

YOUNGMINDS



**A new era for young people's
mental health**

Introduction

There is a crisis in mental health support for children and young people. Despite greater public awareness and extra government investment from 2015 to 2020, it remains far too difficult for young people and families to get the help they need.

This can have devastating consequences. Our research with parents suggests that around three-quarters of young people who seek mental health treatment become more unwell while waiting for help. Too often, they are not signposted to other forms of support.

Parents who call our helpline frequently describe what this means in practice – while waiting for help, young people may start to self-harm, become suicidal, or drop out of school, which can have a huge impact, not only on their education but on their families too.

We also know that young people with emerging mental health problems, who do not meet the threshold for clinical services, are often left with no help at all. This cannot be right.

The government's recent plans to roll out Mental Health Support Teams in schools are a step in the right direction, but will cover less than a quarter of areas by 2022-3. And, after years of cuts, there is also a black hole in youth and community services that could provide essential early support.

That is why we are fighting for a new era for young people's mental health, where help is available to every young person who reaches out. The publication of the NHS Long Term Plan this Autumn presents a crucial opportunity to tackle the crisis once and for all. This will require an ambitious new funding settlement, matched by a fresh approach to supporting young people with emerging needs.

We need to see:

1. An **ambitious new funding settlement** that reflects the reality of the crisis.
2. A **bold new approach** to getting the right support to young people before their needs escalate.
3. Reformed **crisis and specialist services**, to improve the consistency and experience of care across the country.
4. All young people given the **skills, knowledge and resources** to look after their mental health.
5. An **expanded specialist workforce**, while making mental health the responsibility of all professionals working with young people.

Emma Thomas, Chief Executive, YoungMinds

“Being told I would have to wait a painful 40 weeks was completely soul destroying and I was terrified about what would happen next, as were my parents. It's incredibly important that every young person gets the care they need.”

George, YoungMinds Activist



Barriers to support

Young people looking for mental health support can face barriers at every stage. This can be because of problems getting help at school, cuts to youth services, difficulties getting an initial referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), high thresholds for treatment, delays between referral and assessment and delays between assessment and treatmentⁱ.

Even when young people are assessed as needing support from CAMHS, it does not guarantee timely treatment. Recent research by Health Service Journal showed that, in 2017/18, more than 500 young people had waited more than a year between assessment and the start of treatment. Around half of young people had waited more than 18 weeksⁱⁱ.

These delays often mean that problems escalate. We have carried out a survey with more than 2,000 parents of children who have looked for mental health support. This showed that:

- Three-quarters (76%) of parents said that their children's mental health had deteriorated while waiting for support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- The longer children were left to wait, the more likely it was that their mental health worsened. 85% of parents whose children had waited more than six months said that their children's mental health had deteriorated, including 64% who said that their children's mental health had deteriorated a lot.
- Two-thirds (69%) of parents said that neither they nor their children had been signposted to any other form of support during the time they were waiting for support from CAMHSⁱⁱⁱ.

Increased investment is urgently needed to ensure that NHS services can provide mental health treatment to all young people who need it. Early intervention in the community must also become a genuine priority.

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What are we calling for?

1. An ambitious new funding settlement that reflects the reality of the crisis

Under current NHS projections, at most only around one in three children and young people with a diagnosable mental health condition will receive NHS care or treatment by 2020/21^{iv}. However, with an anticipated rise in prevalence, there would need to be substantial new investment over the next ten years just to keep up with this target beyond 2020.

For the two in three young people with a diagnosable mental disorder who are unable to access NHS care, inadequate access to CAMHS is exacerbated by a lack of community support. All too often, young people do not know about help they might be able to get through charities, local authorities or youth groups, or those groups do not have sufficient funding to provide the support that's needed. As a result, young people's conditions can get worse because they are left to fend for themselves.

Children and young people's mental health services have been historically and disproportionately underfunded. Despite the welcome additional investment of £1.4bn from 2015-2020, it is currently the case that:

- Less than 1% of the total NHS budget is spent on CAMHS^v.
- Around 8% of the total mental health budget is spent on CAMHS^{vi}.

We know that there has been a significant fluctuation in NHS spending on children and young people's mental health over the past decade, which, coupled with cuts in local authority budgets, has made it increasingly difficult for local health commissioners to provide long-term funding for services.

A lack of accountability can also mean that increases in funding are inconsistent. There have been substantial increases to local children's mental health budgets across the country, in line with the extra funding promised by the government in 2015 – but our research suggests that some areas have not spent all the additional investment they have been allocated specifically on CAMHS. It is crucial that any future investment is closely monitored, to ensure that it makes a real difference to front-line services.

