

Shaping tomorrow

Prioritising babies',
children's, and young
people's mental health in
the 2024 General
Election

June 2024



**Children & Young People's
Mental Health Coalition**

Executive summary

With rising need, overstretched services, the legacy of the pandemic and deepening social inequalities, the mental health of babies, children and young people has never been more important. Yet findings from a recent poll of 2,000 voters conducted by More in Common, on behalf of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition, found that **59% felt political leaders have failed to do enough** to address this critical issue – rising to **69% among 18-24 year olds**. Only **23% of all adults believe it will be prioritised** in the upcoming election.

The findings highlight the urgent case for change. Two-thirds of respondents want to see mental health support embedded in local communities – like schools and early support hubs – coupled with more investment in mental health services. It is vital that all candidates and the next Government commits to action, to shape a better tomorrow for babies, children and young people.

Key findings

The issues impacting children and young people's mental health

When asked to rank the issues that had the most negative impact on children and young people's mental health, respondents stated:

1. **Social media (49%)**
2. **Bullying (42%)**
3. **Mobile phones (29%)**
4. **Poverty (27%)**

Issues for children and young people that should be prioritised in the General Election

- Ensuring children can **get a good education (35%)**, **protecting children from harm online (35%)** and **reducing child poverty (30%)** were the top three issues respondents felt needed to be addressed for younger children at the upcoming election.
- For teenagers, the top three issues were ensuring children can **get a good education (31%)**, **protecting children from harm online**, and of equal priority to this, **protecting children from crime and anti-social behaviour (29%)**.
- Improving mental health was the mostly highly prioritised issue for both children under 12s and teenagers for respondents aged 18-24 years (**66%**).

Politicians' commitment to children's mental health:

- **Only 23%** of respondents were confident that issues facing children and young people will be prioritised by political parties.
- **Over half of respondents (59%)** agreed that political leaders have not done enough to support children and young people's mental health over the last decade.
- *Young people aged 18 to 24 were much more likely than any other age group to feel this way (69%).*
- *There were also some regional differences, with 66% of those in the East Midlands agreeing with this statement compared to 55% of those based in the East of England and South East England.*
- **29%** of respondents agreed that support for children and young people's mental health from political leaders has declined in recent years.

Change needed at the election:

- **Over two-thirds (67%)** felt that funding mental health services would help improve children and young people's mental health by quite a lot or by a great deal.
- **68%** agreed that ensuring all educational settings provide mental health support would be valuable.
- **67%** agreed that establishing early support hubs (which allow children and young people access to mental health support without an appointment or referral) in every local area would make a difference.
- **Over half (58%)** agreed that reforming mental health legislation, such as the Mental Health Act, would better protect the rights of children and young people.

Introduction

Good mental health is essential for the development and wellbeing of babies, children and young people, but this critical issue has steadily fallen off the political agenda over recent years. This is at a time when mental health problems in children and young people have rapidly increased, with 1 in 5 of those aged 8 to 25 now experiencing a mental health problem. This is an increase from 1 in 9 in 2017. Yet, the mental health system is struggling to meet this rising demand, and many children are forced to wait so long that their problems deteriorate. The pandemic and growing levels of inequality in society, such as child poverty, have only exacerbated these issues, leading to a crisis that demands urgent attention.

Recent polling conducted by Rethink Mental Illness and More in Common found that 4 in 10 people now say mental health will be a key factor in how they will vote at the next election. As the UK approaches the 2024 General Election, we want all political parties to prioritise the mental health of all babies, children and young people.

Addressing the challenges faced by babies, children and young people is not only a moral obligation but a crucial investment in the nation's future. Our [manifesto](#) calls on all political parties to:

- 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.

