

Children and Young People's Mental Health

Introduction

Mental disorders in children and young people are increasing and represent a hidden epidemic. This has significant implications for society as whole, both today and in the future. 1 in 10 under 16s have a diagnosable mental health disorder¹; a child who experiences a physical illness is 2-5 times more likely to develop an emotional disorder² and early onset mental disorders are more likely to persist in adult life. Significantly more children have mental health 'difficulties' which have a long-term impact on education, family function and life chances. There are strong links between mental health problems and adverse life circumstances (parental substance misuse, parental mental health, abuse and neglect and poverty). Early and appropriate intervention minimises the mental health challenges for children and young people and the potential lifelong impact.

Priorities for action

We propose that the current emotional wellbeing and mental health services for children and young people must have sufficient capacity and professional skills to ensure that every individual receives high quality, timely and appropriate care from the outset; *let's get it right first time*. To achieve this aim we propose five key actions;

- 1. Improving the skills of the workforce.** Every professional who works with children and young people must have the competences to both assess and ensure that a child's emotional wellbeing and mental health needs are met. There are currently considerable variations in the skills and competences of the children's healthcare workforce which can be addressed through the development of interprofessional training³. *The government must commit to supporting and funding appropriate training for all health professionals, from universal services to targeted and specialist children's mental health services. This needs to be prioritised early on in any professional's training.*
- 2. Improving the quality of interventions so that every child has timely access to evidence based treatments.** Translation of evidence into practice is crucial to ensure that the most effective treatments are offered to all children. There is an increasing evidence base, however many services cannot access resources to invest in more effective interventions. Where evidence base is lacking further research is needed to develop effective and efficient interventions for tackling mental health difficulties in children and young people. There is international recognition that the scale of mental health research is low relative to the burden of disease⁴. The government must commit to investment in expanding the evidence base for mental health interventions as well as ensuring implementation.
- 3. High quality commissioning and service planning.** Commissioners and those responsible for planning services must be able to develop comprehensive multi-agency services, which enable the most effective and efficient use of public expenditure across the system and make best use of the expertise within health, education, social services,

local authorities and the voluntary sector. In order to deliver consistent, evidence based care across all services, there must be access to skilled children's mental health clinicians to inform service planning and commissioning within every relevant organisation. An approach that is fully integrated with other children's services is crucial to avoid fragmentation of services and to ensure that children don't fall between the gaps at points of transfer of care. *The government must ensure that children's mental health services are commissioned and planned in an integrated, pathway approach.*

4. Commitment to increasing capacity for mental health services for children and young people. It is widely acknowledged that mental health services for children have been chronically underfunded relative to need^{3,5}. Strategic leadership is required to recognise the long term benefits and potential savings to the public sector of ensuring all children and young people are offered appropriate early intervention, and access to high quality evidence based treatments. *This requires commitment from the Government to resource services at all levels through:*

- *Resourcing preventative services and prioritising these programmes within universal services as part of a commitment to 'invest to save'.*
- *Ensuring that paediatric and specialist CAMHS services have sufficient capacity to meet the needs of children and young people.*

5. Improving the transition and collaboration between child and adult mental health services. Many young people fall between the gap of children's and adult's mental health services, especially for those with neurodevelopmental, severe emotional or emerging personality disorders. Improved liaison, collaboration and joint working between children's and adult's mental health services and primary care are required to ensure genuine pathways of care that meet the needs of the young person and their family. *The government must address this increasingly significant issue by developing the capacity of services to meet the needs of young people and ensuring that CAMHS and AMHS are able to work together effectively.*

We are calling for action from the government to recognise children's mental health services as a priority. Such action will affect over 1 million children and young people in the UK. We must act now.

This statement has been developed by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Royal College of Psychiatrists, Royal College of Nursing, the Division of Clinical Psychology (British Psychological Society) and Royal College of General Practitioners in recognition of the common professional concerns from all health professionals who provide services for children. All of these professional bodies have the remit to promote high quality health care and collectively are uniquely placed to provide overarching professional recommendations to improve the quality of children's mental health services.

We are committed to working together to achieve these aims.

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1. ONS, 2004
 2. ONS, 2008
 3. *Getting it right for children and young people*, A review by Professor Sir Ian Kennedy, 2010
 4. *Review of Mental Health Research*, Medical Research Council, 2010
 5. *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS*. DH, 2010