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“All mental health services need more funding because the only way I was getting to see people regularly enough was if they saw me in their own time. There is too much stress on the system as it is.”

Ben, YoungMinds Activist



What are we calling for?

We are calling for:

- Increased investment, which is sufficient to ensure that every young person looking for mental health support is able to get the help they need – either through specialist NHS treatment or through fast and practical support at school or in the community.
- An end to the fluctuation in spending on young people’s mental health. This would be through the creation of a new increased baseline setting out the minimum spend, a new standard to ensure that all increases in mental health funding lead to increased spending on children and young people, and improved accountability, to show how future investment makes a difference to front-line services.
- A comprehensive analysis to show the economic benefits of investing in early intervention, and better data to ensure that we have an accurate picture of how many people are accessing different services.



Local authority spending on youth services in England has fallen by **62%** since 2010-11.

2. A bold new approach to getting the right support to young people before their needs escalate

Alongside increased investment in specialist mental health services, we need to ensure that young people with emerging problems can get the right support in schools and in their community, before their needs escalate.

The Government’s plans to introduce Mental Health Support Teams in schools are a step in the right direction, but these will only be rolled out across a quarter of areas by 2022-23^{vii} – and they will not make up for the black hole in practical community support, which often means that young people are left with nowhere to turn.

Recent research by YMCA suggests that local authority spending on youth services in England has fallen by 62% since 2010-11. This has resulted in the closure of hundreds of youth centres across the country, and the loss of thousands of youth workers^{viii}. In practice, this means that many of the spaces where young people could previously have talked through their problems with a trusted adult and discussed strategies to cope now no longer exist.

That is why we need to see extra investment to ensure that young people can get effective mental health support in the places where they already go – whether that’s youth clubs, churches, cafes or hostels – including in the evenings, at weekends and in school holidays.

“I know too many people who have been dropped in difficult times due to a sheer lack of staff and resources. CAMHS are just not able to meet the demand of today’s level of mental health issues.”

Elizabeth, YoungMinds Activist

We also know that young people and families are often not aware of services that do exist – or that those services are not supported sufficiently with specialist mental health advice. There needs to be far better communication about where to find help, and more training for youth workers and local charities working with young people.

We are calling for:

- Additional investment in community, voluntary and youth services that have a positive impact on mental health. This would involve:
 - New mentor programmes attached to existing youth or voluntary services, particularly working with vulnerable or at risk groups of young people, such as LGBTQI or BAME young people.
 - Peer support models for young people and parents, based on lessons from ‘AA’ and ‘Weightwatchers’ models of safe supported places.
 - Community drop-in services, providing advice and emotional support, run in evenings and weekends and school holidays.
 - Group training courses for young people on practical skills around emotional literacy and crisis management.
 - The expansion of creative therapies – like art, music, drama, sports and recreation – within existing youth and community services.
- An expansion of the role of Mental Health Support Teams as they are rolled out across the country, so that they are able to support youth and voluntary services as well as schools.
- Easily accessible local and national online resources to make it much easier for young people and professionals to find further information, resources, apps and services in their area.
- Services that work with children and young people to take a ‘trauma-informed’ approach, so that professionals understand links between traumatic experiences in childhood and behaviour.

“Local services and charities need more funding because everyone deserves help and support. Sometimes all it takes is for someone to believe in you.”

Tom, YoungMinds Activist





3. Reformed crisis and specialist services, to improve the consistency and experience of care across the country

Access to specialist mental health services can be a lifeline for many children and young people. However, as recent research has shown, there is unacceptable variation in the quality of children and young people's mental health provision across the country^{ix}.

For example, young people going through a crisis are often unable to access support outside A&E departments, which can be stressful environments.

Young people who are admitted to inpatient care say that they feel cut off from their home environment, don't know what their rights are, and don't feel that they have a genuine say in decisions made about their treatment.

And when young people move from children's to adult's services, they can get lost in the system, or no longer receive a similar level of care.

We are calling for:

- Reformed crisis care. This means more safe places where children and young people can go in a crisis, so that they are no longer forced to rely on A&E. It means better support for professionals. And it means a dedicated 24 hour 'Crisis Hotline' for children and young people, offering advice on crisis management, emotional support and urgent referrals when they are needed.
- Improved transitions between child and adult services by moving towards a 0-25 model, and the introduction of a 'Mental Health Passport' to improve continuity of care and ensure that young people have more of say in how they are treated.
- The promotion of new 'hospital-at-home' models and improved outreach care, so more young people are able to receive specialist treatment in their community.
- A new charter to ensure young people understand their rights when they are admitted to mental health services, have access to advocacy, and are treated in a way that is appropriate for their age.
- Publication of waiting times data for CAMHS, including progress towards the four-week waiting time targets in areas where these are being rolled out.

