

## THE GOVERNMENT 10-YEAR MENTAL HEALTH PLAN

A response to the public consultation – Executive Summary.

Kim Markham-Jones, Sofia Atha, Abbey Jackson and Simon Wilson

July 2022

## 1.0 Executive Summary

This report outlines insights from engagement activity that YoungMinds conducted with seven young people with lived experience of mental health support and services.

The purpose of the engagement activity was to provide a response to the public consultation about the government's proposed 10-year mental health plan. The key research questions for the consultation were:

1. How can we all promote positive mental wellbeing?
2. How can we all prevent the onset of mental health conditions?
3. How can we all intervene earlier when people need support with their mental health?
4. How can we improve the quality and effectiveness of treatment for mental health?
5. How can we all support people with mental health conditions to live well?
6. How can we all improve support for people in crisis?

The Department of Health and Social Care and Mind were keen to hear from six at-risk priority groups, these were: Black African Caribbean people, LGBTQIA+ people, young learning disabled people, people with severe mental illness, young women who have experienced trauma and people living in poverty.

YoungMinds' research engaged the following groups:

- LGBTQIA+ young people
- Young women who have experienced trauma
- Young people who have experienced severe mental health problems

Feedback and recommendations are based around five key themes.

### **Key theme 1: The mental health system is out of date, underfunded and not fit for purpose.**

Despite Local Transformation Plan funding there is a lack of individualised care and there are still long waits to access support with, in many instances, only those at crisis point getting the help they need. This creates unintentional competition between young people to reach crisis point because they know only those who are the 'worst' or 'most unwell' will be able to access services.

*"I had to nearly die to get help." 21 year old, male young person*

## Recommendations

1. Create a mental health system that is coherent and connected so that support is available to young people whatever their level of need, wherever they are. Local assessment and triage systems or central points of access could ensure that young people are signposted to the right support at the right time for them.
2. Establish adolescent and young adult services for those aged 16 or 18 to 25. The transition to adulthood is difficult and young people have different needs to children and older adults.

3. Services need to see each young person as a whole and provide individualised support and care based on their specific needs. One way this can be better achieved is through improving opportunities for young people to participate in service commissioning, design and evaluation and in their own individual care. Provision should also be made to provide support and services in different languages for young people whose first language is not English.
4. Make inpatient units and clinical spaces suitable for neurodivergent young people. Further to recommendation three, involving young people in designing spaces would help achieve this and don't create wards where neurodivergent young people and young people with behavioural issues are mixed.



These recommendations link to the key research questions:

- How can we all intervene earlier when people need support with their mental health?
- How can we improve the quality and effectiveness of treatment for mental health?

## **Key theme 2: There is variation in the standard and quality of care from professionals working in the mental health system.**

There is good care happening within the mental health system but it is inconsistent and young people feel that there are people working in mental health services who shouldn't be. We heard experiences of poor care and even abuse and that a trauma informed approach is not standard practice. Young people shared examples of out of date language and diagnoses being used by professionals.

*"I don't feel I have ever had trauma informed therapy. [Therapy] has dug up trauma and then said I can't support you. I've been left unable to function and just sitting with the trauma."*  
18 year old, non-binary young person

## **Recommendations**

1. Implement a standard that young people must be involved in recruitment of all frontline mental health professionals.
2. Mandate continuous professional development and up to date training for the mental health workforce, including training in trauma informed practice.
3. Training and support for mental health professionals to enable them to truly individualise care and provide room to respond to young people's needs e.g. number of sessions and type of intervention. Young people's participation in staff training, service design and development and in their own care could help enable this.

4. Improve coordination and communication between services supporting young people, particularly neurodivergent young people to ensure they are treated holistically and not 'bounced between services'.



These recommendations link to the key research questions:

- How can we improve the quality and effectiveness of treatment for mental health?
- How can we support people with mental health conditions to live well?
- How can we all improve support for people in crisis?

### **Key theme 3: Stigma and discrimination still exist around mental health, particularly around severe and enduring mental illness.**

Although there is improved understanding amongst the public about common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, there is still a lack of understanding and stigma about severe and enduring mental health problems such as psychosis and bipolar disorder. There is also stigma from professionals working in the mental health system around personality disorders.

*"Young people who are diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder are labelled as attention seeking." 22 year old, female young person*

### **Recommendations**

1. Create government awareness raising campaigns about severe and enduring mental illnesses in line with campaigns about common mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and talking about mental health.
2. Include the topic of severe and enduring mental health in the school curriculum as well as discussions about general wellbeing and common mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.
3. Mandate up to date training on bias for the mental health workforce with young people participating in the creation and delivery of the training to share their experiences of how labels such as Borderline Personality Disorder affect them.



These recommendations link to the key research questions:

- How can we all promote positive mental wellbeing?
- How can we all intervene earlier when people need support with their mental health?
- How can we improve the quality and effectiveness of treatment for mental health?
- How can we support people with mental health conditions to live well?

## **Key theme 4: Early intervention is key!**

Early intervention is essential. If it is in place and done well then it can prevent young people from reaching crisis point in the first place. Young people highlighted education settings as being vital in identifying when young people are struggling and the importance of teachers and other school staff viewing behaviour as communication. Support in these settings needs to be holistic rather than just having the primary aim of getting young people 'back into lessons'.

