

Time to deliver

Six mental health priorities
for the UK's next
prime minister.

Who we are

We're Mind, the leading mental health charity in England and Wales. We're here to make sure anyone with a mental health problem has somewhere to turn for advice and support. We work for a better deal and respect for everyone experiencing a mental health problem.

Foreword

Mental health is one of the biggest domestic issues facing the next prime minister. More people than ever are speaking out about mental health and demanding change, and as a nation our expectations for better mental health are higher than ever.

Our society and the way we live have changed beyond recognition in the last decade. Whether you are a teenager worrying about exams, a 30-something whose work and life are a set of blurred boundaries, or a grandparent who sees the world changing and is struggling to keep up – we all talk a lot more about the complexity of life and the challenges we face. Momentum has been building over the last decade, and our generation now fully expects the next prime minister to care about the nation's mental health just as much as its physical health. We won't stand for anything less.

The Conservative Party made significant mental health commitments in both its 2015 and 2017 manifestos, with the latter containing commitments such as reforming the outdated Mental Health Act, investing in and expanding mental health services, growing and improving

the workforce, and transforming the way employers support mental health in the workplace.

There has been welcome progress in these areas and more, but the work is far from done. The reality is that in most parts of the country services are still poor and people lack the essential support that they need to stay well and fully participate in society. We know that change is possible; there are pockets of excellent practice that are making a huge difference to the lives of people lucky enough to live in those areas. But this ought to be the standard everywhere. Now is the time to redouble our efforts and deliver the mental health services and support that people rightly expect.

It is vital that the new prime minister honours the commitments that the Conservative Party has already made on mental health, and goes even further in their approach, putting mental health at the very heart of their agenda. The nation demands it. In this document we set out six mental health priorities for the next prime minister of the United Kingdom.

1. Provide the right care, in the right place, at the right time

For too long, those of us with mental health problems have had to put up with second-rate, second-class services, with two-thirds of people with common mental health problems not receiving any treatment or support. Much of the time people only get help once they reach crisis point.

Within UK government, and across the nation, there is an understanding that this cannot go on, and work is underway to transform services. In England, the NHS Long-Term Plan, published in January 2019, builds on the progress started under the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health and includes a commitment of £2.3bn a year for mental health by 2023/24.

The key commitments within the plan are:

- Around two million more people with anxiety, depression and other mental health problems will be able to access treatment like counselling and cognitive behaviour therapy.
- Support for pregnant women and new mums.
- 24-hour access to crisis care.
- A guarantee that investment in primary, community and mental healthcare will grow faster than the growing overall NHS budget.
- Improvements to mental health services for children and young people.

Mind fully supports the plan and all those who are working hard to put it into action. But decades of underfunding and neglect mean it will be the work of a generation to bring mental health services up to the standard they should be at. The uncomfortable truth is that we have yet to see meaningful improvement in many areas of the country, and the NHS simply doesn't have the right workforce in place to make the promised improvements.

We need the next prime minister to ensure that momentum around the Long-Term Plan is not lost and that the funding attached to it reaches the frontline. They must address workforce shortages with adequate funding and planning, and ensure progress against all of the commitments in the plan is consistent across the country.

2. Address the growing crisis in young people's mental health


Many of the concerns set out above apply equally to children's mental health services, but there are also unique challenges facing young people that demand urgent action.

Half of all mental health problems have been established by the age of 14, rising to 75% by the age of 24. If we can enable our young people to understand their mental health, to look after it and to speak up as early as possible when they need help, we could drastically reduce the number of people reaching crisis point.

But neither the NHS nor schools are currently able to cope with the increasing numbers of young people needing support. The picture is bleak: cuts to local authority budgets mean initiatives like youth services and community outreach workers, which boost young people's resilience and wellbeing, are disappearing. And only three in 10 young people with a mental health problem were able to access specialist services last year, with those who do facing long waits and even longer journeys for treatment.

