental care are disproportionately affected, exacerbating existing health inequalities. It is essential that steps are taken to ensure that everyone, regardless of their financial situation, has access to quality dental care.

We are calling on the next Welsh Government to deliver an NHS Dental Health Service that is fit for purpose and is gender-responsive by:

- **Reforming the NHS dental contract:** The reform of the 2006 NHS dental contract needs to address the dental access crisis, ensuring adequate funding for a universal NHS dentistry service. Reforms should fairly compensate professionals for complex cases and introduce incentives for dentists to work in underserved areas.
- **Increasing NHS dental workforce:** In order to tackle the shortage of NHS dentists, the government should expand training programs and provide financial incentives to retain existing practitioners and attract new talent to NHS dentistry.
- **Making dental care affordable and accessible:** NHS dental care should be both affordable and accessible, preventing patients from enduring long journeys or delaying treatment until emergency care is needed.
- **Addressing the gendered impact of the dental health crisis:** The government must recognise that women are disproportionately affected by the dental health crisis, including the impact of pregnancy and menopause on dental health, and therefore ensure that women's experiences are at the forefront of policy solutions to the crisis.

Thinking Differently: Autistic and ADHD Women and Girls

For too long, women and girls' experiences of autism and ADHD have been overlooked and missed. Girls in the UK are receiving autism diagnosis an average of 2-3 years later than boys.

Masking in autistic and ADHD women and girls is more common than in men and boys, with women and girls spending a lot of time and effort to fit in with their peers. Masking is mentally exhausting and isolating, and has been shown to be linked to a heightened risk of depression, anxiety and suicidality in autistic and ADHD women and girls.



In March 2024, the NFWI published a report featuring the lived experiences of autistic and ADHD women and girls. Over 66% of respondents in Wales stated that they feel that society does not understand and accept autistic people. Over 90% of respondents expressed a lack of awareness of autistic and ADHD women and girls within healthcare settings. Almost half said obtaining a diagnosis was either somewhat or very difficult and 88% felt that there is insufficient support for autistic individuals and their families.

We are calling on the next Welsh Government to take action to address the barriers experienced by neurodivergent women and girls in accessing support and services by:

- Improving the diagnosis process for women and girls through a gendered and intersectional approach.
- Reducing waiting times for diagnosis in line with NICE guidelines.
- Enhancing training and awareness amongst healthcare and educational professionals so that they can better understand and recognise the female presentation of autism and ADHD.

Ending Violence Against Women and Girls



Photo credit: Anne-Marie Bickerton

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a violation of women's human rights and both a cause and consequence of gender inequality. The prevalence of VAWG is alarming and unacceptable. Every three days, a woman is killed by a man in the UK. In July 2024, the National Police Chiefs' Council described VAWG as a national emergency stating that 3000 offences are recorded by the police every day. The true extent of VAWG is much greater as many incidents of VAWG are under-reported.

A survey commissioned by the WI in March 2025 found that nearly two thirds of adults (64%) think misogyny is a problem in Britain today and three in ten adults consider it a serious problem. More than half of all women (56%) are more likely to have taken an action in the past 12 months to make themselves feel safer. The onus should not be on women and girls to adapt their lives but for perpetrators to change their behaviours. Since 2012, WI members have been recruiting male ambassadors to make a stand against male VAWG.

Women in all areas of Wales should have equal access to specialist support services. Yet the reliance of these services on short-term funding is impacting on their ability to undertake long-term planning, recruitment and retention of staff and staff wellbeing. Sustainable, long-term funding for specialist Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) support services is vital.

We are calling on the next Welsh Government to take action to end violence against women and girls by:

- Delivery and investment in the prevention of VAWG at all levels of society including initiatives targeted at men and boys.
- Prioritising ending VAWG as a cross-cutting theme across all government departments and delivering a whole system approach.
- Delivery of a sustainable funding model for VAWDASV specialist support services.
- Continuation of the Migrant Victim of Abuse Support Fund and development of a sustainable, long-term funding model for supporting survivors with no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

NFWI-Wales is a member of the Gender Network and supports the 'Prevent gender-based violence and support survivors' asks within the [Wales Women's Rights Manifesto](#).

Climate Change



Photo credit: Anne-Marie Bickerton

Climate change is the single biggest threat to the people and places we love, both here in Wales and globally.

All too often, women around the world are the ones who suffer first and hardest from the effects of climate change. The Women's Environment Network (WEN) has found that 80% of people displaced by climate change are women. Climate change is exacerbating existing inequalities and disproportionately impacting people on lower incomes, women and people from minoritised groups. At the same time, they are often under-represented in developing the solutions to tackling the climate crisis.

We are calling on the next Welsh Government to take action to address the climate emergency by:

- Delivering a just and fair transition to net zero by 2030.
- Engaging with and empowering marginalised voices such as women and people from ethnic minority groups in the development of climate policies and decision-making. Only when all voices are heard can inclusive solutions be developed to address the climate crisis.

Clean Rivers for People and Wildlife



WI members are concerned about the poor health of our rivers. Only 44% of rivers in Wales currently meet the criteria for good ecological status and just 40% of waterbodies overall achieve good or better status.

River pollution is contributing to biodiversity loss with salmonid populations in serious decline in many rivers in Wales.

Research by Bangor University has found microplastics in our rivers. A key source of microplastic pollution comes from wearing and washing synthetic clothing. While wastewater treatment plants are effective at capturing microplastics in wastewater, vast amounts of these make it back to nature through the use of sewage sludge as agricultural fertiliser. Untreated sewage spills from sewage overflows also represent a significant source of pollution.

We do not know the full consequences of microplastics however there is growing evidence that microplastics have an impact on human health, wildlife and the entire ecology of rivers. Rivers are not currently monitored for microplastics and other pollutants.



Designated bathing waters are key to cleaning up our polluted waters, as they are the only places where water quality is monitored for its effect on human health and legal obligations are put on polluting industries to clean up their act.

During the Bathing Water season, which runs from May until September, Natural Resources Wales tests the water quality of the 112 bathing waters in Wales (as at May 2025) for two types of bacteria namely E.coli and intestinal enterococci. As rivers are used for recreational purposes all year round, testing of water quality should not be limited to the Bathing Water season.

Combined, Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and Hafren Dyfrdwy released sewage into rivers, lakes and seas for a total of 985,341 hours in 2024. Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water discharged sewage 118,276 times and Hafren Dyfrdwy 1,810 times.

We are calling on the next Welsh Government to take action to address the pollution of our rivers by:

- Designating appropriate stretches of Welsh rivers as bathing water sites to help improve the state of our rivers.
- Improving the monitoring arrangements of bathing waters, beyond the requirements set out under the Bathing Water Regulations 2013, to include water testing all year round and the monitoring of microplastics and other pollutants. It should also be ensured that the necessary resources and investment are provided to deliver effective monitoring of our rivers.
- Introducing legally binding nature recovery targets to protect and support nature recovery.
- Developing a strategy to address microplastics pollution.
- Stronger environmental regulation and enforcement, including more resources to enable regulators to enforce the rules.

Further information

For further information on any of the issues featured in this manifesto, please contact the NFWI-Wales Office.

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