"The transition between child and adult services needs to improve as "coming of age" is a big enough deal without having to take a leap into the unknown with your care."

Marianna, YoungMinds Activist

4. All young people given the skills, knowledge and resources to look after their mental health

Everyone experiences emotional distress at some point in their childhood or adolescence as a normal part of life. And almost half of young people experience at least one adverse childhood experience, which can have a significant impact on their mental health^x.

That is why we need to help all young people develop resilience from a young age, so that they are equipped to deal with life's normal ups-and-downs, to understand their emotions, and to seek help when they need it.

We also need to ensure that parents and families have a good understanding of mental health, and know how to support children who are struggling to cope.

We are calling for:

- Investment in digital technology to help young people manage difficult emotions. This would involve an NHS-led online 'self-management hub', which would provide information and advice, as well as access to evidence-based resources, activities and Apps. We are also calling for investment in virtual reality and Artificial Intelligence technology, and the expansion of online counselling services.
- A high-profile, youth-led emotional literacy campaign, focusing on improving the emotional literacy of children and young people
- A designated online and telephone service to provide advice, information and emotional support for parents, carers and adults who are concerned about the mental health or behaviour of a young person.
- Tailored training programmes on "digital resilience" to ensure that children understand how to use the internet and social media in a way that's positive for their mental health.

5. An expanded specialist workforce, while making mental health the responsibility of all professionals working with young people

There are major challenges in recruiting and retaining professionals specialising in children and young people's mental health. These challenges need to be addressed, both through increased funding and through removing some of the barriers that prevent people from working as psychiatrists, therapists and counsellors.

Almost half of young people experience at least one **adverse childhood experience**, which can have a significant impact on their mental health.



"CAMHS is crucial in supporting young people as they are not only struggling with their mental health, but they are growing and developing as well. Young people should be able to get help early on."

Becca, YoungMinds Activist

But we need to do more than this. There are hundreds of thousands of professionals in other fields who have contact with children and young people who may be experiencing emotional distress. By ensuring that all of these professionals have a good understanding of mental health, and that a significant number receive specific training, we can ensure that many more children receive fast and effective support.

We are calling for:

- A new fast-track specialism for medical students into Child and Adolescent psychiatry, to support recruitment, and the removal of restrictions on counselling and psychotherapy trainee placements.
- A new 'Youth Mental Health Supervisor' status, so that professionals working with children outside specialist mental health services can receive extra training and lead mental health support within their organisation.
- A national roll out of the Mental Health Support Teams, who would work directly with the Youth Mental Health Supervisors in their area.
- Training on children and young people's mental health for all health professionals, and every GP practice to be able to provide psychological wellbeing support.
- An integrated approach to planning, commissioning and delivering services at a local and national level. This means bringing together health professionals, local authorities, schools and voluntary and youth providers to ensure that they work as effectively as possible together.

"I was lucky enough to have consistent inpatient and community help for over 10 years and they genuinely saved my life. I hope that everyone can be treated equally and get the help they need."

Sai, YoungMinds Activist

References

- i. YoungMinds (2018) #FightingFor report: <https://youngminds.org.uk/media/2258/youngminds-fightingfor-report.pdf>
- ii. <https://www.hsj.co.uk/quality-and-performance/revealed-hundreds-of-children-wait-more-than-a-year-for-specialist-help/7023232.article>
- iii. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are taken from a YoungMinds survey hosted on surveygizmo.eu in August 2018, and promoted through social media. There were 2,317 responses from parents of children and young people up to the age of 25 who had looked for support for their mental health in the UK. 94.1% live in England, 2.1% in Scotland, 1.9% in Wales and 1.2% in Northern Ireland.
- iv. NHS England (2016) Implementation Plan for Five Year Forward View for Mental Health: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/mentalhealth/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2016/07/2.-Children-and-young-people's-mental-health.pdf>
- v. Data taken from NHS England, Five Year Forward View for Mental Health Dashboard, Q1 & Q2 2017/18; the NHS Digital, Mental Health Services Data Set, April-May 2018; and responses to YoungMinds Freedom of Information requests. Data refers to 2016-17 the last year for which full figures were available.
- vi. YoungMinds Freedom of Information requests, due to be published October 2018
- vii. Government Response to the Consultation on Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper and Next Steps (2018) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/728892/government-response-to-consultation-on-transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health.pdf
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- ix. CQC (2017) Review of Children and Young People's Mental Health Services <https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/major-report/review-children-young-peoples-mental-health-services-phase-one-report>
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