*"School could have been more supportive. They tried to deal with my non-attendance by threatening on a daily basis that my mum could be taken to court. They never asked why I didn't want to be in school or what they could do to help." 21 year old, male young person*

## **Recommendations**

1. Invest in early intervention as a way of not only better supporting young people but also protecting the future mental health system. This should include providing all teachers with training about mental health (not only a select few mental health leads in each school) including seeing behaviour as communication, having conversations, signposting and trauma.
2. Create a statutory requirement that each education setting must have a defined number of mental health first aiders (similar to the requirement to have physical first aiders).
3. As mentioned under the previous key themes, build systems and support that are holistic and respond to the young person's needs as a whole. Interventions that take every aspect of the young person into account during assessments, diagnosis and support, particularly if there are multiple difficulties being experienced, will prevent young people reaching crisis point and stop young people falling through gaps in services.

These recommendations link to the key research questions:



- How can we all intervene earlier when people need support with their mental health?
- How can we improve the quality and effectiveness of treatment for mental health?

## **Key theme 5: You cannot address or improve mental health without addressing the social and economic issues that impact on young people.**

Young people care and worry about social and economic issues such as the housing crisis, the cost of living and employment and many are affected by adverse childhood experiences, traumatic events, loneliness and harm from social media. However, if they speak about their concerns they are labelled as 'snowflakes' and are told it is 'not their problem'. A clear message from them is that social and economic issues are causes of mental health problems and more needs to be done to tackle these issues in order to reduce the number of young people struggling.



*"They [the government] want to fix mental health but don't ask about the other stuff [that causes it]." 24 year old, non-binary young person*

## Recommendations

The key actions that young people want the government and other institutions to take are:

1. Recognise that the factors that lead to mental health problems in young people are the same as those that lead to mental health problems in adults. Young people are not immune to the impact of local, national and world events. They worry about their futures and this impacts on their present.
2. Tackle the issues that impact on mental health **alongside** making improvements to the mental health system. Doing both is the way to effect true change and really help people.



These recommendations link to the key research questions:

- How can we all prevent the onset of mental health conditions?
- How can we all support people with mental health conditions to live well?

## Conclusion

**There is no one answer to protecting and improving young people's mental health. It must involve social and systemic change.** Key themes across all of the recommendations from young people are the importance of individualised care, consistent skills building in the mental health workforce and the need to tackle the social and economic issues that impact young people's mental health at the same time as making improvements to the mental health system. **Make change to the cause of problems as well as the support provided.**

An important point to note is that there was a commonality of experience across all of the young people we spoke to, regardless of the priority group they 'fit into'. A key aspect of the feedback was that there is stigma in the system and that whichever priority group young people are a part of, they experience this in some way. Whether this is demonstrated as professionals assuming their sexuality, gender or neurodivergence is a cause of mental health problems or them having bias about particular diagnoses e.g. personality disorders. **Young people don't exist solely in one single affinity group therefore it is fundamental for the government and other institutions to recognise and understand the intersectionality of young people's identities and consequently, the importance of truly individualised care and of young people's participation in their own care and in shaping services.**

The situation is complex, but this doesn't mean we shouldn't address the challenges and try to make things better for our young people.

## 1.1 Open letter from a YoungMinds Youth Advisor

This April the government opened a call for evidence to inform a new 10-year mental health plan. In response to this YoungMinds was asked by Mind and the Department of Health to speak with young people and produce a report based on their lived experiences. The 10-year mental health plan will have a direct impact on young people's lives, many of whom have already sought help in the current mental health support system.

The purpose of this report is to make sure young people's voices are visible and appropriately represented in shaping this 10-year plan.

YoungMinds organised three insight sessions and one 121 interview for YoungMinds Activists and Youth Advisors to share their experiences of the mental health support system. Each session focused on the experiences highlighted as priorities by the commissioners: young people in the LGBTQIA+ community, young women who have experienced trauma and young people with severe mental illness. Through these sessions, young people overwhelmingly agreed that the mental health system is outdated, underfunded and not fit for purpose. Apart from the significant lack of resources, professionals often lack up to date training, leading to exacerbation of mental health stigma. Vulnerable young people seeking help are put in an environment and through a process prone to re-traumatisation and are often denied case by case time and care.

*"I had to share my trauma, including experience of sexual assault, with a room full of strangers including men. This needs to change. Professionals need to recognise trauma and triggers."*

22 year old, female young person

With the mental health system overwhelmed as it is, young people focused discussions around early intervention and prevention as key for moving forward. However, young people stressed this would be challenging to achieve when the government has not shown any sign of tackling the socioeconomic issues that impact young people and the population as a whole. On its own, overhauling the mental health system is not going to work, unless the new plan and the government start aiming for the root cause (stigma, discrimination, systemic racism, the education system, the economic crisis, quality of life etc.) instead of the symptoms.

*"I look at houses and mortgage calculators and feel like I'll never be able to afford even normal/average house."*

24 year old, non-binary young person

We, as Youth Advisors and the YoungMinds team, believe young people's experiences are key to redefining what the mental health care system should be. With this report we aim to elevate young people's voices and ask the government to take their insights into careful consideration. Through the past few years YoungMinds has shown in practice that having young people's input fosters trust, opens valuable communication channels, and develops practical and efficient implementation of ideas and strategies in the sector.

Through this report we intend to provide a clear and concise picture of the issues the new mental health plan needs to address. We hope this will be seen as valuable and important as young people themselves see it.

**Sofia – YoungMinds Youth Advisor**

**Telephone:** 020 7089 5050

**YoungMinds**

4th Floor  
India House  
45 Curlew Street  
London SE1 2ND

**[yomenquiries@youngminds.org.uk](mailto:yomenquiries@youngminds.org.uk)**

**[youngminds.org.uk](http://youngminds.org.uk)**