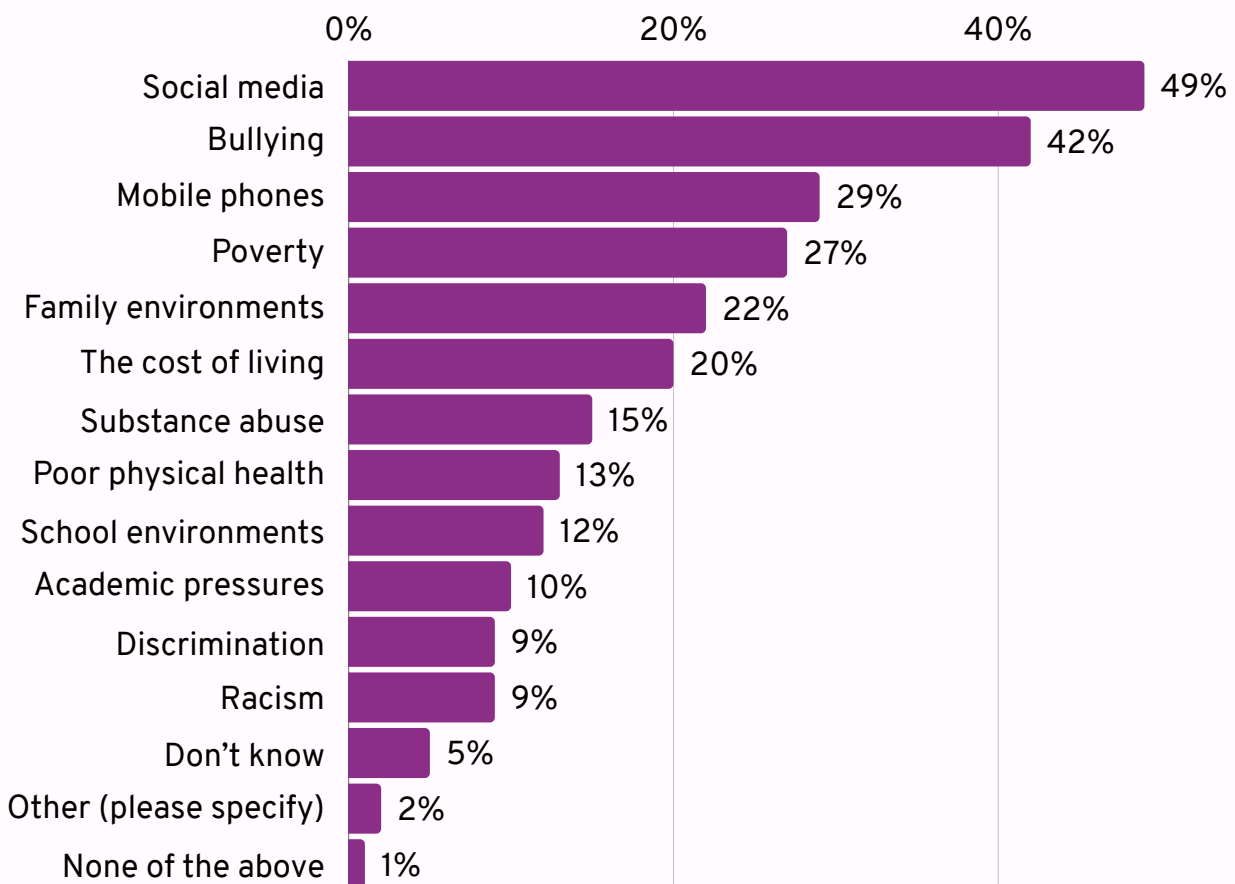
To understand more about the general public's views on children and young people's mental health and the forthcoming election, the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition commissioned More in Common to carry out a survey in May 2024. The survey is based on a representative sample of 2,000 people, aged 18 and over, who were asked a series of questions regarding the priorities for children's mental health among political parties in the upcoming election. This briefing provides a summary of the overall results of the survey. We are very grateful to The Prudence Trust for generously funding this work.

What negatively impacts on children and young people's mental health?

The mental health of babies, children and young people is influenced by a range of factors including relationships, social and environmental factors (such as poverty and inequality), the school environment and traumatic experiences. We asked respondents to rank the three issues they felt are having the most negative impact on children and young people's mental health.

The two issues that respondents particularly viewed as negatively impacting children's mental health were **social media (49%)** and **bullying (42%)**, which doubtless reflects some overlap between these two factors. This was followed by **mobile phones (29%)**, **poverty (27%)** and **family environments (22%)**.

Which of the following do you think has the largest NEGATIVE impact on children and young people's mental health?