The Government has made a number of commitments aimed at improving support for young people, including training teachers to be able to spot the signs of mental ill health, and support for parents worried about bullying, self-harm and online pressures. Schools and parents can play a hugely important role in preventing mental health problems and we welcome these initiatives. But it won't be enough. Much more investment in early intervention and prevention services is required, enabling schools and local authorities to promote good mental health and identify young people at risk.

We urge the new prime minister to deliver on existing commitments in schools and to go much further in their approach to prevention. Critically, they must ensure that all children and young people can access timely, appropriate and well managed support for their mental health, wherever they are in the country, by ensuring that schools, NHS services, local authorities and all relevant agencies can deliver the right help at the right time.



As a teacher, it can feel like you're expected to know all the answers, but when it comes to mental health many staff aren't confident in having that conversation.

3. Promote and protect mental health at work

With mental health now the leading cause of sickness absence in the UK, it's never been more important for employers to look after the mental health of their staff. The total cost of unemployment, presenteeism and absenteeism resulting from mental health problems has been estimated as £30.3 billion in England alone.

Some 300,000 people with mental health problems fall out of work every year – equivalent to the population of Newcastle. But by promoting wellbeing for all staff, tackling the causes of work-related mental health problems, and supporting staff who are experiencing mental health problems, organisations can help keep people at work and stem the flow of people falling into hardship. Employers who have already taken this approach have reaped the rewards, with Deloitte analysis concluding that for every £1 spent on workplace mental health interventions, an average of £4.20 will be returned to employers.

We know that there is huge appetite among employers to do more in this space, but many require help from government in order to do so – including through legislative change. In 2017, following on from commitments made in the Conservative Party manifesto, Theresa May commissioned an independent review of mental health and employers. 'Thriving at Work', led by Mind's Chief Executive Paul Farmer and Lord Dennis Stevenson, made

various recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Government. But there are key legislative proposals on which the Government has so far made very little progress.

Employers are often unclear on their legal responsibilities and duties in this space, and employees unaware of their rights. We're calling for the workplace protections available to under the Equality Act 2010 to be clarified and extended so that those of us with fluctuating mental health conditions unequivocally receive the same rights as other disabled people.

It is particularly important that the next prime minister delivers on promises to overhaul Statutory Sick Pay. Right now, because the system is outdated and inflexible, too many people are forced to choose between taking time off work to look after their mental health and paying their bills. A system which allows more people to take time off when they need to would lead to fewer people falling out of work further down the line.

The next prime minister must deliver the changes set out in Thriving at Work to ensure that employers do all they can to support mental health in the workplace, and that employment legislation protects people with mental health problems from discrimination.

4. Make the benefits system work for people with mental health problems

When people with mental health problems are out of work, it is essential that they are treated with dignity and respect, can access a stable source of income that protects them from poverty, and are supported to live independently.

For those of us with mental health problems, feeling insecure or anxious about money only makes the situation worse. It prevents us from living our lives or doing the things we need to do to stay well. A benefits system that offers support at the right time can help us avoid a vicious circle of poor mental health and financial insecurity.

However, Mind hears from people every week who are simply not getting the support they need or being treated fairly. All too often, the system makes people jump through hoops to access support, causing unnecessary stress and anxiety, and in many cases pushing people further away from work. In the long term it can lead to poorer health and much more entrenched difficulties such as debt and homelessness. It's time to admit that the current approach isn't working and to implement a benefits system that works for people with mental health problems, built around three key principles:

Treating people with respect

Staff working in the system should be properly trained to support people with mental health problems and take the time to listen. The process of applying for benefits should be accessible for people with mental health problems and nobody should have to repeatedly share distressing personal experiences in order to receive benefits.

Protection from poverty

Benefits must reflect the costs of living if they are to provide a true safety net, and should be provided in good time, allowing people to manage their basic living costs and focus on recovery. Crucially, no one should be at risk of destitution because they have been too unwell to find or look for work. The threat of benefit sanctions is a significant source of anxiety for thousands of people, making their mental health worse.

Support to live independently

The benefits system must recognise the extra day-to-day costs we face when we're unwell, and provide the financial security necessary to move forward in our lives. If and when we are ready to find work, Jobcentre support should help us find work that fits our hopes and aspirations, rather than feeling like a tick-box, one-size-fits-all approach.

We urge the next prime minister to ensure that the benefits system works for those who need it. Everyone with a mental health problem should be able to access financial support from the benefits system when they need it, free from the fear of sanctions, and confident that they will be treated with dignity, compassion and respect.

5. Modernise the Mental Health Act

The Mental Health Act 1983 is the legislation in England and Wales that sets out when people can be detained and treated in hospital for their mental health against their wishes.


Being sectioned is one of the most serious things that can happen to somebody experiencing a mental health problem and can have long-term effects for them. For years, Mind and others have argued that the way the Act is implemented, and the care that people receive under it, often fails to treat people with dignity and respect. It focuses on what people are unable to do, rather than empowering people to have choice and control over their own care and recovery. And we have seen increasing numbers of people locked up under the Act, at huge cost, when much of the evidence is that for many people less intrusive, less expensive, treatments can be more effective.

In its 2017 manifesto the Conservative Party recognised that the legislation was three decades out of date and no longer reflects the nation's views on how people ought to be treated when they are most in need of help. Theresa May established an Independent

Review which sought the views of thousands of patients and carers affected by the Act as well as the professionals who use it.

The Review raised deep concerns about dignity, autonomy and human rights, as well as racial disparity in the way the Act is enforced, with Black African and Caribbean people disproportionately detained under the Act. Its recommendations include minimising the numbers of people being held against their will; strengthening the rights, dignity and wellbeing of people who are extremely vulnerable, ensuring that people are given a voice in crucial decisions about their health, and addressing racial discrimination. We wholeheartedly backed the recommendations and urge the next prime minister to take these forward immediately.

The Review was published in January 2019, yet we still await a formal response from government. We need urgent action from our next prime minister: they must commit to all of the recommendations in the Review and commit to a new Mental Health Bill in the next Queen's Speech.



**I hadn't hurt
anyone, I hadn't
broken the law...
so why had I been
imprisoned?**

6. Put mental health at the heart of government policy

The investment into services promised in the Long-Term Plan in England is vitally important, but good mental health is about so much more than good mental health services. To really improve the lives of people with mental health problems, and to reduce the number of people who become unwell in the first place, government needs to look beyond the NHS.

Our mental health is affected by a huge range of things – the quality and security of our homes, employment status and money worries, transitions between school, university and beyond, the relationships and friendships we have with others in our communities, our physical fitness and access to green space, to name but a few.

There is little point in government putting money into the NHS to help people when they are unwell if, at the same time, it undermines mental health through a flawed benefits system, or doesn't provide adequate social care support or housing solutions for people struggling with their mental health, or allows discriminatory employment practices to lock people with mental health problems out of the work place.

While politicians from all parties have begun to understand this point in recent years, we have yet to see decisive action. The Department of Health and Social Care will soon publish a Green Paper on prevention, setting out some of the actions that it and other departments

will take to prevent the onset of mental health and other conditions. Done well, this has the potential to drastically reduce the numbers of people who become unwell with mental health problems as well as increase the numbers of those who, despite their mental health problems, are able to live independently and thrive. But government needs to go further in its efforts to join up policy – a prevention strategy that is owned by health ministers will not provide all the answers. The task for the next prime minister is to bring together all of the different pockets of good practice that are taking place across government into one coherent strategy – and to abandon policies or practices that work against wellbeing and good mental health.

The next prime minister should commit to developing a cross-government strategy for mental health, making clear that each government department is responsible for actively promoting good mental health, and for preventing its policies from being detrimental to mental health. This strategy should bring together existing commitments from across government, and sit alongside the NHS Long-Term Plan. In addition, the prime minister must ensure the long-awaited Green Paper on prevention is published, and provide adequate funding via the Spending Review for both.

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