



# A MENTALLY HEALTHIER NATION

## TOWARDS A TEN-YEAR, CROSS-GOVERNMENT PLAN FOR BETTER PREVENTION, EQUALITY AND SUPPORT

More than 30 of the country's biggest organisations with an interest in mental health, representing millions of people, have come together to develop and promote this plan to address worsening mental health. Ahead of the UK general election, we will campaign for these policies to be adopted as part of a 10-year, cross-government mental health strategy for England, ideally to begin in the first year of the next Parliament.

### **MENTAL HEALTH IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES TO VOTERS**

New polling commissioned by Rethink Mental Illness finds that the UK population now ranks mental health as a more important issue than unemployment, industrial action, and Brexit. Under-40s rank its importance even above climate change.

### **THE UK'S MENTAL HEALTH IS GETTING WORSE**

The cost-of-living crisis, Covid-19 pandemic, austerity and other challenges have worsened many people's circumstances. Given that mental health is so strongly influenced by life conditions, we are facing higher rates of mental ill health. This is causing preventable misery, death, demand on stretched services, lost economic productivity, and costs of tens of billions of pounds.

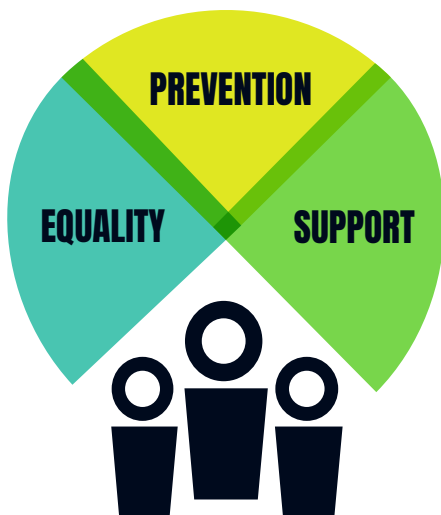
### **BUT THERE IS HOPE...**

We know from programmes that have been properly funded, supported and measured, such as the mental health elements of NHS England's Long Term Plan, Improving Access to Psychological Therapies, the Time to Change stigma-busting campaign, Sure Start centres for families, Individual Placement and Support, and the Better Mental Health Fund, that proper investment in evidence-based and informed interventions can support significant improvements, reducing distress and cutting costs.



## OUR VISION FOR A MENTALLY HEALTHIER NATION

Signatories of this document believe that a long-term, comprehensive, cross-government plan is essential to protect and promote the whole nation's mental health. It is necessary because mental health problems affect millions of people in every aspect of their lives. It's necessary because action across government could help to turn the tide of rising levels of mental ill health in our society today. And it's necessary because we cannot become a healthier, more equitable and productive nation without better mental health for us all. This new plan must encompass prevention, fairness and support so that we address the causes as well as the symptoms.



Address the causes of mental ill health



Eradicate mental health inequalities



Ensure timely access to local services

## PREVENTION

### MORE PEOPLE WILL ENJOY GOOD MENTAL HEALTH, FEWER WILL EXPERIENCE ILL HEALTH

By effectively addressing social determinants (like poverty and discrimination), and environmental factors (including housing and pollution), more of us can have better mental health. Investing in more powerful public health infrastructure is also key to preventing illness and promoting better health.

**Give children the best start** by delivering on the Association of Directors of Public Health's call for a new Child Poverty Act to eradicate child poverty by 2030. In addition, every parent and carer needs access to effective support including evidence-based parenting programmes, and every school and college should be a mentally healthier place for children and young people.

**Improve people's security** by ensuring everyone can afford a healthy life with enough money and a decent home. This should include instituting a Minimum Income Guarantee, reforming sick pay legislation, and providing more social rent homes.

**Create healthier physical environments** by accelerating the switch to cleaner energy and transport; better incentivising insulation, active travel, and public transport; ensuring everyone can access green space; and improving protection from junk food, smoking, alcohol, gambling and pollution.

**Boost public mental health infrastructure:** putting in place a 'Mental Health Test' of government policies and restoring the public health grant to its 2015 level with an annual £1 billion boost (Health Foundation, 2021) for local councils.

# EQUALITY

## THE HEALTH GAPS BETWEEN DIFFERENT GROUPS WILL BE CLOSED

Discrimination and disadvantage mean that risks to mental health are much higher in some groups, such as racialised communities. People with mental health difficulties are often treated less well in society, including in the social security and justice systems. And people with a severe mental illness have a life expectancy up to 20 years shorter than the general population. Addressing these injustices must be at the heart of creating a mentally healthier nation.

**Tackle racism in all its forms.** This must include ending 'hostile environment' policies, preventing school exclusions that disproportionately affect racialised children, and taking sustained action to boost race equality throughout mental health services.

**Set a target to close the health gap within a decade.** People with a severe mental illness shouldn't be dying up to 20 years too soon. They need fair access to health checks, stop smoking services, vaccinations and cancer screening.

**Reform our social security system** to ensure it treats people with mental health difficulties fairly. The Work Capability Assessment and its equivalent for Personal Independence Payment should be replaced with a fairer system of assessment for disability benefits.

**Reform the justice system.** This should include reducing reliance on prisons, boosting rehabilitative community sentences, and improving access to justice for people with a mental illness.

# SUPPORT

## EVERYONE WILL HAVE TIMELY, LOCAL ACCESS TO THE SERVICES THEY NEED

With the right support from properly resourced services, people are more likely to enjoy better mental health outcomes. Investing in mental health and social care works. No one should struggle to get help for their mental health, or be sent to hospital far from home. Services should meet everyone's needs with a minimum use of coercion, backed up by a modernised Mental Health Act.

**Fund mental health services fairly.** The Government must make a long-term commitment to funding NHS mental health services and local authority social care at levels that enable them to expand the workforce sufficiently to meet rising levels of need.

**Tackle long waits for mental health support** by implementing new access and waiting time standards for both child and adult mental health services, with sufficient resources to achieve them.

**Give children and young people easy access to mental health support.** Expand Mental Health Support Teams to all schools and colleges in England and fund a nationwide network of early support hubs for young people in every local authority area.

**Modernise the Mental Health Act** to reduce the use of coercion and tackle racial disparities in the mental health system. This must be backed up by investment in the mental health estate and action to address safety concerns in mental health hospitals.

# TAKE ACTION

The nation's mental health is a precious resource. Securing better mental health for more people will create a fairer, healthier, and more prosperous future for us all. We're calling on MPs and parliamentary candidates to adopt these policies, include them in their parties' election manifestoes, and deliver them in government.



Scan the QR code for the full report and references, or visit [www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/mentally-healthier-nation](http://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/mentally-healthier-nation)