Priorities for the election for children and young people

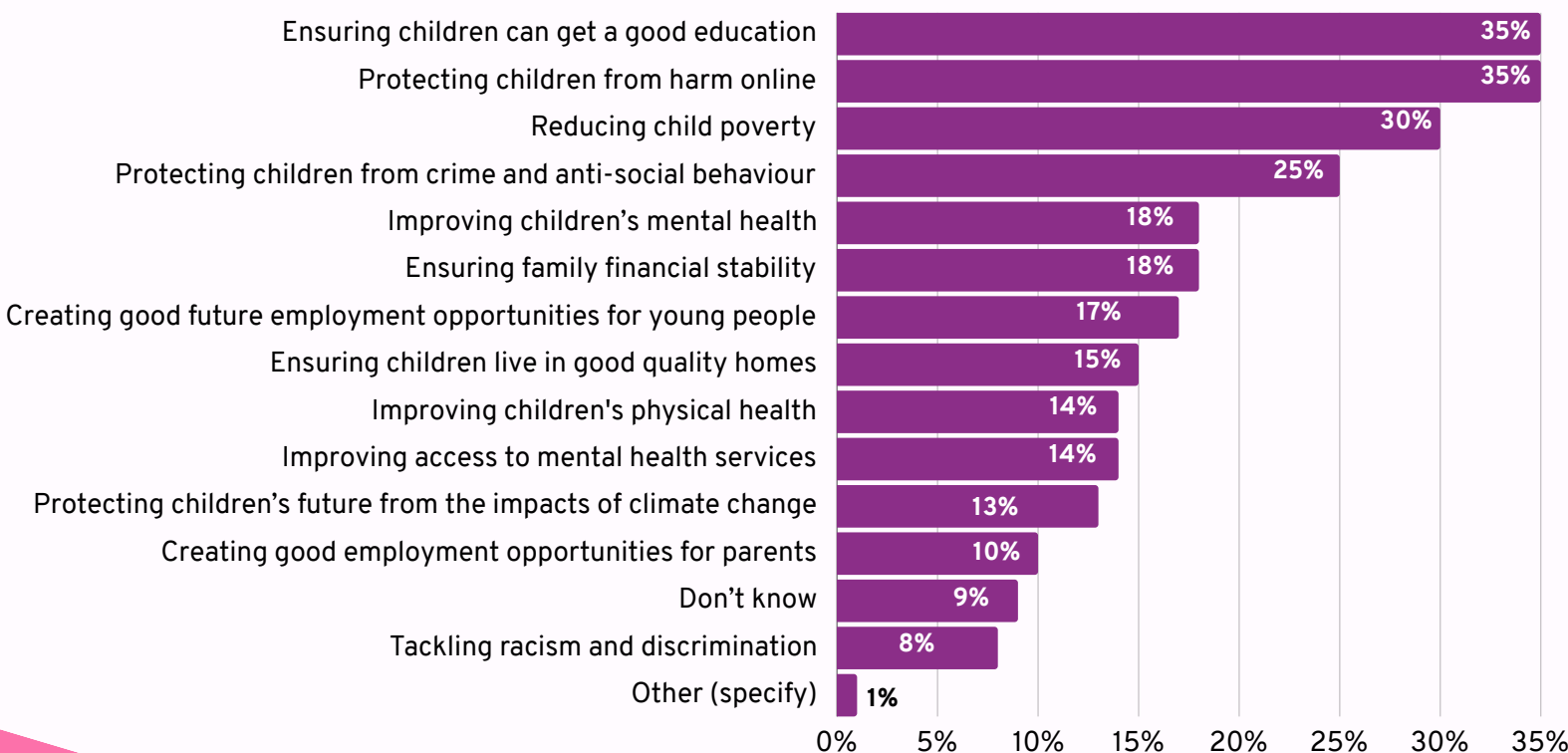
Children under 12

We asked survey respondents what the top three issues are that they would like to see addressed for both children and teenagers in the upcoming election. This list included a range of factors that shape and influence children and young people's mental health.

For children under 12, respondents prioritised the following issues:

- Ensuring children can get a **good education (35%)**
- Protecting children from **online harm (35%)**
- Reducing **child poverty (30%)**.

Thinking about issues that affect children under the age of 12, which of the following would you most like to see addressed in the upcoming general election?

