



Children & Young People's
Mental Health Coalition

A Manifesto to Promote Children and Young People's Mental Health

November 2019



Our vision

Children and young people's mental health is one of the most important issues of our time. Any government that truly aspires to promote a healthy society must acknowledge in policy and practice the impact of good infant, child and young people's mental health. It is now clear that social determinants are a huge factor in mental health. The new government must design policy that reaches beyond the Department of Health and Social Care. Mental health should be at the heart of any government's ambition for its citizens.

We want all parties to make a strong commitment to the mental health and wellbeing of all infants, children and young people, by recognising and realising their right to enjoy the highest standard of mental health as possible.

Overarching recommendations:

- **A cross-departmental approach to children and young people's mental health.** Children and young people's mental health is affected by a myriad of factors. Therefore, any future government should seek to embed a 'mental health in all policies' approach by establishing a coordinated approach, led by the Cabinet Committee, to tackle the crisis we face in our children and young people's mental health. Every department should strive to promote and safeguard mental health. The voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector should be regarded as partners, acknowledging and making use of the critical role they play.
- **The voice of children and young people at the heart of the Government's wider social agenda.** Too often children, young people and their families are not engaged on the decisions that affect them most, a right they have that must be given more respect. The next Government must provide meaningful and inclusive opportunities for children young people and their families to be involved in the political process and the strategic direction of their work.

Early intervention

Early years and parental support: The first 1001 days are crucial period in a baby's development as early experiences shape their brain development and can influence their future outcomes, including their relationships, learning, behaviour, and overall health. We must create a safe and nurturing environment to ensure children have the best start in life. Giving every parent and carer the knowledge and tools to look after their own mental health and their children's will make for happier families and can prevent problems from emerging.

Early intervention: On average young people get help 10 years after their first symptoms arise.¹ There are long-term financial implications associated with late intervention, including treatment for serious mental health problems such as psychosis and conduct problems.² With the right policy and action, we can prevent young people's problems from escalating, instead of waiting to treat them at crisis point. This applies across the spectrum of mental health and support services from early help to inpatient provision.

Children with multiple and complex needs have an even tougher time accessing the timely help they need.³ Our [Overshadowed](#) report, for example, has highlighted the significant barriers young people with learning disabilities face in accessing early intervention mental health services.⁴

Mental health in education: A whole school, college and university approach is needed, where health is a pillar of education alongside learning. Our recent joint report [Making the Grade](#), produced with Centre for Mental Health, finds that educational environments, timetables, lessons and cultures all have an effect on the mental health of children and young people.⁵ From bullying to exam stress, schools, colleges and universities can be stressful places, especially for young people facing the greatest adversity. But they can also be good for mental health – for example through teaching life skills and creative subjects.⁶ Young people should also be equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to navigate the online world safely as part of a whole education approach⁷

Currently much of the policy focus is on children and young people who are in school- but policy must also work for those who are not in mainstream settings (such as those who are excluded or home educated). Many of these children are at greater risk of developing mental health problems than their peers. They need more help, not less.

We are asking the next government to:

- **Support parents and carers.** Every parent should have access to the advice and support to enable them to maintain good mental health, relationships at home, and their children’s wellbeing. And every parent should know how to access that support.
- **Invest in evidence-based early intervention initiatives** that meet the rights of all young people to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, supporting timely, age-appropriate, community-based services. Three quarters of adult mental health problems start by age 24.⁸ Let’s act early to stop them early.
- The next government must also ensure that investment in mental health and wellbeing services reaches the areas it is intended for – not being used to plug public funding shortfalls elsewhere.
- **A whole education approach to mental health and wellbeing.** Create a whole school, college and university culture that promotes positive mental health and wellbeing for both pupils and staff. Parents, carers and the wider community should be engaged as part of this.

Prevention and Promotion

Preventing mental health problems is not only better for young people, it is a better use of resources. Too often preventative approaches are overlooked and under resourced. Health visitors, for example, play a critical role in improving maternal and infant mental health and joining up services. We must ensure there are sufficient numbers of health visitors in post with capacity to establish trusting and supportive relationships with families.

There are approximately 4.1 million children living in poverty in the UK and the numbers are rising.⁹ A report by the British Medical Association has shown the impact of social determinants on mental health, including the effects of poverty and poor housing.¹⁰ Secure and safe housing has been shown to benefit children and young people’s mental health, yet 585,000 children are homeless or are at risk of being so.¹¹ This is unacceptable.

The trend, has been to cut, not invest in, crucial preventative measures such as community links, advice and signposting. For example, youth services have fallen by 69% since 2011 ¹², a damaging amount for something so important. Further, investment in advice services can help young people who are at a greater risk of developing mental health problems.¹³

We also want greater priority given to research around mental health and wellbeing, especially in areas that would make a big difference to people's lives. This means more funding for research into the prevention of mental ill-health and the promotion of good mental health.

We are asking the next government to:

- **Commit to increasing the public health grant to local authorities.** Address the funding shortfall to local authority public health to improve the provision of preventative mental health and wellbeing services, such as those delivered by health visitors and school nurses.
- **Address health inequalities to help prevent mental health problems.** Concerted effort is needed to tackle the known social determinants related to mental health problems, such as poverty, ethnicity and disability, to improve access to support and outcomes.
- **Give all children, young people and their families a safe and guaranteed home.** Ensure providers, housing associations and councils are held to a minimum-build requirement on adequate and affordable homes. All our children require a safe place to live.
- **Invest in research on effective preventative approaches.** Further research is needed to build on what we already know about the social determinants of mental ill-health to inform effective practice around children and young people's mental health, particularly around prevention and promotion.

Workforce

It is essential that roles in health, care and the voluntary sector are strengthened and supported through high quality training and development opportunities. So much additional help is available for our children and young people in the voluntary sector that the government can harness but we need to ensure that the NHS workforce can meet the rising demand on its services.

Evidence from our members suggests that there are significant shortages in the children and young people's mental health workforce. For example, the Royal College of Psychiatrists have found the vacancy rate for NHS consultant psychiatrists has doubled in the last six years, with vacancies particularly high in child and adolescent psychiatry.¹⁴ Recruitment and retention of staff must improve. Too many children are not treated due to workforce challenges, from a lack of good policy and planning.¹⁵ The next government must remedy this.

We are asking the next government to:

- **An overarching workforce plan to improve children and young people's mental health.** We are calling for an overarching infant, children and young people's mental health and wellbeing workforce plan to include the roles of all those working with infants, children and young people and their families, including the roles of parents/carers and peer support workers.
- Young people should never be denied a service due to where they live. The government **must end the postcode lottery by ensuring the workforce covers the country fairly.**

- **Maximise the potential of the whole workforce.** Children and young people’s mental health is supported by a wide variety of groups and people. The next government must support this workforce fully with adequate planning and funding. The variety of important services that VCSE provide should be integrated with statutory services. Support and funding will result in better retention and staff numbers. These steps will give children and young people the service they need.
- **Harness the power of digital.** Use the constant innovations in digital technology to best help and treat our children and young people. Train the workforce to maximise the potential of cost effective and impactful digital support.

The Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition: Who are we?

The Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition brings together almost 200 organisations to campaign and influence policy, with and on behalf of infants, children and young people in relation to their mental health and wellbeing. We do not represent any one organisation, approach, or professional group, but come together to provide a strong unified voice speaking out about children and young people’s mental health.

For any questions, please contact Oliver Glick, Public Affairs Officer, at oliver.glick@cypmhc.org.uk.

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