



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

A step towards change

Members perspectives on
government policies on
children and young people's
mental health

March 2025

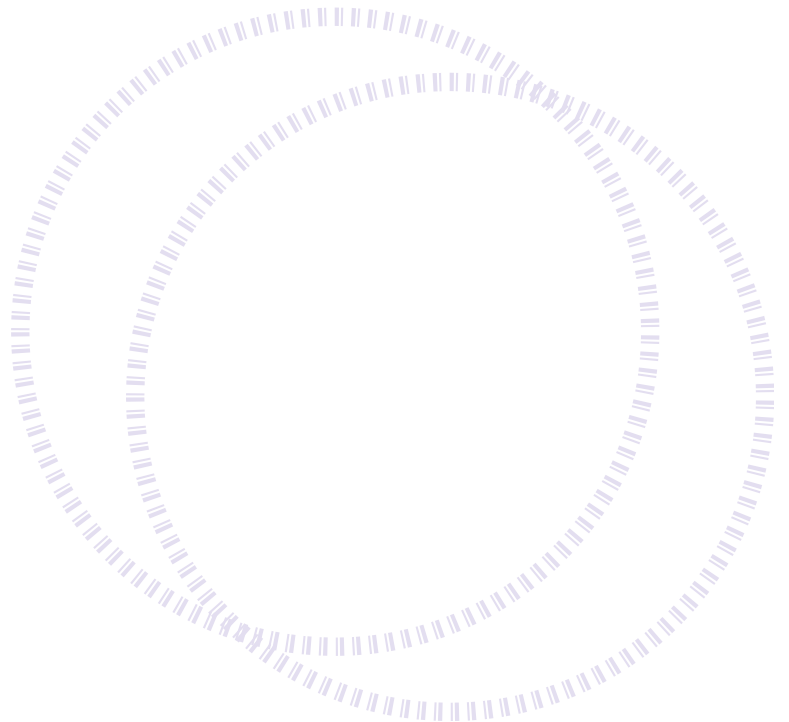
Executive summary

- Ten years have passed since the publication of Future in Mind, the blueprint for transforming the children's mental health system. However, the scale of crisis facing the children's mental health system remains bigger than ever.
- The mental health of children and young people has declined in recent years, with one in five children and young people aged 8 to 25 years with a reported mental health problem in 2023, compared to one in nine in 2017 (NHS Digital, 2023).
- The establishment of a new government has brought renewed commitment to babies, children and young people's mental health. They have made a series of commitments in relation to children and young people's mental health and have pledged to raise the healthiest generation of children and achieve parity of esteem between physical and mental health.
- The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition members were surveyed to capture the views of our diverse membership in order to understand the impact of policies on the children and young people's mental health landscape.
- Overall, the 46 members who responded to the survey generally welcomed the Government's new policies related to babies, children and young people's mental health and felt that they were a step in the right direction. However, they emphasised that their success relies on the details of implementation and accountability measures, resourcing and workforce.
- The majority of respondents identified that measures to achieve parity of esteem, specialist mental health professionals in schools and Young Futures hubs have the greatest potential to achieve change, if implemented effectively

- When asked about which of the Government's commitments should be prioritised for future financial investment, respondents stated that the top three priorities were:
 - o A new Child Poverty Strategy
 - o Young Futures hubs to provide open-access, drop-in mental health support in local communities
 - o A specialist mental health professional in every primary and secondary school.

Recommendations:

1. The Government should commission an independent review into the rise in prevalence in children and young people's mental health that has a statutory footing and appoint a cross-government, cabinet level taskforce on babies, children and young people's mental health to oversee the delivery of any recommendations made.
2. The Government should increase investment in children and young people's mental health services, with a commitment to meet 70% of diagnosable need by the end of this Parliament.
3. The Government should develop a comprehensive children and young people's mental health workforce plan.



Introduction

This year marks a decade since the publication of the Future in Mind strategy, which set out a blueprint for transforming the children’s mental health system. The strategy set out a clear and ambitious vision for whole system transformation. Ten years have now passed since its publication, and the scale of the crisis facing the children’s mental health system remains bigger than ever.

- There has been a significant rise in the prevalence of mental health need amongst children and young people over the last decade. In 2023, **one in five children and young people** aged 8 to 25 years had a mental health problem (NHS Digital, 2023). This is a rise from **one in ten children aged 5-16 years** in 2004, to **one in nine children aged 8 to 16 years** in 2017 and one in six in 2020.
- Referrals to NHS Children and Young People’s Mental Health Services (CYPMHS) have tripled from **40,000 in 2016 to almost 120,000 in 2024** (Darzi, 2024).
- 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).

