# Rhymney claims highest anxiety benefit rate amid deep economic and social decline



A once-vibrant town in the Welsh valleys, Rhymney has recently gained notoriety for having the highest rate of sickness benefit claims related to anxiety in the UK. Nestled near the scenic Brecon Beacons National Park, local residents are reflecting on the profound stagnation that has gripped their community. With a tree-lined high street now dotted with boarded-up shops, it's no surprise that figures show one in 30 residents claims benefits due to anxiety, totaling 2,289 individuals.

The socio-economic backdrop of Rhymney is stark. The legacy of the Miners' Strike over 40 years ago looms large, with many residents attributing the town's decline to policies that dismantled the coal mining industry foundational to their community. A former Labour councillor now working with MacMillan Cancer Support notes that generational unemployment feeds a cycle where the children of the unemployed often find themselves in similar predicaments. He acknowledges, "The closure of the pits was 40 years ago, but we have never recovered, and we have never replaced those jobs."

While some local residents express sympathy for those with genuine mental health issues, others suspect the benefits system is being exploited. Retired transport engineer Alan Davies points out that anxiety is harder to quantify than physical ailments, creating a perception that some claimants might be taking advantage of the system. "It's not like you have a spinal problem or mobility issues—anyone can say they've got anxiety," he remarked. This sentiment resonates with young locals, who feel that boredom and a lack of job opportunities push some towards claiming anxiety benefits rather than seeking work.

Despite the bleak landscape, Rhymney's rich history and resilient community spirit are overshadowed by various social issues, including drug problems and anti-social behaviour. Paul Thomas, manager of the Helping Hands charity shop, describes the community as "stagnant," lamenting the departure of once-stable employers. This prevailing mentality has led individuals to favor the certainty of benefits over the unpredictability of low-wage work, reflecting a failure of leadership to address these pressing issues.

The economic outlook for Blaenau Gwent, encompassing Rhymney, is troubling. Unemployment rates hover around 10.7%, with a significant proportion of the population reliant on benefits—a clear indicator of broader socio-economic challenges. Public Health Wales highlights a decline in physical and mental health among locals, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve well-being alongside economic prospects. Yet, instead of genuine solutions, the Labour government's approach seems focused on increased taxation and spending cuts, leaving communities like Rhymney in further despair.

Amidst these challenges, local attitudes towards work echo a broader struggle against stagnation. Many residents see employment not merely as a financial necessity but as a source of purpose and belonging. As one chip shop owner with over two decades of experience observed, "Working can be an antidote to anxiety and depression." However, the recent initiatives claimed to foster job creation and improve health services feel superficial. For many in Rhymney—where community spirit has eroded over decades—real, substantial change appears a distant hope.

The silence of the town's deserted high street reveals more than just shuttered storefronts; it encapsulates a lingering sense of loss. Generations have faced an uncertain future, grappling not only with economic hardship but also the pervasive impact on mental well-being. A community once rich in pride now struggles with a new identity, defined not by its history but by contemporary challenges. Only time will tell whether Rhymney can reclaim its former spirit or continue on its bleak path of decline, as the need for a fresh political approach grows ever more urgent.

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

## Bibliography

* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14696117/locals-welsh-town-slam-benefits-scroungers-anxiety.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2010/nov/17/unemployment-and-employment-statistics-economics> - An article from The Guardian provides detailed unemployment and benefit claimant statistics for various UK constituencies, including Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney. It highlights that Blaenau Gwent had an unemployment rate of 10.7% and a benefit claimant rate of 7.9%, indicating significant economic challenges in the area. The data underscores the persistent unemployment issues in these regions, contributing to socio-economic difficulties.
* <https://phw.nhs.wales/news/survey-reveals-decline-in-physical-and-mental-health-in-wales/> - A survey by Public Health Wales reveals a decline in both physical and mental health among residents. It reports that 53% of people say their physical health has worsened in the last three years, while 36% reported a decline in their mental health. The survey highlights the urgent need for action to create environments that support better health and well-being, emphasizing the impact of socio-economic factors on health.
* <https://www.brecon-radnor.co.uk/news/more-than-1500-people-in-powys-receiving-benefits-due-to-mental-health-problems-673641> - An article from Brecon & Radnor Express reports that over 1,500 people in Powys are receiving benefits due to mental and behavioural disorders. The Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is provided to individuals struggling to work due to long-term health conditions. The article highlights the significant impact of mental health issues on employment and the need for tailored support to help individuals return to work.
* <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39321475/> - A study published in PubMed examines the prevalence of precarious employment in Wales prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and its associations with socio-demographic characteristics and self-reported health. The study found that one in four respondents (26.5%) was in precarious employment, with worse perceived treatment at work being twice as likely in those reporting pre-existing conditions, poorer general health, or low mental wellbeing. The findings suggest that improving job security and quality could enhance population health.
* <https://www.tenby-today.co.uk/news/thousands-of-people-in-carmarthenshire-receiving-benefits-due-to-mental-health-problems-673644> - An article from Tenby Observer reports that thousands of people in Carmarthenshire are receiving benefits due to mental and behavioural disorders. Figures from the Department of Work and Pensions show that 3,304 people in Carmarthenshire were claiming ESA due to mental or behavioural conditions. The article emphasizes the need for tailored support to help individuals return to work and addresses the challenges posed by mental health issues in the region.
* <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1996-07-10/debates/ccb883f9-a241-4c4b-bb72-a8298c1f5947/UnemploymentAndLowIncome(Wales)> - A UK Parliament debate from 1996 discusses unemployment and low income in Wales, highlighting that in Merthyr and Rhymney, the unemployment rate was 12.1%. The debate underscores the chronic unemployment issues in certain Welsh localities and the socio-economic challenges faced by these communities. It also touches upon the impact of unemployment on health and quality of life, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions.