About Mind and the We Need to Talk coalition

We're Mind, the mental health charity for England and Wales. We believe no one should have to face a mental health problem alone. We provide advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. We campaign to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding.

Mind is part of the We Need to Talk coalition of mental health charities, professional organisations, Royal Colleges and service providers who campaign for better access to psychological therapies for people with mental health problems.

Mind’s manifesto for better mental health

Poor mental health is becoming a national crisis. That’s why, in June 2014, we published our manifesto for the General Election 2015, setting out the six commitments we want the next Government to make:

- Reduce mental health stigma and discrimination and continue to support the Time to Change campaign
- Mandate the NHS in England to offer talking therapies to everyone who needs them within 28 days of referral
- Ensure everyone gets safe, speedy and accessible crisis care whenever they need it, no matter where they turn
- Transform the support for people who are not working because of their mental health and create a system that really helps them to overcome the barriers they face
- Increase the overall NHS mental health budget by a minimum of 10 per cent in real terms over five years
- Implement a national strategy that helps everyone to take care of their mental wellbeing

This briefing focuses on the second of those commitments – access to talking therapies.

Access to talking therapies – summary

In coalition with our We Need to Talk partners, we are calling on the next Government to invest in talking therapies, so that the NHS in England can offer a full range of evidence-based psychological therapies to all who need them within 28 days of requesting a referral.

When people experience a mental health problem, getting the right type of talking therapy as early as possible can make a huge difference to their recovery and prevent them from becoming more ill. But over 40 per cent of people have to wait over three months just to find out if they can get treatment, and 1 in 10 people have to wait more than year. Waiting so long for treatment can damage relationships, stop people working and have long-lasting effects on their mental health. Shockingly, while waiting for treatment 67 per cent of people had suicidal thoughts and 40 per cent harmed themselves.
I had a complete breakdown, was unable to work and was hospitalised. If therapy had been available when I needed it, I believe I could have been helped to manage the illness and not reach the stage where everything fell apart.

We welcome the Government’s recent announcement introducing the first national waiting time standards for talking therapies in October 2014, which outlines targets to have 75% of people referred to IAPT treated within 6 weeks of referral, and 95% treated within 18 weeks of referral. Our priority will be to ensure that these new waiting targets are achieved and properly implemented.

What are the issues?

Investing in talking therapies has been shown to deliver significant health and economic benefits. If people with mental health problems are treated earlier, they are less likely to require crisis care services later, which ultimately saves the NHS money.

Excellent talking therapy services exist, and the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme has helped millions access therapies on the NHS, but it simply hasn’t gone far enough. Our 2014 survey of 2,000 people who have tried to access talking therapies within the last two years found revealed some appalling statistics:

Waiting times

Over 40 per cent of people have to wait over three months just for an assessment to find out if they can get treatment. Shockingly, 1 in 10 people have to wait more than a year. Once assessed, most people start therapy within three months, but a third (32 per cent) wait longer. We would not accept these waiting times for physical health.

Waiting so long for treatment can damage relationships, stop people working and have long-lasting effects on their mental health. We found that while waiting for treatment:

- 67 per cent of people became more unwell
- 67 per cent had suicidal thoughts
- 40 per cent harmed themselves
- 37 per cent went into crisis
- 16 per cent attempted to take their own lives
- 3 per cent were sectioned.

I had to push for three months to see a psychiatrist for a referral and then waited another two months before I got the letter confirming I had been referred. I am now on a four-month waiting list, which feels like a long time. In the meantime my depression has got worse and I feel like my life is passing me by.

Choice of treatment

Different therapies work well for different people. When people need help, it’s crucial that they can choose the type of therapy that’s right for them. Unfortunately, at the moment there is still a disproportionate focus on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy over other therapies, and we found that
Only 15 per cent were offered the full choice of NICE-approved therapies
56 per cent were offered no choice of therapy
45 per cent didn’t get the different types of therapy explained to them.
If the therapy offered didn't work, 37 per cent were not offered anything else

Equality of access

Access to talking therapies is patchy across the country, but some groups of people are consistently under-served. People from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, those with severe mental health problems, and older and young people find it particularly hard to access talking therapies on the NHS. We also found that many people are not offered talking therapies as a treatment option. One third people said that they had to request psychological therapies rather than being offered them.

There are cultural barriers. You worry about how you are going to be perceived and whether you can trust the other person. What is their reaction to you going to be? In how much detail in English can you describe your feelings? There is a language barrier.

What are we calling for?

Mind, as part of the We Need to Talk coalition, calls on the next Government to mandate that the NHS in England offer a full range of evidence-based psychological therapies to everyone who needs them within 28 days of requesting a referral. In particular, we call for:

Greater investment in talking therapies

The next Government must commit to increasing investment to meet rising demand and address the high level of unmet need for a range of mental health problems. In the lead up to General Election we want to see manifesto commitments from all political parties to continue to invest in talking therapies to meet rising demand. Local clinical commissioning groups can also take action now to identify the gaps between levels of need and levels of provision for psychological therapies in order to target investment effectively where it is most needed.

The introduction of national access standards and waiting times

The NHS Constitution should enshrine 28 days as the maximum waiting time from referral to first treatment. Clinical Commissioning groups can also ensure that all groups have equal and timely access to psychological therapies.

Choice in treatments

The NHS Constitution currently contains a right to some NICE-approved treatments, but the majority of mental health treatments and therapies are not included. We call on NICE to allow greater flexibility in assessing clinical evidence on talking therapies. This will ensure that a wider range of therapies are available on the NHS, and that access standards and waiting times apply to them.