

# TOWARDS MENTAL HEALTH EQUALITY

A MANIFESTO FOR THE  
NEXT UK GOVERNMENT



**The Mental Health Policy Group**  
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Mental Health  
Foundation



# FOREWORD

It is seven years since the Health and Social Care Act said the NHS would give mental health parity with physical health – setting out an ambition that mental health should always be treated with the same priority and value as physical health. Since this time, there is no doubt we have seen significant progress in mental health policy.

Our Manifesto for Better Mental Health, published before the 2017 General Election, highlighted where urgent improvements were needed. Since then we have seen welcome improvements in several of these areas.

## **This includes:**

- A commitment to implementing the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health and the publication of data to measure progress against these recommendations.
- Mental health being made a central priority in the NHS Long Term Plan, including vital additional funding for mental health services and an important focus on prevention and addressing health inequalities.
- A full independent review of the Mental Health Act, with a commitment to publish a White Paper by the end of 2019.
- Ongoing government support for the Time to Change campaign to tackle stigma and discrimination against people with mental health problems.
- Commitment to supporting people with mental health problems at work by implementing the recommendations from *Thriving at work: a review of mental health and employers*.
- The appointment of the first Minister for Suicide Prevention.

Mental health is now clearly established as a national priority. However, when fewer than four in ten people who need support are accessing mental health services, there is still a long way to go on the road to equality.

Our country's progress on mental health is fragile. Taking concerted action to improve the nation's mental health is the work of a generation. It's going to take the sustained commitment and leadership of government to get us there. And at a time when more and more people are speaking out about their mental health and demanding better support, the next government cannot afford not to listen.

In this manifesto, we set out five areas that the next government must address in order to improve the lives of people with mental health problems and promote the mental health of the nation. By addressing these areas, the new government will lead the way towards mental health equality and bring us closer to the ambition of a fair deal for mental health.

- 1) Take action to prevent mental illness**
- 2) Create a cross-government plan for mental health and establish a 'mental health in all policies' approach across government**
- 3) Reform the Mental Health Act**
- 4) Ensure everyone can access the right mental health support, in the right place, at the right time**
- 5) Build a mental health workforce fit for the future**

# PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT GOVERNMENT



## 1) Take action to prevent mental health problems developing

Preventing mental health problems developing is good for both individuals and families while also providing excellent value for public money. Therefore, the next government should work with departments across government to develop clear and ambitious plans for preventing mental health problems, building on the Prevention Green Paper.

### **This should include, but not be limited to:**

- Commissioning specialised parent-infant relationship teams to provide holistic help at an early stage, when babies' emotional well-being and later mental health is identified as being at risk.
- Ensuring every school, higher and further education student receives appropriate mental health literacy lessons at every stage of their education and can access early support through their education provider.
- Expanding parent support programmes to improve outcomes for children, including access to evidence-based positive parenting interventions, peer-led self-management programmes to help parents with a mental health problem, and earlier access to education and support services for parents at risk of or living with addictions.
- Investing in public mental health by expecting similar (in some cases joint) outcomes to those for smoking cessation and programmes to tackle obesity, supporting every local authority to have a plan for better mental health and to deliver on suicide prevention plans.
- Working with employers to ensure they support the mental wellbeing of their staff, including fully implementing the recommendations from *Thriving at work: a review of mental health and employers*.
- Continuing to fund the Time to Change campaign at its current level to help end the stigma and discrimination often experienced by people with mental health problems.
- Prioritising additional funding for public mental health in the next spending review and committing to increased and sustained investment in Local Authority public health budgets throughout the course of the Parliament.



## 2) Create a cross-government plan for mental health and establish a 'mental health in all policies' approach across government

Improving the nation's mental health cannot be achieved through a focus on health services alone and requires action across government departments. People with mental health problems face numerous injustices and disadvantages in life: with higher levels of physical health problems, disability, unemployment, poverty,

debt, homelessness, poor housing, drug or alcohol dependency, crime victimisation and contact with the criminal justice system. It will only be possible to address these injustices if mental health is put at the heart of all government policy.

