

A manifesto for babies, children, and young people's mental health

Parliamentary Briefing

Babies', children, and young people's mental health is a critical issue of our time. This briefing by the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition sets out the headline manifesto commitments we believe all political parties should adopt in their manifestos in order to improve mental health outcomes for all babies, children and young people, and to build a healthier and more prosperous society. This includes:

- Commit at least an additional £1.7bn per year for Integrated Care Systems to deliver a comprehensive mental health pathway for all babies, children and young people aged 0-25.
- Embed whole educational approaches to mental health and wellbeing across all education settings.
- Increase the provision of early intervention support in the community through the national roll-out of early support hubs in every local area.
- Bring forward reform of the Mental Health Act 1983, to ensure that children and young people's rights are protected and promoted, and that they receive high quality and compassionate care.

Key statistics

- Half of all lifetime mental health problems are established by the age of 14 and 75% by age 24 (Kessler et al., 2005; McGorry et al., 2007).
- It is suggested that around **10-25% of young children** experience a disorganised attachment relationship with their main carer(s). This can significantly increase the risk of poor social, emotional and cognitive outcomes (First 1001 Days Movement, 2021).
- In 2023, about **1 in 5 children and young people** aged **8 to 25 years** had a mental health problem (NHS Digital, 2023).
- **Suicide is the most common cause of death** for both boys and girls aged between 5 and 19 (ONS, 2019).
- **1.5 million children and young people** under the age of 18 could need new or increased mental health support following the Covid-19 pandemic (O'Shea, 2021).
- It is estimated that around **75% of young people** experiencing a mental health problem are forced to wait so long that their condition gets worse, or they are unable to access any treatment at all (Local Government Association, 2023).
- The cost of not intervening is high. The economic and social cost of mental ill health have grown to almost **£119 billion a year** in the last decade (Centre for Mental Health, 2020).

We call on political parties to:

- 1. Commit at least an additional £1.7bn per year for Integrated Care Systems to deliver a comprehensive mental health pathway for all babies, children and young people aged 0-25.**

Mental health care for babies, children and young people has been underfunded for many years with local areas spending on average **less than 1%** of their overall budget on children's mental health (Local Government Association, 2023). Budget constraints puts continued pressure on services leading to a situation where demand outstrips capacity.

Funding for other areas of the system, particularly prevention, has also seen a significant decline. Analysis by the Health Foundation shows that the Public Health Grant **has been cut by 26 per cent** on a real terms per person basis since 2015/16 (Finch, 2023), risking essential services for babies, children and young people, such as school nurses and health visitors, being cut.

We are calling on the new government to commit additional funding of **£1.7bn per year** to Integrated Care Systems in order to deliver a comprehensive pathway of support for 0–25-year-olds, that reaches across health, social care, education, justice, and the voluntary sector.

We recognise that not all babies', children and young people will need NHS support, so it is crucial that there is a comprehensive pathway of support that covers the Thrive framework of getting advice, getting help, getting more help and getting risk support (Wolpert et al., 2019). This should be coupled with pathways to ensure that those with specific needs can get support.

2. Embed whole educational approaches to mental health and wellbeing across all education settings.

Early years settings, schools, colleges, and universities all have an important role to play in promoting and protecting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Whilst many schools are working to implement whole educational approaches this work is often underfunded, comes from core budgets, and remain optional within schools. Many schools are also left to manage children and young people's mental health needs without the resources and capacity to appropriately support this.

The new government should embed whole education approaches to mental health and wellbeing across all education settings to ensure cultures that promote positive mental health and wellbeing for both learners and staff. This would ensure that mental health is embedded within the education system, which would have a universal impact on the health of every child and young person.

A whole school approach programme in England would cost approximately **£530 million per year** based upon the key elements of such an approach¹, as costed by our members Place2Be and would include a range of essential aspects including a mental health practitioner for targeted support, foundational programmes for class teachers and more.

3. Increase the provision of early intervention support in the community.

¹ This approach builds on and complements the current plans for the Mental Health Support Teams being rolled out by the Department for Education and NHS England and the Senior Mental Health Lead training programme. Costs of the Senior Mental Health Lead training programme have been include in estimates, but this cost could be removed if the Department committed to long-term, annual funding of the programme.

There have been wide-ranging calls to equitably fund the system which includes investing in early intervention provision in local communities, alongside late intervention, crisis and urgent care. Identifying and supporting children and their families at an early stage prevents problems from developing later in life, avoids costly interventions and later pressure on services and supports children and young people before needs escalate.

The new Government should invest in a national network of early support hubs in every local area in order to increase the provision of early intervention support in the community. Early support hubs offer easy-to-access, drop-in support on a self-referral basis for young people with emerging mental health needs, up to age 25 and have been shown to have excellent outcomes for young people both internationally and in the UK.

To establish a hub in a local area, we estimate that it will cost the Government between **£114m to £134.5m** per annum for running costs and an additional **£125.4m to £205.2m** for capital costs to establish hub sites. It is important to note that there will be regional variations in costs as well as in access to existing infrastructure and properties, which will either reduce or increase costs.

4. Bring forward reform of the Mental Health Act 1983

It is estimated that around **3,500 children aged under 18** are admitted to NHS CYPMHS Tier 4 wards a year (Article 39, 2021). Care of this kind is extremely expensive, **with acute care costing over half a million pounds** per child, per year. Too many children and young people continue to be placed in settings out of area and on adult wards, and insights gathered from children and young people highlight that their experiences of inpatient care are not consistently good. Inequalities in the disproportionate use of detentions under the Mental Health Act also first emerge in childhood.

The next Government should introduce a new Mental Health Bill to reform the Mental Health Act 1983 as part of its first King's Speech. Children and young people must be a central part of a new Mental Health Bill, and it must be ensured that their rights are protected and promoted. Reforming the Mental Health Act provides a key opportunity to improve care and strengthen safeguards for children and young people admitted to mental health hospitals.

In the long term, a shift towards an increased use of community-based provision should be accelerated and would result in significant savings. Analysis has quantified that offering community treatment and intensive support instead of acute beds can reduce the cost of treatment by **£15.3 million**. This was largely driven by reductions in out of area placements and lengths of stay in hospital.

What can you do to support?

- Read the full manifesto document.
- Call on your political party to adopt these asks as part of your manifesto for the upcoming general election.
- Show your support for these asks publicly and on social media using the **#CYPMHManifestoAsks2024**.
- Raise the asks debates and discussions.
- Meet with us to discuss the asks and how we can support you in your work.

About the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition

The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition is a collaborative network of over 270 organisations dedicated to advocating for and influencing policy in relation to the mental health needs of babies, children, and young people. Our coalition consists of diverse stakeholders, including mental health organisations, youth support services, educational institutions, and concerned individuals, all united by a shared commitment to improving the well-being of children. We aim to raise awareness of the importance of mental health and ensure that children and young people have access to the necessary support and services.

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