Since the publication of Future in Mind, successive governments have developed further policies and strategies to improve support and expand access to children’s mental health services. This includes the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health, the NHS Long-Term Plan and the ‘Transforming children and young people’s mental health provision: a green paper’.

Whilst these strategies have created some positive change, there is wide-ranging consensus that political parties have failed to grasp the nettle on children’s mental health over the last decade. Our previous polling of over 2,000 adults found that **59% of respondents believe that political leaders have failed to do enough** to address the mental health of babies, children and young people – **rising to 69% of respondents who were 18-24 year olds** (CYPMHC, 2024).

The establishment of a new government has brought renewed commitment to babies, children and young people’s mental health. The Government’s election manifesto declared an ambition

to raise the healthiest generation of children in our history and committed to achieving parity of esteem between physical and mental health (Labour, 2024). Alongside, this, the manifesto included a series of commitments on babies, children and young people's mental health, including:

- A specialist mental health professional in every primary and secondary school
- Developing a Child Poverty Strategy
- Establish Young Futures hubs in every community to provide open-access, drop-in mental health support
- Modernise the Mental Health Act through a new Mental Health Bill
- Recruit 8,5000 new staff into mental health services

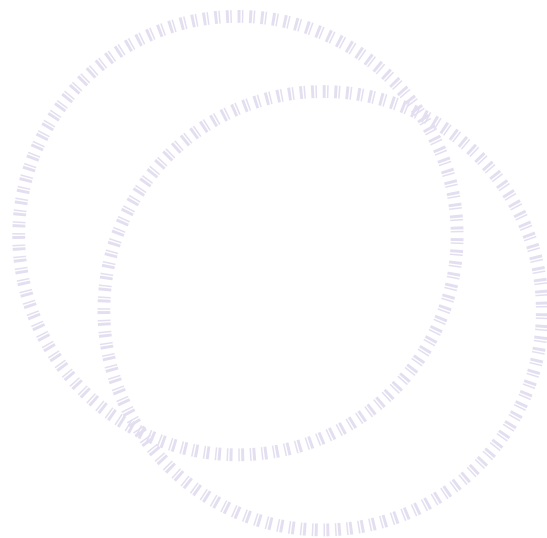
Since taking office, further action is underway. Both a new Mental Health Bill and Children's Wellbeing Bill have been introduced into parliament and work is also underway to develop a new 10 year health plan, as well as a National Youth Strategy.

What did we do?

To understand if these commitments will provide the step-change that is needed, we surveyed members of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition, who represent a

broad and diverse range of organisations from the mental health sector. We launched the survey in September 2024 and asked our members their views on the Government's policies on babies, children and young people's mental health and what further change they thought was needed. Specifically, we asked questions in relation to the commitments made by the Government in their manifesto as well as action taken by the Government in their first term. In total we received 46 responses to the survey from a wide range of members.

This short briefing covers our member's views on the Government's policies, the policies that should be prioritised for future financial investment and further change that is required.



Views on the Government's policies

We were keen to explore our members views on the Government's commitments relating to babies, children and young people's mental health, and whether they felt they were sufficient to achieve the change we want to see. We asked members their views on the following policies:

- A specialist mental health professional in every primary and secondary school
- Developing a Child Poverty Strategy
- Establish Young Futures hubs in every community to provide open-access, drop-in mental health support
- Modernise the Mental Health Act through a new Mental Health Bill
- Recruit 8,5000 new staff into mental health services
- Measures to achieve parity of esteem
- Introducing a new Children's Wellbeing Bill
- A new 10-Year Health Plan

Overall, the majority of members that responded to the survey believe these commitments are broadly going in the right direction to achieve the change they want to see. They raised that they

were 'a good starting point' with the potential to have a positive impact if implemented properly. It was noted that the policies provided an overarching framework to support and improve the lives of families and children who are struggling.

We then asked members the extent to which each of the commitments made by the Government were sufficient to improve mental health outcomes for babies, children and young people's mental health. The following table^[1] sets out members' views on the Government's commitments from most to least sufficient.

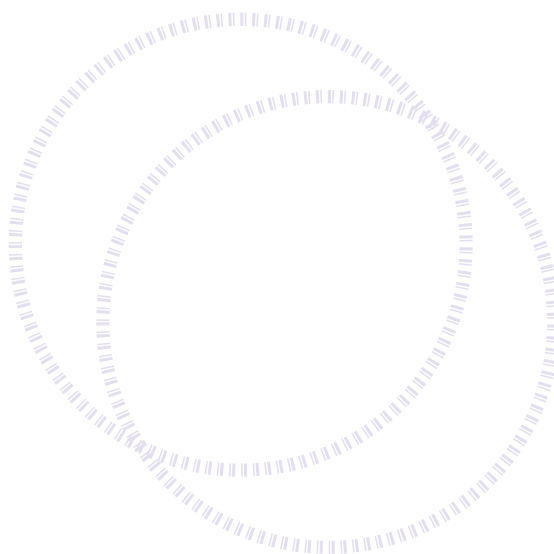


Table 1: To what extent are the Government’s commitments sufficient to improve mental health outcomes for babies, children and young people?