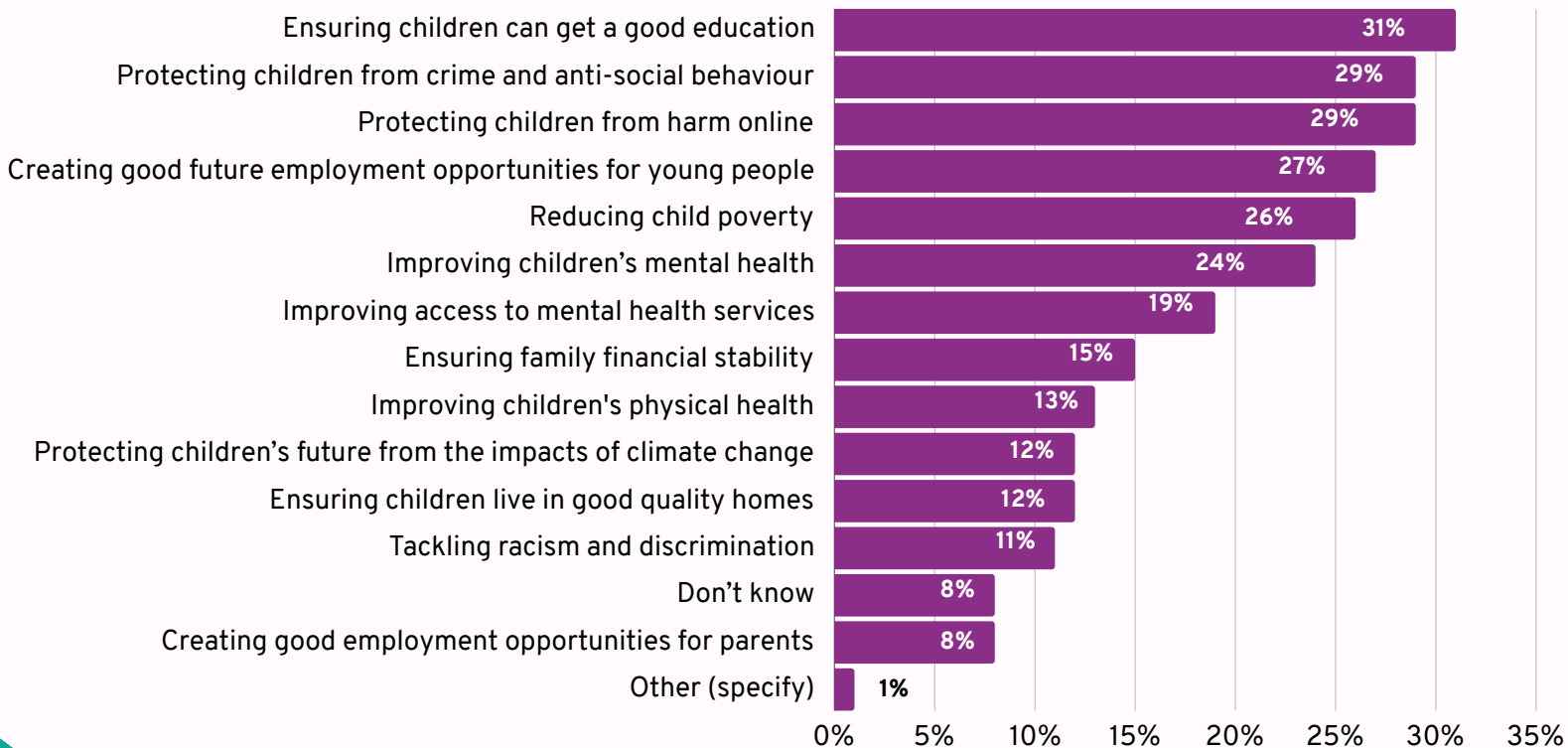


Teenagers

The issues respondents wanted prioritised for teenagers across the whole sample were similar, with getting a good education as the most significant priority. Respondents' top priorities for teenagers were:

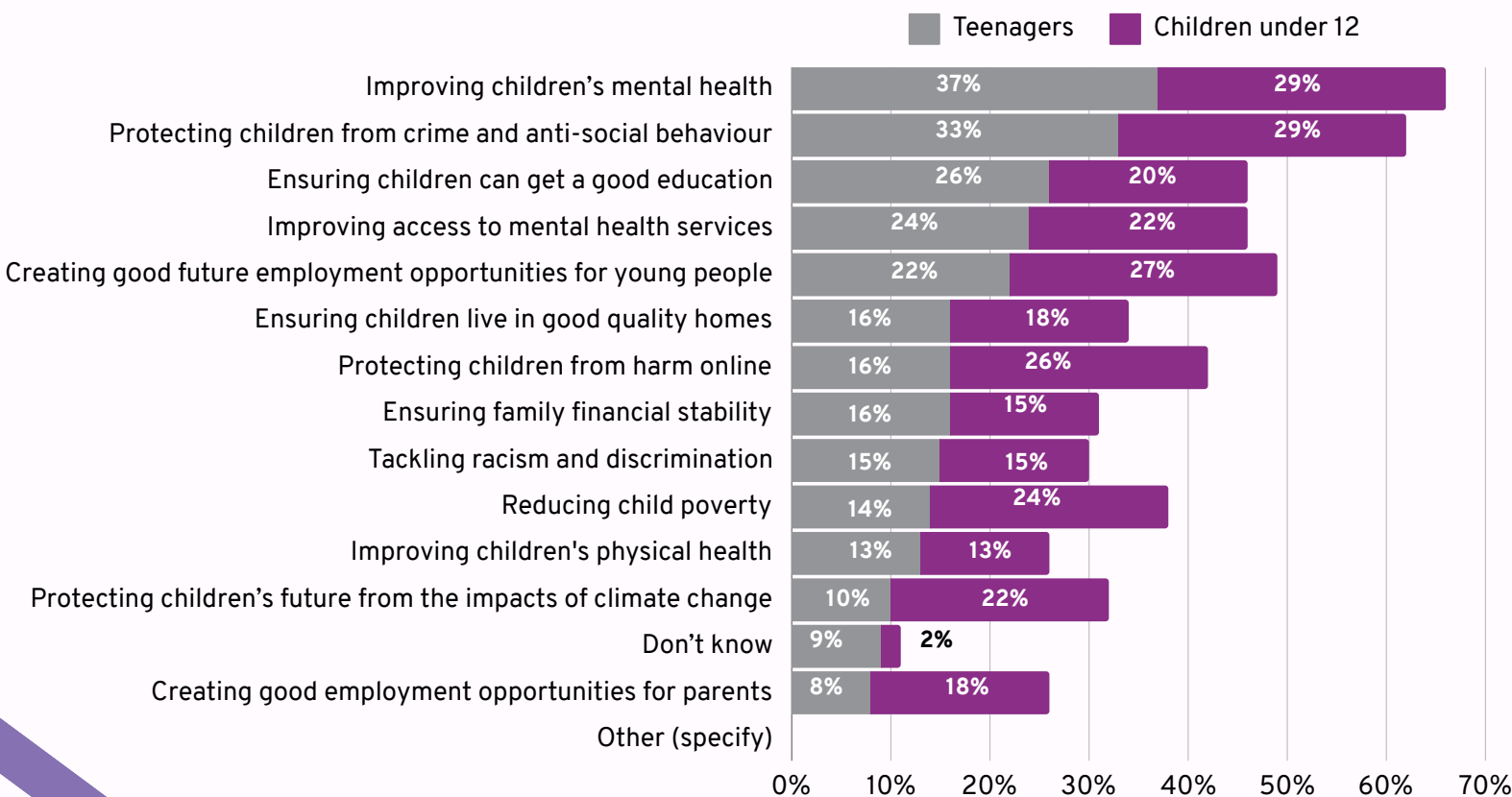
- Ensuring children can get a **good education (31%)**
- Protecting children from **harm online (29%)** and of equal priority to this, protecting children from **crime and anti-social behaviour (29%)**
- Creating good **employment opportunities for young people (27%)**.

