# Welsh government vows to improve gynaecological cancer care following Claire O'Shea’s advocacy



Eluned Morgan, the Welsh Minister for Health and Social Services, recently paid tribute to Claire O'Shea, a passionate advocate for women's health who tragically passed away at the age of 42 from gynaecological cancer. In a heartfelt statement delivered in the Senedd, Morgan commended O'Shea for her tireless efforts to change the narrative around women's health, particularly regarding the often-neglected area of cancer care. O'Shea's campaign aimed to address the profound issues women face when navigating the healthcare system, where they are frequently "dismissed, downplayed, unheard and misdiagnosed".

O'Shea's legacy is particularly significant, as she utilised her personal experience with gynaecological cancer not just to highlight her own struggles but to ignite a broader call for change. Morgan praised her for transforming personal tragedy into a powerful catalyst for advocacy, stating, “She raised awareness of critical issues in health care and gave a voice to those who have been overlooked.” This sentiment resonates with the growing number of women who have come forward to share their own encounters, which often mirror Claire's, of feeling invalidated by healthcare professionals.

The Senedd's Health and Social Care Committee has been actively responding to the concerns raised by O'Shea and others. Their report, titled "Unheard: Women's journey through gynaecological cancer", published on December 6, 2023, underscores the systemic failures that contribute to the misdiagnosis and mistreatment of women. The report called for significant changes across the healthcare landscape in Wales, emphasizing the need for a cultural shift that prioritises women's health needs and enhances the overall quality of care. It highlighted testimonials from women who described feeling "dismissed" by their GPs, with O'Shea herself noting the emotional toll of her experience, labelling it as "medical gaslighting."

In a subsequent plenary debate held on October 2, 2024, Eluned Morgan apologised to the women who had been let down by the National Health Service (NHS). This debate was marked by discussions around the urgent need for systemic change in how women's health is addressed, with members of the Senedd echoing O'Shea's sentiments about the normalization of women's pain and the lack of urgency in addressing their health concerns. Such reflections have led to calls for a cultural re-examination within the NHS, urging a shift in mindset to genuinely listen and respond to women's health issues.

The findings of the "Unheard" report have not only resonated within political circles but have also struck a chord with cancer support organisations, such as Tenovus Cancer Care, which released a statement acknowledging the distress faced by women at the hands of a system that has often failed to validate their experiences. They stressed the necessity of implementing the committee's recommendations to ensure that future generations of women will not endure similar hardships. Moreover, they joined in commemorating figures like O'Shea and Judith Rowlands, both of whom bravely shared their stories to highlight these endemic issues.

As part of ongoing efforts to reform cancer care in Wales, Jeremy Miles, the new Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, outlined plans on December 10, 2024, detailing initiatives aimed at enhancing gynaecological cancer services. His statement included commitments to meet ambitious targets for cancer treatment and a pledge to address the unique challenges faced by women, as outlined in the newly published Women’s Health Plan. This initiative seeks not only to improve survival rates but also to provide a more responsive and compassionate healthcare experience for women throughout Wales.

Despite these promising developments, many women remain sceptical about the Welsh Government’s commitment to change. A report dated May 15, 2024, highlighted that numerous women still feel disillusioned by what they perceive as a dismissive attitude from the government towards their healthcare concerns. For those voices, including that of O'Shea, the demands for accountability and tangible change continue to echo, as the healthcare system works to mend its relationship with women across Wales, ensuring that they are heard, validated, and cared for appropriately.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1-2: [[1]](https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25163207.welsh-government-tributes-champion-womens-health/?ref=rss)
2. Paragraphs 3-4: [[2]](https://senedd.wales/committees/health-and-social-care-committee/unheard-women-s-journey-through-gynaecological-cancer/), [[5]](https://www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk/news-and-views-listings/report-published-today-into-gynaecological-cancers-following-senedd-inquiry)
3. Paragraphs 5-6: [[3]](https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/14138), [[4]](https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/addressing-gynaecological-cancer-care-a-plenary-debate/)
4. Paragraphs 7-8: [[6]](https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-improving-gynaecological-cancer-services), [[7]](https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/health/women-feel-down-welsh-governments-29165579)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25163207.welsh-government-tributes-champion-womens-health/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://senedd.wales/committees/health-and-social-care-committee/unheard-women-s-journey-through-gynaecological-cancer/> - The Senedd's Health and Social Care Committee published a report titled 'Unheard: Women's journey through gynaecological cancer' on December 6, 2023. The report highlights the experiences of women who felt unheard and dismissed by healthcare professionals, leading to delays in diagnosis and treatment. It includes recommendations for the Welsh Government to improve support and awareness of gynaecological cancers in Wales. The report emphasizes the need for a cultural shift in the healthcare system to prioritize women's health concerns and ensure timely and effective care.
3. <https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/14138> - On October 2, 2024, the Welsh Parliament held a plenary debate addressing gynaecological cancer care. During the debate, Eluned Morgan MS, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services, apologized to women who had been let down by the NHS. Members of the Senedd highlighted systemic failures in the healthcare system, including the normalization of women's pain and the dismissal of their health concerns. The debate underscored the urgent need for cultural change within the NHS to listen to and prioritize women's health issues.
4. <https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/addressing-gynaecological-cancer-care-a-plenary-debate/> - An article published on May 29, 2024, discusses a plenary debate in the Welsh Parliament regarding gynaecological cancer care. The debate focused on the Senedd's Health and Social Care Committee's report 'Unheard: Women's journey through gynaecological cancer.' The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Eluned Morgan MS, acknowledged the need for improvements in cancer care but faced criticism for a response perceived as dismissive. The article highlights the ongoing challenges in addressing women's health concerns and the necessity for systemic change in healthcare services.
5. <https://www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk/news-and-views-listings/report-published-today-into-gynaecological-cancers-following-senedd-inquiry> - Tenovus Cancer Care published a statement on December 6, 2023, regarding the Senedd's report on gynaecological cancers. The statement emphasizes the distressing experiences of women who felt unheard and dismissed by healthcare professionals. It calls for urgent action to implement the report's recommendations to prevent other women from enduring similar challenges. The statement also pays tribute to individuals like Claire O'Shea and Judith Rowlands, who shared their experiences to highlight systemic issues in gynaecological cancer care.
6. <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-improving-gynaecological-cancer-services> - On December 10, 2024, Jeremy Miles MS, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, issued a written statement outlining efforts to improve gynaecological cancer services in Wales. The statement acknowledges the need for enhancements in cancer care and sets expectations for the NHS to meet the 62-day cancer target. It highlights the publication of the Women's Health Plan and the commitment to addressing the challenges faced by women with gynaecological cancers, aiming to improve survival rates and patient experiences.
7. <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/health/women-feel-down-welsh-governments-29165579> - An article published on May 15, 2024, reports on women's reactions to the Welsh Government's response to gynaecological cancer concerns. Women who provided evidence to the Senedd's inquiry expressed disappointment, describing the response as 'dismissive.' The article highlights personal testimonies, including that of Claire O'Shea, who felt her satisfaction with services was never solicited. The piece underscores the need for the Welsh Government to reflect on these concerns and take meaningful action to address the issues raised.