



The 2021 Spending Review

Priorities for investing in the nation's mental health, September 2021

About us

Centre for Mental Health is an independent not-for-profit organisation dedicated to eradicating inequalities in mental health. Our research, analysis and evaluation work seeks to inform policy and change practice in pursuit of social justice and equality for mental health.

Our submission draws on evidence of need and benefit, including from economic analysis and demand modelling we have carried out before and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Centre for Mental Health also hosts the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition and it is a member of the Mental Health Policy Group. We have contributed to their Spending Review submissions and endorse their recommendations in full.

Our analysis of mental health need and demand

Mental ill health is common in all populations, and it has been rising among most age groups and sections of the population in England over the last 20 years. The biggest rise up to the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic was among young women, and by 2019/20 the economic and social cost of mental ill health in England had reached £119 billion a year (O'Shea and Bell, 2020).

We have reviewed evidence from high quality academic studies to forecast demand for mental health support consequent to the pandemic. Our modelling, which has contributed to national and local estimates by the NHS and DHSC, consistently forecasts that the equivalent of 10 million people in England will need some mental health support as a direct result of the pandemic over the next 3-5 years (O'Shea, 2021a). That includes 1.5 million children under age 18. Two-thirds of people included in this figure have existing mental health needs that may be exacerbated by the pandemic and its consequences.

This means that demand for mental health services could reach 2-3 times the current capacity of the system (O'Shea, 2021a). The Spending Review is an opportunity to anticipate growing demand and develop a comprehensive response. That should include:

1. Honouring the pledges made in the NHS Long Term Plan for mental health, and where necessary bolstering these to meet additional demand created by the pandemic
2. Shifting resources to prevention and early intervention, achieving better value for money from public funding by protecting people's mental health and investing in earlier help, especially for children, young people and families

3. Supporting the wellbeing of the health and care workforce, addressing trauma and burnout
4. Taking a whole government approach to supporting the public's mental health, ensuring that spending decisions achieve the greatest possible benefit and address the causes of poor mental health

Delivering existing policy commitments

The Spending Review is an opportunity to clarify the Government's continued commitment to implementing the NHS Long Term Plan for mental health, and to signal intent to achieve further improvements beyond the first five years. This should include the resources to implement the four new mental health access and waiting time standards recommended by NHS England.

While the revenue settlement for the NHS for the next three years has already been announced, the Spending Review must also now ensure that funding is provided to implement both the Long Term Plan and the Mental Health Act white paper, including:

- Investment in education and training to expand the health and social care workforce: including statutory roles such as AMHP and IMHA
- Investment in capital funding for mental health services: to replace outdated and inadequate buildings, facilities and vehicles

In the aftermath of Covid-19, it will be vital to support the mental health of the health and care workforce. Research and survey evidence predict high levels of trauma and burnout which are likely to increase the pressure on the NHS and local authorities. Investing 1% of the cost of staff absences in the NHS in protecting the wellbeing of the workforce could save up to £500 million a year in lost productivity (O'Shea, 2021b).

It is not possible to deliver improvements in mental health care without proportionate investment in social care alongside that put into the NHS. Mental health social care is a vital service that funds social work, supported housing and a wide range of voluntary and community sector services. Local authorities across the country are struggling to meet their Care Act responsibilities for people with mental health difficulties and their carers. Social services need immediate injections of funding to sustain basic services, and the longer term funding settlement for social care must include adequate provision for people of working age, many of whom currently have to pay towards the support they receive – often out of benefit payments.

Supporting children's mental health

Some of the biggest mental health impacts from the pandemic have been felt by children and young people. Existing plans for children's mental health focus on boosting specialist NHS children and young people's mental health services and on setting up Mental Health Support Teams in schools and colleges. These are welcome developments but fall short of offering a comprehensive approach to supporting children's mental health. To close the gap we recommend the Spending Review:

- Invests in evidence-based early years interventions, including parenting programmes that have been proven to improve children's mental health and family wellbeing (Doyle et al., 2018). This could be incorporated into the new network of Family Hubs and would

cost approximately £60 million over three years to cover the whole of England (O'Shea and Bell, 2020).

- Supports schools, colleges and universities to adopt a whole school approach to mental health, as set out in the Government's recent guidance (HM Government and CYPMHC, 2021)
- Creates a national network of early support hubs for young people (11-25 years) to get open access advice and help for their mental health: based on the existing YIACS model, this would cost £103 million annually to reach some 500,000 young people each year

Preventing mental health problems

While not all mental ill health can be prevented, there are steps that government can take to protect people's mental health and reduce the risks people face in their daily lives.

Among the necessary steps the Spending Review could take to protect the public's mental health at this critical time are:

Investing in public health services: restoring the value of the Public Health Grant to at least 2015/16 levels in real terms by investing at least £1 billion in funding for local councils by 2024/25. This should include the recruitment of 5,000 additional Health Visitors to provide essential support for young families.

Extending the Better Mental Health Fund: the £15 million one-year programme to boost local public mental health activity in the 40 most deprived local authorities in England has given an early boost to efforts to 'level up' mental health. The Spending Review can extend and sustain this programme to support further innovative work to improve mental health in communities where it is needed most.

Tackling poverty and income inequality: there is clear evidence that poverty and income inequality are major drivers of poor mental health (Patel et al, 2019). Boosting the incomes of the poorest in society improves population mental health (Ridley et al, 2020). By contrast, areas with high levels of poverty have similarly high levels of depression and antidepressant prescribing (Thomas et al, 2018). And children growing up in poverty face a far higher risk of poor mental health, both immediately and throughout their lives (Morrison Gutman et al, 2015).

The Spending Review should take a first step to addressing this by cancelling the cut in Universal Credit planned for October 2021.

The Spending Review could also address in-work poverty by increasing the minimum and living wage, including a commitment by all public services to pay all staff the latter. Evidence shows that higher minimum wages are linked to improvements in mental health (Kaufman et al, 2019).

Further, the Spending Review instigate a review of the benefits system and its impact on mental and physical health. There is clear evidence that reducing benefit entitlements and making the system more confrontational have generated higher levels of mental ill health (eg Reeves et al, 2016; Barr et al, 2016).

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