YoungMinds: five priorities for the next government

In the run-up to the general election, we are calling on the next government to make five crucial commitments on children and young people’s mental health in England:

1. Invest in additional and sustained funding for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
2. Rebalance the education system to prioritise emotional wellbeing and mental health
3. Strengthen and enforce rights for children in mental health hospitals
4. Require that all children’s services understand the impact of childhood trauma on young people’s mental health
5. Give young people an equal say on the mental health care and services they receive

After years of underfunding, far too many children are not getting the support they need from CAMHS – and this needs to change.

CAMHS currently receives just 0.7% of the NHS budget and less than 7% of the mental health budget, even though half of mental health problems in adults emerge by the age of 14 and three-quarters by the age of 25.

During 2014/15, an extra £1.4 billion was pledged over five years (2015-2020) to “transform” CAMHS - but research by YoungMinds suggests that not all of this money is going where it was intended.¹

We urge the next government to:

- Calculate the true cost of providing support to all the children and young people who need it, and guarantee long-term, sustainable funding to ensure that this can happen.

o In the interim, reaffirm the existing NHS mental health spending commitments until 2020 and invest at least a further £250 - £300 million year-on-year to 2022/23 in CAMHS.
o Introduce a CAMHS Investment Standard to ensure that all money allocated to local Clinical Commissioning Groups for CAMHS is spent where it is intended, and not siphoned off for other priorities.

2. Rebalance the education system to prioritise emotional wellbeing and mental health

A staggering 90% of school leaders have seen an increase in the number of students experiencing anxiety and stress over the last five years.\(^2\)

Schools have a crucial role to play in promoting good mental health, and in intervening quickly when problems emerge. But at the moment the education system is so fundamentally unbalanced that it can be hard for schools to focus on children’s wellbeing rather than their exam results.

We urge the next government to:

o Establish emotional wellbeing and mental health as a fundamental priority of schools in legislation and the Ofsted inspection framework.
o Ensure that wellbeing, mental health and resilience are a core part in all teacher training, with specific modules in initial teacher training and continued professional development.
o Provide schools with designated funding for wellbeing provision.

3. Strengthen and enforce rights for children in mental health hospitals

Good inpatient care is a lifeline for children and their families. But too often children and young people receive inappropriate care or do not know what their rights are.

Surveys by YoungMinds have found that only 43% of parents think their child’s mental health has improved while in hospital, while many young people and parents feel unable to challenge crucial decisions about treatment and medication.

We urge the next government to:

o Develop a comprehensive charter setting out the rights of young people and their families or carers when they are treated in specialist mental health hospitals.
o Ensure that all young people who spend time in mental health hospitals, and their families, understand their rights and are supported to challenge any decisions about their treatment that they aren’t happy with.

\(^2\) https://youngminds.org.uk/media/1428/wise-up-prioritising-wellbeing-in-schools.pdf
End the use of harmful practices in hospital, including the reliance on prone restraint and chemical restraint and the overuse of seclusion.

4. Require that all children’s services understand the impact of childhood trauma on young people’s mental health

One in three mental health problems in adulthood stem from adverse experiences in childhood – including abuse, neglect, bereavement or taking on adult responsibilities at a young age. These experiences can result in psychological trauma, which can have a lasting effect on the way a young person behaves, processes their emotions and manages their relationships with others, as well as their overall development.3

We urge the next government to:

- Raise awareness of the impact of childhood trauma or adverse experiences among commissioners, providers and the general public.
- Require that the design of all children’s services is informed by knowledge of the impact of adverse experiences, so that children experiencing trauma are more likely to access help.
- Ensure that schools, social workers, NHS staff and other services that work with children fully understand the impact of trauma on children’s behaviour and emotional wellbeing so that they do not unwittingly re-traumatise them.

5. Give young people an equal say on the mental health care and services they receive

Mental health services are more likely to be effective if they are set up with children and young people’s needs and experiences at the centre. But, at the moment, there is too often a ‘top-down’ approach, with children and families feeling that services aren’t giving them what they need. Young people also tell us that they don’t feel they have enough of a say in the treatment they receive.

We are calling on the next government to:

- Ensure all planning for children and young people’s treatment and care gives an equal say to their opinions, needs and preferences, and involves their families.
- Ensure that mental health services are always meaningfully co-produced with children and young people, and their families, to meets the needs of the people who are using them.

3 https://youngminds.org.uk/blogs/launch-of-beyond-adversity/