It's time to press play on mental health

Six mental health priorities for the UK’s next Government.
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 UK Government. More people than ever are speaking out 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 every generation now fully expects the next UK government to care about the nation’s mental health just as much as its physical health. We won’t stand for anything less.

In 2017 all of the main political parties made significant mental health commitments in their manifestos, including reforming the outdated Mental Health Act, investing in and expanding mental health services, growing and improving the workforce, and transforming the way employers support mental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.

Since then, Brexit has dominated UK politics. People feel their lives have been put on pause, and promises broken. While there has been some progress, 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.

Yet 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. This ought to be the standard everywhere, and 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 next UK government puts mental health at the very heart of its agenda. The nation demands it. In this document we set out our priorities over six areas and we urge each party to commit to them and help transform the lives of people with mental health problems.

Politicians can’t keep mental health on pause any longer. It’s time to press play on mental health.
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. Decades of underfunding and neglect mean that services are all too often delivered in substandard, and sometimes dangerous, facilities. It is unsurprising that the workforce is feeling so demoralised, with staff leaving in droves.

Within UK government, and across the nation, there is an understanding that this cannot go on. 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 promise of £2.3bn a year for mental health by 2023/24. Key commitments include two million more people with anxiety, depression and other mental health problems accessing treatment, better support for pregnant women and new mums, 24-hour access to crisis care, improvements to children and young people’s mental health services, and a guarantee that investment in primary, community and mental healthcare will grow faster than the growing overall NHS England budget.

Mind fully supports the plan and all those who are working hard to put it into action, but political inertia means it is at risk.

The next UK government must ensure that the progress made over the last few years is not lost and agree to:

- implement all of the recommendations and funding commitments in the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health and the NHS England Long Term plan, in full, and continue to publicly track progress against these.
- commit to a major, multi-year capital investment programme to modernise the mental health estate and ensure it is fit for purpose.
- agree a sustainable funding solution for social care and for public health, to ensure that we have a world class and fully functioning health and care system.
- urgently address the mental health workforce shortage, widening the pool of people who come into the workforce through increased funding, an ambitious recruitment campaign, and the creation of a Mental Health Foundation Worker role.
- ensure that all NHS staff in England have training in mental health, both as part of their initial training and via continued professional development.
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. But it is 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.

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 2018 an Independent Review was established 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. Although more fundamental reforms may be needed in the longer term, taken together the Review’s recommendations have the potential to make significant improvements to people’s rights and experience of mental health care.

• The next UK government must commit to all of the recommendations in the Review and deliver them via a new Mental Health Bill at the earliest stage in the new Parliament.

I hadn’t hurt anyone, I hadn’t broken the law... so why had I been imprisoned?
Many of the concerns set out so far 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 seek and receive support as early as possible, we could drastically reduce the number of people reaching crisis point.

But neither the NHS in England 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 that boost young people’s resilience and wellbeing, like youth services and community outreach workers, 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 next UK government must take urgent action across three areas, with each requiring significant investment and accountability:

1. Schools
   - Our education system must be radically reframed so that wellbeing is placed on an equal footing to academic success.
   - All teachers and support staff should receive training in mental health and wellbeing, ensuring that responsibility is shared across the whole school.
   - Our education system must be inclusive, ensuring that young people with a mental health problem are supported to learn, develop and thrive. Too often young people with mental health problems face discrimination and stigma, are pushed out, excluded and left behind.

2. Community mental health services
   - Children and young people who require specialist help should begin treatment within four weeks, and the next UK government must honour the commitment to ensure that 100% of children who need specialist help can access it within the next decade, if not before.
   - A single point of access, simple referral routes, and short waiting times are essential for good community services, as are services that are as close to home as possible.
   - Clear, honest information must be available to help young people make informed choices about their care.
   - Young people who are moving towards adult mental health services should expect high quality, age-appropriate services. More research into the effectiveness of 0-25 models of care is needed.
3. Crisis services

- Young people in crisis must be seen within four hours by appropriately trained staff, and no young person should have to travel out of area for crisis services.

