

Parliamentary Briefing: Support ‘My Right to Cardiac Arrest Recovery’

What needs to change?

Surviving a cardiac arrest can result in a [range](#) of physical, neurological, cognitive, emotional, and social issues. These may not become apparent until after discharge from the hospital. At present, too many Survivors in Wales aren't being assessed for their health and social care needs beyond hospital. As a result, cardiac arrest survivors often struggle with anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress – as do their families, caregivers, healthcare professionals and rescuers. This needs to change.

What is a Cardiac Arrest?

An Out-of-hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA) is an often-fatal condition where the heart stops beating and needs CPR +/- defibrillation. Between 2020-21, the Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust (WAST) responded to 6,585 Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrests of which, 2,791 resulted in a resuscitation attempt. And yet, unlike rehabilitation services for a [stroke](#) or [heart attack](#), there is currently no formal care pathway for cardiac arrest survivors across the country.

Key Recommendations:

- ✓ Everyone affected by involvement in a Cardiac Arrest, and the provision of cardiopulmonary resuscitation, must be able to access appropriate, ongoing, personalised support.
- ✓ All cardiac arrest survivors to be assessed prior to hospital discharge using [current guidelines](#), and to receive an individualised post cardiac arrest rehabilitation plan.

Background

At Resuscitation Council UK (RCUK), we believe everyone has the right to make their best possible recovery after a cardiac arrest. That's why [we're campaigning](#) to improve the post-cardiac arrest support offered by the NHS.

A programme of rehabilitation, targeted to the individual's needs, improves quality of life, is [cost effective](#), and can reduce hospital readmissions.

“Survivors of a cardiac arrest require a system of care that is multi-disciplinary and does not end when the patient leaves the hospital.

Everyone affected by Cardiac Arrest has a right to recovery and rehabilitation, which we know is a key element of improving quality of life after cardiac arrest.”

James Cant, CEO, Resuscitation Council

Currently, there is no minimum level of follow-up applied equally across the country. Meaning that many patients are missing out on vital services helping them to a full recover.

Who else is affected?

A cardiac arrest incident can have a huge impact upon all those involved, causing a ripple effect that often goes far beyond the person who's had the arrest. Being resuscitated, performing CPR or witnessing a cardiac arrest can be incredibly stressful. [Qualitative research](#) suggests that many '[co-survivors](#)' are dissatisfied with the lack of post- discharge information and poor continuity in healthcare services, and often express feelings of neglect.

Progress achieved in Wales

Wales has been actively engaged in tackling OHCA through various initiatives and partnerships. The [Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Plan](#) for Wales, launched in 2017 and the establishment of Save a Life Cymru programme has brought together NHS Wales organisations and the third sector from across the country. Great progress has been made, but there's still more to be done to ensure that everyone affected by involvement in a cardiac arrest has access to appropriate, ongoing, personalised support.

While there are internationally and nationally recognised guidelines for patient and family follow-up post cardiac arrest, there is significant variability in application across Wales, and the United Kingdom. This results in a wide variation of access to rehabilitation services and psychological support for those affected by cardiac arrest, with many patients and families feeling abandoned.

Resuscitation Council UK to publish Cardiac Arrest Survivor Quality Standard

Post cardiac arrest care is multi-disciplinary and requires coordinated support that does not end when the patient leaves the hospital. Patients must receive a care assessment prior to discharge, to plan their ongoing care and access to the specific help they need. Health and care systems across Wales must work in partnership to identify and reduce the gaps in accessing cardiac arrest rehabilitation services.

At RCUK, we are committed to ensuring optimal recovery for all cardiac arrest survivors and are publishing a national quality standard later this year. By advocating for its implementation across all the UK's health boards & integrated care boards, we aim for equitable care, granting every cardiac arrest survivor timely access to all the elements of aftercare they need for their recovery.

Become a parliamentary advocate for cardiac arrest survivors

Resuscitation Council UK would like Members of the Senedd to step forward and become an advocate for cardiac arrest survivors. We want to see parliamentarians commit to meaningfully engaging with survivors and co-survivors within their constituency and represent their voices in parliament. We would be most grateful if you could express your interest in becoming an advocate by contacting communications@resus.org.uk.

About us

Resuscitation Council UK is saving lives by developing guidelines, influencing policy, delivering courses, and supporting cutting-edge research. Through education, training and research, we're working towards the day when everyone in the country has the skills they need to save a life.