Commitment	Sufficient (%)	Insufficient (%)	Unsure (%)
Parity of esteem	90	6	4
Mental health professionals in schools	82	13	4
Young futures hubs	77	9	15
10- Year Health Plan	71	7	22
Children's Wellbeing Bill	71	11	17
Mental Health Act reform	70	11	20
Child Poverty Strategy	70	11	20
8500 new mental health staff	63	20	17

Measures to achieve parity of esteem was identified as the most valuable commitment to improve mental health outcomes for babies, children and young people, with 90% of respondents noting that this commitment was sufficient.

This was followed by a specialist mental health professionals in every primary and secondary school and rolling out Young Futures hubs in every local community. Members welcomed these commitments and emphasised the importance of preventative and early intervention measures to protect children and young people’s mental health. Members were keen for the Government to provide clarity on the next steps for implementation and how these measures will support a diverse range of need.

“It must ensure consistent, high-quality support across all schools, with significant

focus on the areas with less resource and higher need.” - survey respondent

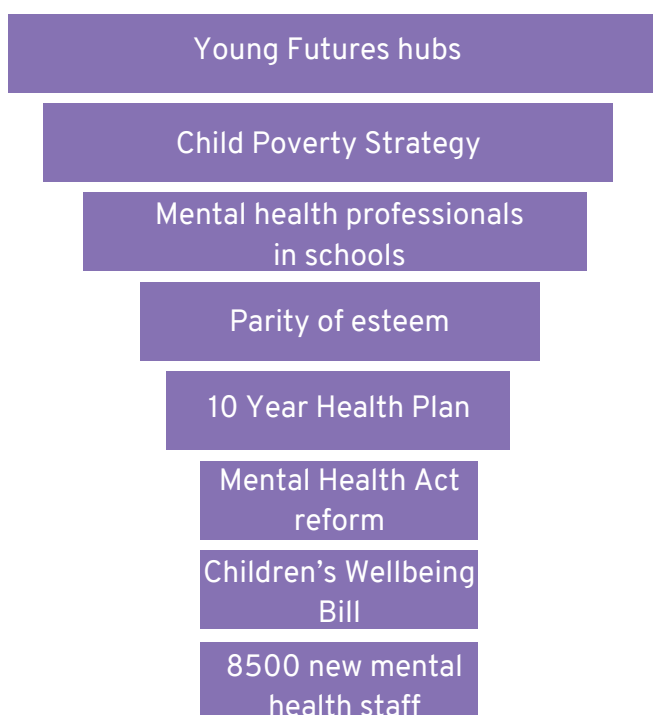
“Young Futures hubs: Open-access, community-based mental health services are integral to realisation of providing accessible, early help provision. It is essential that the hubs are well funded, well-resourced, and reduce the stigma of seeking mental health support.”- survey respondent

The Government’s commitment to employing 8500 additional mental health staff in their first term was ranked the lowest. Many respondents raised concerns that 8500 additional new staff members is *“unlikely to be enough based on the scale of the problem”*. It was also noted that for this to be successful, the current children’s mental health workforce needs to be increased, and sufficient resourcing and training would need to be provided to ensure retention of staff.

Priorities for future financial investment

Ahead of the Spring Multi Year Spending Review, we asked members which of the Government's policies should be prioritised for future financial investment. Members were asked to rank each of the Government's commitments in order of financial priority. The table below displays the number of respondents who selected each of the commitments as the top priority for future financial investments from most popular to least popular.

Which of the commitments should be prioritised as a financial commitment?



mental health and respondents stated that the top three priorities for future financial investment were:

- Establishing Young Futures hubs in every community to provide early support in the community
- Developing a Child Poverty Strategy to address this key risk factor for poor mental health
- A specialist mental health professional in every primary and secondary school to provide access to support in schools

This was followed by measures to roll out parity of esteem and implementing the new ten-year health plan.

The Spending Review is a key opportunity to promote investment in children and young people's

Implications for implementation

As we mark ten years since the publication of Future in Mind, it is crucial that we learn lessons from the past. Previous plans and strategies put in place to address mental health have been thwarted by a lack of implementation frameworks or accountability mechanisms, meaning that they have not been comprehensively delivered on. Whilst the commitments made by the Government on babies, children and young people's mental health are a step in the right direction, members overwhelmingly told us that the details and implementation of these policies will be what counts if we are to achieve positive and lasting change.