Thinking about issues that affect teenagers, which of the following would you most like to see addressed in the upcoming general election?



Improving mental health was the mostly highly prioritised issue for respondents aged 18-24, highlighting the importance of mental health to young people.

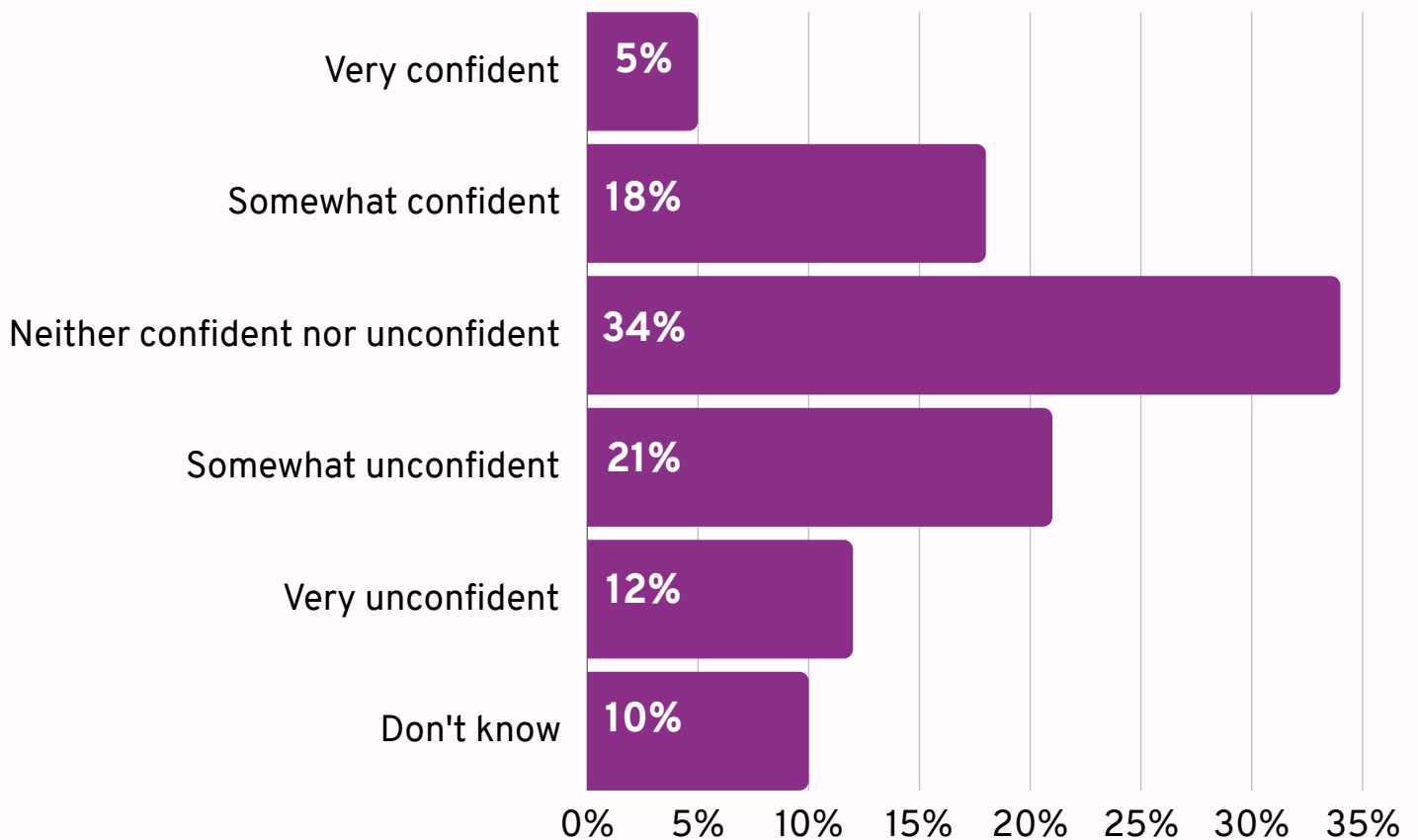
18-24 year olds views on issues that need to be prioritised at the election for children under 12 and teenagers



