

Call for evidence - Major Conditions Strategy

Questions

Tackling the risk factors for ill health

Preventable risk factors: includes tobacco, alcohol, physical activity, and diet-related risk factors.

- 1. Do you have any suggestions on how we can support people to tackle these risk factors?**

Yes

- 2. How can we support people to tackle these risk factors? (Please do not exceed 500 words)**

We are concerned that the proposed one-size-fits-all Major Conditions Strategy will fail to adequately address a rapidly escalating crisis in mental health. We do not believe that what has been presented so far responds in sufficient detail to the issues raised in the 10-year Mental Health plan consultation response.

While we understand the government's rationale for incorporating the 10-year Mental Health plan into the Major Conditions strategy, we feel that the crisis in mental health, particularly children's mental health, warrants a standalone mental health strategy, funding and resources.

In our consultation response last year, we warned that the risk of inaction was significant. We still have this concern, but without a long-term strategy we the UK has no roadmap for addressing poor mental health and we fear the issue will only worsen. However, we are conscious that the Department for Health and Social Care has asked for new recommendations, and so here are some of the additional considerations which we believe should be prioritised in tackling risk factors:

The Government should commit to developing an anti-racist approach, including ending 'hostile environment' policies and reviewing interventions that disproportionately affect people from racialised communities like school exclusions, youth custody, prison, and inpatient mental health services.

Government must address the risk factors of poor mental health, including poverty, otherwise efforts to create change in mental health will not be effective. Specifically, the government must commit to creating a comprehensive roadmap for ending child poverty via cross-departmental action. This action should include strengthening

economic support to families by restoring the £20-a-week Universal Credit uplift introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Action must be taken to support parents and families where they live. The government should provide investment into perinatal mental health services, midwifery, health visiting and family hubs. In developing these services, it is crucial to engage with voluntary and community sector organisations, who understand the barriers people face in accessing services at a local level.

Lastly, the government should increase targeted funding for early intervention and preventative mental health support by at least £2.3 billion, focusing on communities which are disproportionately affected by ill health to mitigate the inequality gap.

3. *How can we better support those with mental ill health? (Please do not exceed 500 words)*

When we look at the health of children specifically, early mental health intervention plays an important role in stopping the development of Major Conditions.

The government must prioritise early intervention for children struggling with their mental health, recognising the importance of mental health in determining future physical health.

We want to see a national roll-out of early support hubs in every local area so that all children and young people can access early support for their mental health in the community where they live.

Furthermore, the evaluation of the first 58 mental health support teams (MHSTs) across the programme's 25 Trailblazer sites, demonstrates that the programme is too NHS dominated and we are afraid that this will be reinforced with the Major Conditions strategy.

MHSTs spent a very low percentage of time supporting whole-school approaches and had a limited ability to support a full range of needs. Concerns have also been raised that the standardised CBT intervention MHSTs were offering were not effective for some groups (e.g children with SEN or neurodiversity).

We recommend:

- That the government takes a whole school approach to children's mental health, with 100% of schools being able to provide low level mental health interventions.
- Ensure that a person-centered approach is taken to meet children's individual needs, including for those with SEN or neurodiversity.

- Expand interventions used by MHSTs beyond CBT.
- Invest in training, recruiting, and retaining enough professionals in MHSTs, to ensure adequate capacity to provide support.

We want to emphasise the importance of community services and the role they can play in the development of mental health interventions. For example, the clinical team at the Together Trust are currently working with the University of Manchester to research persistent school based non-attendance, an issue which is growing and is under-researched.

Professionals from voluntary organisations with expertise in mental health must be included in the development, implementation and evaluation of Integrated Care Systems. We bring knowledge of our communities and a level of innovation that we feel could be beneficial to local and national government.

Creating accountability in local systems for children and young people's mental health will also be critical in ensuring effective, integrated mental health support is delivered. At a national level, there has been an absence of accountability arrangements put in place to ensure that plans and strategies set by the Government are acted on and effectively implemented.

We want to see clarity on what mechanisms will be put in place at a local level to ensure accountability for children and young people's mental health delivery, and how this will feed into existing accountability structures.

We recommend the creation of a strategic national oversight board to drive forward government commitments made in relation to mental health, and this board should include a representative for children and young people's mental health. In addition, this oversight structure should be reflected at a local level to ensure local implementation is similarly prioritised and driven locally.