“Although these commitments represent a comprehensive and ambitious plan, their success will largely depend on effective implementation, consistent long-term funding, appropriate resource allocation, and strong accountability measures. Ensuring these factors are addressed is crucial for translating the policies into lasting and impactful improvements in mental health outcomes.” - survey respondent

“None of these measures will be sufficient in isolation. The success of them is also dependent on details around scope, implementation, and level of ongoing funding that is not yet specified.” - survey respondent

“These are all great ideas, but as with any policy it is the details and the implementation which actually matters.”
- survey respondent

If the Government are serious about delivering the change they have promised, then clear mechanisms for implementation and accountability must be put in place. This should include:

A commissioned review and taskforce

One of the largest barriers to meaningful action to tackle the children's mental health crisis is the contentions about the role of the different drivers including social media, the pandemic, the cost of living crisis and failing services (Future Minds, 2025).

The Government must be given a clear idea of the causes of the crisis to meaningfully tackle the challenge. We support the Future Mind Campaigns calls for a government commissioned independent review into the rise of prevalence in children and young people's mental health.

It is crucial that there is cabinet level responsibility for the delivery and implementation of any recommendations made from the commission.

One of the shortcomings of Future in Mind was the fact that no accountability mechanisms were put in place to ensure that targets were delivered on (National Audit Office, 2018). As a result, key targets set out in the strategy such as delivering a joined up approach, achieving timely support and making support more accessible have not been achieved.

Our members also consistently highlighted the importance of taking a cross-government approach to implementation.

“A cross governmental approach to mental health, which would focus on tackling the social determinants of mental ill-health and create a mentally healthier nation”- survey respondent

Such a taskforce has already been established to oversee the development and publication of the Government’s child poverty strategy, and we see that a similar format should be used for the children’s mental health taskforce.

Increasing investment in the children’s mental health system

Many of the commitments outlined by the Government depend enormously on increased investment in the children’s mental health system. Mental health care for babies, children and young people has been historically underfunded.

While the NHS Long Term Plan committed to invest in children’s mental health services at a faster rate than both overall NHS funding and total mental health spending to address disparities, the reality is that services continue to remain underfunded. On average, local areas spend less than 1% of their overall budget on children’s mental health and 13 times more on adult mental health services than on services for children (Local Government Association, 2023).

“Historically, mental health services have been underfunded compared to physical health services. Achieving parity of esteem ensures that children and young people’s mental health services receive the same level of investment, leading to better access to care and improved outcomes. This is essential and must be measurable and linked to improved outcomes for mental health services.” - survey respondent

If the Government is serious about achieving their ambition of parity of esteem, then this must translate into a more equitable funding settlement for children’s mental health. We support the asks outlined by the Future Minds campaign for increased investment in children and young people’s mental health services, with a commitment to meet 70% of diagnosable need by the end of this Parliament. The campaign outlines that this will require scaled increases in spending year on year until

2029, starting with an additional £167 million in 2025/26.

Delivering a comprehensive workforce plan

The Government has committed to recruit an additional 8,500 new staff in mental health services. While this commitment was welcomed, many of our members raised concerns that is unlikely to be sufficient given the scale of the problem. We recognise that there has been some positive growth in the children’s mental health workforce in recent years, however, demand is still outstripping capacity. NHS staff retention in the children and young people’s mental health workforce has declined, with only 77% of staff remaining in post throughout the 2022 financial year, compared to 83% in 2019 (Health Education England, 2023). There are also gaps in workforce provision, including a shortage in specialist staff to support eating disorders (Ibid).

“Increasing staffing levels is necessary to meet growing demand, but the sufficiency will depend on whether these numbers match the needs of diverse populations, how quickly recruitment happens, and whether retention strategies are effective.” - survey respondent

“Tackle the workforce crisis and backlog so children and young people get help quickly when they need it” survey respondent

It is crucial that action is taken to sufficiently invest in the workforce and to create a comprehensive, costed workforce plan that clarifies how the Government will grow the workforce to meet the level of mental health need amongst children and young people.

Recommendations

- The Government should commission an independent review into the rise in prevalence in children and young people’s mental health that has a statutory footing and appoint a cross-government, cabinet level taskforce on babies, children and young people’s mental health to oversee the delivery of any recommendations made.
- The Government should increase investment in children and young people’s mental health services, with a commitment to meet 70% of diagnosable need by the end of this Parliament.
- The Government should develop a comprehensive children and young people’s mental health workforce plan.

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