There were also some marked differences in regions over priorities. For under 12s, respondents from Yorkshire and Humberside, the West of England and the East of England prioritised getting a good education (45%, 41% and 40% respectively), compared to Greater London and the North East (26% each), where protection from crime and anti-social behaviour was a greater concern (both at 31%). For the North East, protection from online harm was the most significant factor (47%). However, in terms of teenagers, getting a good education was ranked as the most important factor for Greater London and the North East (both at 41%), markedly more so than for other regions.

However, when we asked respondents how confident they were that issues relating to children and young people would be prioritised at the election, **only 23%** said they were 'somewhat confident' or 'very confident' that this would be the case. This compared to **33%** who said they were either somewhat or very unconfident that children and young people would be given priority.

To what extent are you confident that issues facing children and young people will be prioritised by Britain's political parties in the upcoming general election?



Political support for children and young people's mental health

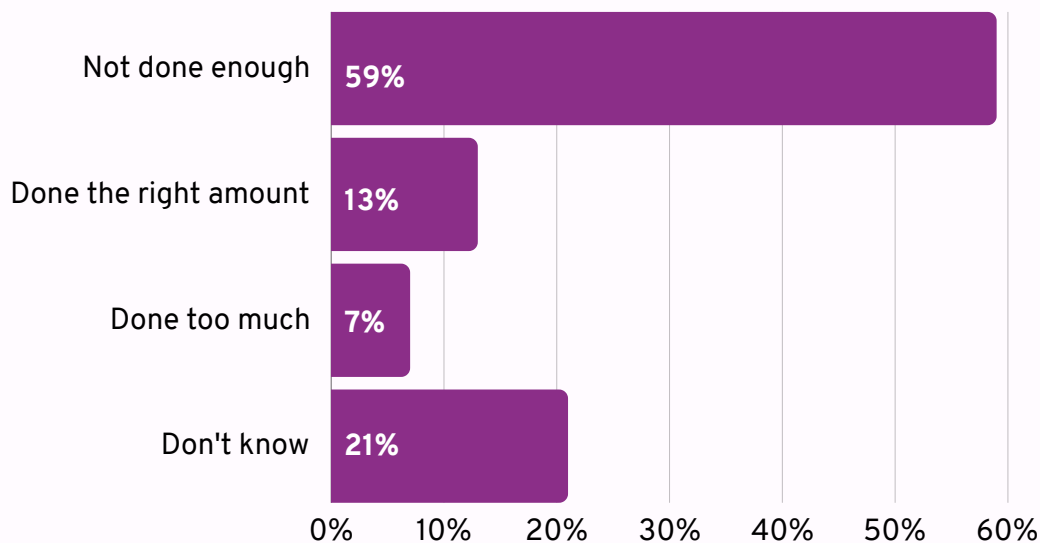
Over the last decade, we have seen rapid change within the children and young's mental health system. Whilst positive steps have been taken to improve the support available, mental health has fallen further down the political agenda. We asked survey respondents to reflect on how much they felt political leaders had done to support children and young people's mental health over the last decade.



Over half (59%) of respondents agreed with the statement that political leaders had not done enough to support children and young people's mental health over the past decade. This compared with 13% who felt leaders had 'done the right amount' and just 7% who felt leaders had done 'too much'.

