

Reference:	FOI.17989.25
Subject:	Walking aids
Date of Request:	4 August 2025

Requested:

Please could you provide the following information for your organisation (or the NHS Trusts you oversee), covering the past three financial years (2022/23, 2023/24, 2024/25):

1. A list of the most commonly purchased or issued walking aids, including:
 - a. Elbow crutches
 - b. Underarm crutches
 - c. Walking frames (Zimmer frames)
 - d. Walking sticks
 - e. Rollators
 - f. Orthopaedic boots (CAM walkers)

2. For each product type:
 - a. The number of units purchased annually
 - b. The total annual spend
 - c. The top suppliers or manufacturers (if recorded)

3. If held, the percentage or number of items returned or reused after patient use.

I would prefer to receive this information in Excel or CSV format if possible.

Response:

Hywel Dda University Health Board (UHB) does not hold all of the information requested as some equipment is provided by Carmarthenshire Integrated Community Equipment Service (CICES), Ceredigion County Council and Community Equipment Service (CES) for Pembrokeshire, the UHB would not hold a record of the items supplied by these services.

We would therefore recommend that you send your request to the Freedom of Information Teams within each LA in the UHB's footprint, who may be able to help you further with your enquiry. For ease, their details are set out below:-

Information & Data Protection Officer, Carmarthenshire County Council, County Hall, Carmarthen, SA31 1JP or by email foia@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

Complaints & Freedom of Information Team, Ceredigion County Council, Canolfan Rheidol, Rhodfa Padarn, Llanbadarn Fawr, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 3UE or by email foi@ceredigion.gov.uk

Information Governance Team, Pembrokeshire County Council, County Hall, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, SA61 1TP or by email FOI@pembrokeshire.gov.uk

The UHB has considered applying an exemption under Section 43 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA), as the costs requested for question 2b relate to third parties, and their disclosure

would be prejudicial to their commercial interests. Section 43(2) exempts information, where disclosure would or would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any company.

Commercial interests may be prejudiced where disclosure would, or would be likely to:

- Weaken a company's position in a competitive environment by revealing market sensitive information or information of potential usefulness to its competitors
- Damage a company's business reputation or the confidence that customers/users, suppliers or investors may have in it.

This exemption is qualified; therefore, even if information falls within Section 43, public authorities must then apply the public interest test set out in Section 2(2)(b).

The information can only be withheld if the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

In favour of disclosure: There is a public interest in transparency and accountability of the activities being undertaken by the UHB for the procurement of its walking aids, to ensure that real value for money is being achieved, and in turn, to demonstrate the effective use of public funds.

Against Disclosure: Disclosure of the information could impede the UHB's ability to trade competitively, as providers would not like to carry the risk of their costings being released into the public domain. Action of this kind could directly impact the UHB's ability to help patients, should walking aids not be available for procurement.

Decision: Following consideration of the arguments, the UHB determines that the individual costing information being requested is commercially confidential in nature, as its use could impact the provider's ability to trade within a competitive market and equally could impact the UHB's ability to procure the items required to treat and support patients with rehabilitation and mobility needs.

Additionally, the UHB is unable to provide you with all of the information requested for question 3, as it is estimated that the cost of answering your request would exceed the "appropriate limit" as stated in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004. The "appropriate limit" represents the estimated cost of one person spending 18 hours (or 2 ½ working days) in determining whether the UHB holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting the information.

The UHB does not hold a central record of items that have been returned or reused after patient use. Therefore, in order to provide you with the information requested, the UHB would need to contact each service, ward and department across the UHB and request that they undertake an inventory audit, to identify any information that may fulfil your request.

The UHB can confirm that it has one hundred and forty-seven (147) services and teams listed on its website. Therefore, contacting each of these services and requesting a search of systems would exceed the 18 hours stipulated within the FoIA. Based on the number of teams that would need to be contacted and the subsequent number of staff members within each team, conducting a search would far exceed the 'appropriate limit', costing the UHB the following:

147 @ 1.5 hours per audit = 220.5 hours
220.5 hours @ £25 per hour = £5,512.50

However, under Section 16 of the FOIA, we are required as a public authority, to provide advice and assistance so far as it is reasonable to individuals who have made a request under the FOIA, this can include assisting a requester to further refine their request.

Unfortunately, the UHB is unable to provide advice on how you can refine your request further. This is due to the UHB still requiring a undertake an inventory audit to identify any information relating to your request.

However, the UHB has approached its Procurement Team and provides the accessible information it holds to answer the remainder of your request, within the spreadsheet as requested, at Attachment 1.