- Crisis helplines, triaged through NHS England’s 111, must be accessible for children and young people to ensure they can get face-to-face help quickly.

- Clinical staff and social workers should be brought together through new, specialist Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment Teams, with aim of supporting young people quickly in their own homes.

There are many stressful parts of being a teenager today. So much can affect our wellbeing: exams, home life, cyberbullying, and the pressures of social media are just a few examples. I’ve found that not many people want to talk about mental health, and this needs to change.
4. Make the benefits system work for people with mental health problems

It’s time to admit that the current benefits system isn’t working for people with mental health problems.

Mind hears from people every day who are simply not getting the support they need from the system, or being treated with respect. Whether it’s applying for Universal Credit or being assessed for disability benefits like Personal Independence Payments, all too often, people are forced to jump through hoops to access support. This causes unnecessary stress and anxiety and leaves people trapped in poverty.

For those of us with mental health problems, living with the fear of having our benefits stopped only makes the situation worse. A benefits system that offers support at the right time would help avoid a vicious circle of poor mental health and financial insecurity. That’s why we need a system built around three key principles: treating people with dignity and respect, protecting people from poverty, and supporting people to live independently.

The next UK government must:

- ensure that no disabled people or people with health conditions are subject to sanctions. The fear of being sanctioned makes people more unwell and does nothing to help those of us with mental health problems find work.

- regulate benefits assessments similar to how schools and hospitals are regulated. Nearly seven in 10 fit for work tests which go to appeal are overturned, and the figure is even higher for Personal Independence Payments. In the majority of cases decisions are overturned because of problems with the quality and accuracy of assessments – an independent regulator could go a long way to preventing this.

- make sure that disabled people have the right to apply for long-term benefit awards. We hear time and time again that the frequent use of face-to-face assessments is making people more unwell.

- set up a new independent commission to ask disabled people and independent experts to decide the questions for benefits assessments, to ensure they reflect the realities of their lives.

All I can say is my mental health has deteriorated since these assessments started. I literally lived in fear of the letter arriving. I find the questions on the form utterly degrading and hate that I can’t fit into those boxes.
5. 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 long-term 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; 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 the UK government to do so. Employers are often unclear on their legal responsibilities and duties, and employees unaware of their rights. In 2017, then-Prime Minister 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 UK government. But there are key areas from the review where very little progress has been made.

The next UK government must:

- deliver the changes set out in Thriving at Work to ensure employers do all they can to support mental health in the workplace. The next government must also do more to promote transparency and accountability around employer practices so that we know what’s happening in our workplaces.
- clarify and extend the protections available to workers under the Equality Act 2010, so that people with mental health problems unequivocally receive the same rights as other disabled people.
- radically reform the outdated Statutory Sick Pay model by increasing the rate, removing the wait for pay, enabling people to make a phased return to work, and ensuring the system works for low paid workers and self-employed people.

Statutory Sick Pay wasn’t just a drop in pay, it was the difference between being evicted or not, between eating or not.
6. Put mental health at the heart of UK government policy

The investment into services promised in NHS England’s Long Term Plan 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, UK government needs to look beyond the health services.

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 the UK government putting money into health services 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 workplace.

While politicians from all parties have begun to understand this point in recent years, we have yet to see decisive action. The task for the next Prime Minister is to bring together all of the different pockets of good practice that are taking place across the UK government into one coherent strategy – and to abandon policies or practices that work against wellbeing and good mental health.

The next UK government must:

- drastically reduce the numbers of people who become unwell with mental health problems through a well thought-out prevention plan
- tackle inequalities, stigma and discrimination
- develop joined-up policy on social care, the welfare system, housing, and legal rights, so that all of the UK government is working together to improve the lives of people with mental health problems.

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