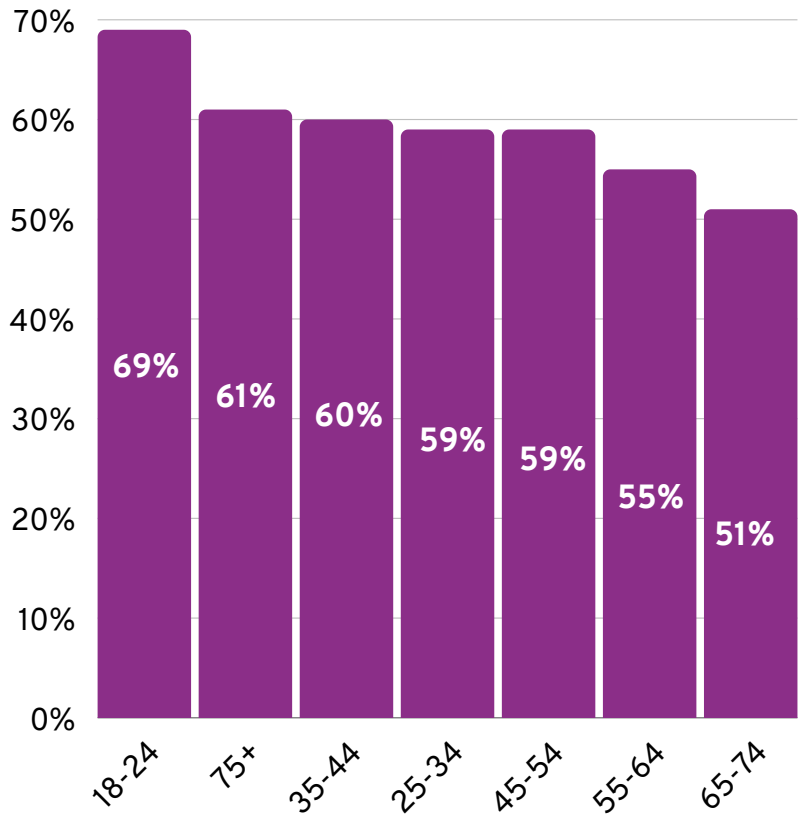
Thinking about the mental health of children and young people over the last decade, which of the following comes closest to your view?

Political leaders have ...



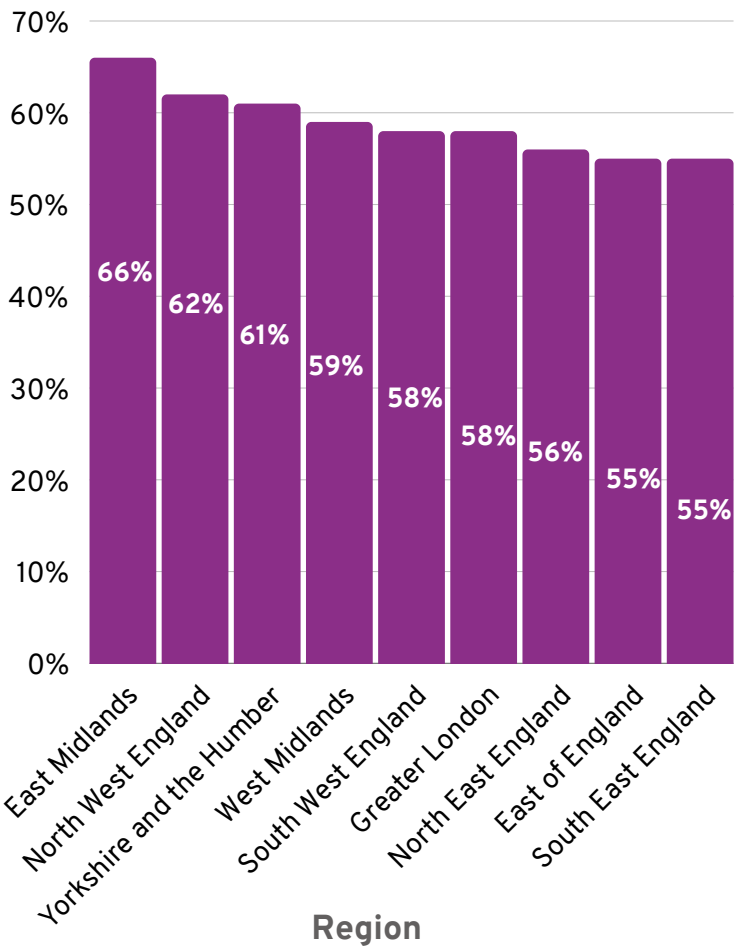
...to support children and young people's mental health

Views on political leaders support for children and young people's mental health by age



There was wide ranging consensus across respondents age, gender, ethnicity, region and living circumstances in response to this question. However, **young people aged 18 to 24 were more likely than other age groups to feel that political leaders have not done enough on children and young people's mental health.**

Views on political leaders support for children and young people's mental health by region



Regionally there was some variation, with **66%** of East Midlands respondents saying political leaders have not done enough, compared to **55%** of East of England and South East England respondents.