The next government should commit to developing a cross-government plan for mental health, to sit alongside the NHS Long Term Plan. This plan should set out how all public authorities and services will work to promote the mental health of the nation, particularly in relation to social care, housing, the social security system and the criminal justice system.

As part of this plan, the next government should introduce a 'mental health in all policies' approach, overseen by a Mental Health Cabinet Committee, which ensures that all new and existing policies are designed to benefit everyone's mental health and improve the lives of people with mental health problems.

**Examples of what could be achieved through this approach include:**

- Reform of the criminal justice system to make prisons safer and to divert more people to community options.
- Reforms to the social housing system so it better meets the needs of people with mental health problems and a sustainable funding model for supported housing to ensure everyone who needs supported housing is able to access it.
- A guarantee that anyone with a serious mental illness who wants help with employment is able to access Individual Placement and Support.
- A long-term sustainable approach to social care funding, which is complementary to improvements in mental health services support.



### 3) Reform the Mental Health Act

Being detained under the Mental Health Act is one of the most serious and traumatic things that can happen to someone. The current legislation is outdated and out of line with the principles of modern health care. The recent independent review, chaired by Professor Sir Simon Wessely, recommended a series of essential reforms to the legislation and wider mental health services.

**As a matter of urgency, the next government should commit to implementing all the recommendations from the independent review and champion the need for equality, dignity and respect in mental health services. This includes:**

- Bringing forward legislation to reform the Mental Health Act and publishing a White Paper within the first month of coming to office.
- Promoting race equality in mental health services and closing the gaps in the access, experience and outcomes between different ethnic groups.
- Using the next Spending Review to provide urgently needed investment in new staff and estates fit for the 21st century.



### 4) Ensure everyone can access the right mental health support, in the right place, at the right time

We warmly welcomed the NHS Long Term Plan for England, which builds on progress started under the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health. The Long Term Plan emphasises the financial commitment required to make up for the

decades of underinvestment in mental health services. The next government must now ensure that everyone experiencing mental health problems is able to receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

To achieve this the national Long Term Plan must be translated into effective local implementation plans, with funding reaching the front line to enable significantly improved access and choice of the full range of mental health services close to home.

**The next government must also take action to ensure that:**

- Previous pledges made on mental health investment are followed through.
- The next Spending Review must include a multi-year capital funding settlement to invest in the dilapidated and unsafe mental health estate and ensure safe levels of staffing.
- Progress against the commitments in the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health and Long Term Plan, including funding commitments, continue to be publicly tracked, so that both national bodies and local areas can be scrutinised and held accountable for delivering better mental health services.
- The Equalities Champion is made a permanent appointment and has a major role in monitoring the impact of delivery on people at increased risk of poor mental health.
- There is increased investment in mental health research to identify the most effective interventions.



## **5) Build a mental health workforce fit for the future**

Without the right workforce in place, it will not be possible to deliver the commitments in the NHS Long Term Plan or achieve the ambition of parity for mental health. Therefore, the next government must take the lead on building a sustainable mental health workforce, across the health and social care sector, which is capable of delivering the mental health services we deserve.

**As part of this, it is essential that the next government develops a long term workforce strategy and takes action to:**

- Grow the NHS workforce by: expanding the number of places available at medical and nursing schools, urgently reviewing the impact of tuition fees on mental health nursing and working with secondary schools and universities to actively promote mental health career options via a national campaign.
- Make it easier for psychology graduates and psychological therapists to become part of the mental health workforce.
- Urgently deliver the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health recommendation to consider how to introduce regulation of psychological therapy services.
- Ensure the workforce strategy utilises the full breadth of the mental health workforce and makes use of the expertise in the voluntary and community sector. This should include expanding the use of peer support workers and availability of independent advocates.
- Support the mental health and wellbeing of staff across the mental health workforce and take action to encourage more staff working in mental health services to stay in the NHS and social care.

# ABOUT THE MENTAL HEALTH POLICY GROUP

The Mental Health Policy Group consists of six national organisations working together to improve mental health: Centre for Mental Health, the Mental Health Foundation, NHS Confederation's Mental Health Network, Mind, Rethink Mental Illness and the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

This manifesto reflects areas of shared ambition and common concern across the six organisations.

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## The Mental Health Policy Group