Age

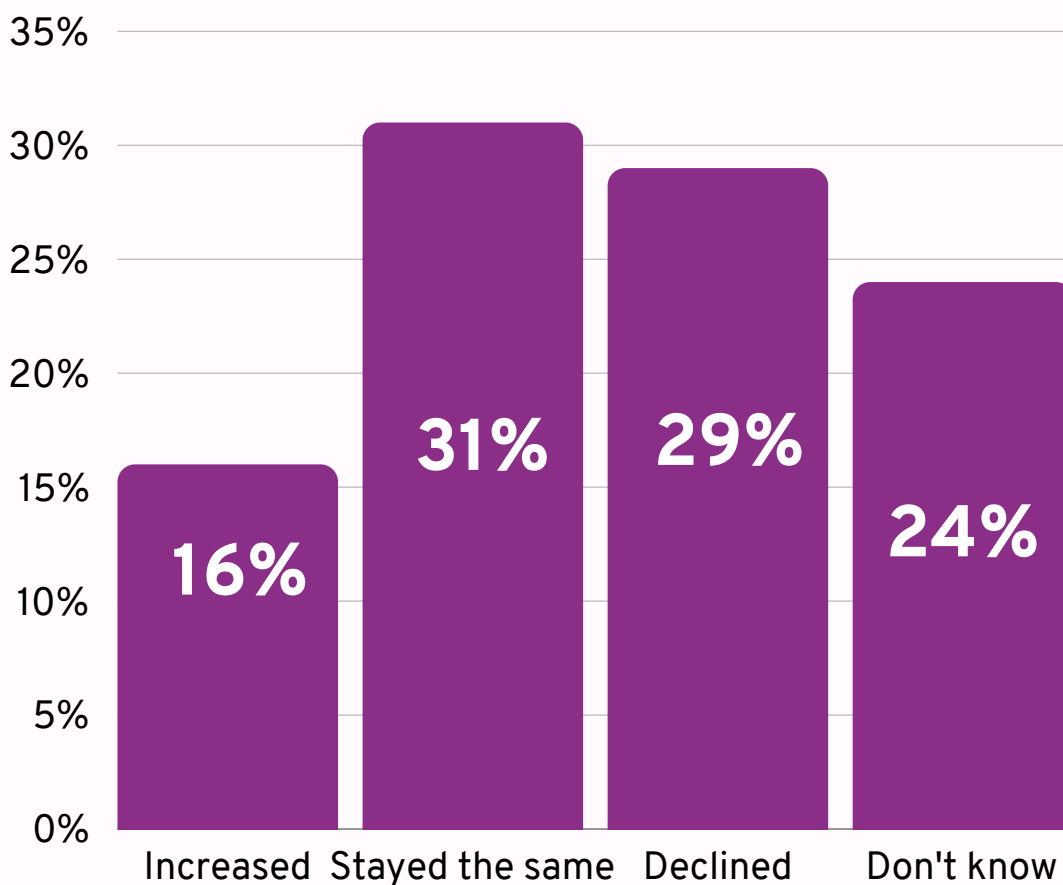
Region

Alongside the level of action taken by political leaders on mental health, we were also keen to explore whether respondents believed support for children and young people's mental health has increased, decreased or stayed the same over the last decade.

31% of respondents felt that support from political leaders for children and young people's mental health has stayed the same over the last decade, while **29% agreed that it has declined**. **16%** of respondents agreed that support has increased while nearly a quarter of respondents (**24%**) were unsure.

Thinking about the mental health of children and young people over the last decade, which of the following comes closest to your view?

Support from political leaders for children and young people's mental health has...



Our manifesto for babies', children's and young people's mental health calls on all political parties to make a strong, tangible commitment to mental health and sets out four key asks for change. We found broad support and consensus on these recommendations from across survey respondents, highlighting the change that is urgently needed for children and young people's mental health services.

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.



Of those who responded:

- **Over two-thirds (67%)** felt that funding mental health services would help improve children and young people's mental health by quite a lot or by a great deal.

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



Of those who responded:

- **68%** agreed that ensuring all educational settings provide mental health support would improve children and young people's mental health by quite a lot or a great deal.

Increase the provision of early intervention support in the community through the national roll-out of early support hubs in every local area.



Of those who responded:

- **67%** agreed that establishing early support hubs in every local area would make a difference to children and young people's mental health quite a lot or by a great deal.

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.



Of those who responded:

- **Over half (58%)** agreed that reforming mental health legislation, such as the Mental Health Act, would help protect the rights of children and young people.

About us

The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition is a collaborative network of over 300 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.

If you would like more information, please contact Charlotte Rainer, Coalition Manager, on charlotte.rainer@cypmhc.org.uk

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Children and Young People's
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