

Local Government Association Briefing

Children's mental health week

House of Commons
06 February 2020



Key Messages

- Improving and maintaining good mental health for communities is a key priority for councils. This is particularly important for children and young people.
- Through their children, family and public health responsibilities, councils are giving children and young people high quality mental health support. They stand ready to do more and help to avoid children reaching crisis point but are currently having to cut vital early intervention work.
- This week, we have published commissioned research¹ into the early intervention, prevention and support for children with multiple and complex needs that councils across the country are doing to support our children and young people. This demonstrates what can be achieved through good local partnership working, as well as putting the child and family at the heart of services.
- We welcome the recent announcements for increased investment in NHS-led children's mental health services. This includes, more money for crisis care and schools-based support teams. However, we can help more children and young people avoid being escalated into clinical services with life-long mental health disorders by refocusing on the good work councils do in supporting mentally healthy childhoods and in providing early and family-based support.
- The Government should strengthen the governance over how funding on children's mental health services is spent and recognise the expertise of health and wellbeing boards locally.
- The LGA's [Bright Futures](#) campaign sets out our key asks to help improve the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people, this includes prioritising prevention and early intervention and providing funding to councils to allow them work with schools to commission independent school based counselling in every secondary school.

Briefing

Background

Good mental health is essential for a healthy and prosperous society. Unfortunately, it is easier to focus on what happens when a person becomes mentally ill, and how the health service intervenes, rather than how to keep our communities mentally well in the first place.

Improving and maintaining good mental health for communities is a key priority for councils. This is particularly important for children and young people. Over half of mental health conditions arise before the age of 14, and 75 per cent by the age of 24. Providing early and holistic support can prevent the escalation and complication of conditions and can dramatically improve a young person's life chances. This in turn helps to save money in the longer term.

It is important that we focus on prevention and intervention at an early stage, particularly for children and young people. By doing this we will help prevent poor mental health blighting peoples' lives and improve the well-being of our communities.

Local partnerships

The LGA has published commissioned research, [Building resilience: how local partnerships are supporting children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing](#). The paper seeks to explore the factors contributing to the challenges facing children's mental health services nationally. The research seeks to help develop an evidence base for how local government and its partners can work most effectively together to deliver a coherent and joined-up offer of support for children and young people's mental health.

The research is based on a review of the existing evidence base, workshops with around 80 participants from councils and their partners in health and in-depth engagements with eight fieldwork areas.

Children's mental health

Supporting child and adolescent mental health and wellbeing continues to be a priority for councils. According to the latest data, at least one in 8 children and young people have a diagnosable mental health condition. Looked after children are four times more likely to experience mental health issues than their peers.² Despite the increasing demand, funding for children's mental health has stagnated and only 6.7 per cent of mental health spending goes to children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).

We are pleased that the [NHS Long Term Plan](#) sets out the priorities for expanding Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS) over the next 10 years, alongside a commitment that funding for children and young people's mental health services will grow faster than both overall NHS funding and total mental health spending. This will help the NHS to prioritise mental health services for children and young people, with more money for crisis care and schools-based support teams. Through their children, family and public health responsibilities, councils are also pulling out all the stops to give children and young people high quality mental health support.

The Government must ensure there is accountability at national level for the investment, so it reaches the right services. There must also be improved accountability and oversight of the reforms and funding at local level, this should be overseen by Health and Wellbeing Boards.

It is crucial we focus on prevention and intervention at an early stage, particularly for children and young people. By doing this we will help prevent poor mental health blighting peoples' lives and improve the well-being of our communities.

In our response³ to the Government's Children and Young People's Mental Health Green

Paper, we highlighted that measures to tackle the crisis in children and young people's mental health are long overdue and we are pleased the Government's response confirmed it is taking steps to address this.

Funding arrangements

The Government should strengthen the governance over how funding on children's mental health services is spent and recognising the expertise of health and wellbeing boards locally.

In 2018, the National Audit Office found that NHS England could not be certain that CCGs (clinical commissioning groups) had spent the increased investment allocated by the Government for children's mental health on children's mental health⁴. The Government must ensure NHS England make up the shortfall in its promised £1.7 billion investment, or that any future investment has additional robust oversight via the statutory local health and wellbeing boards.

LGA Bright Futures campaign

The LGA's [Bright Futures](#) campaign highlights the early intervention and prevention work that councils across the country are doing to support our children and young people. We are calling on the Government to:

- Ensure all the promised £1.7 billion for children's mental health is spent on children's mental health services, and not diverted elsewhere. Where it has been spent on other services, government should make up the shortfall
- Improve standards and makes sure funding is spent wisely. This includes strengthening the governance over how funding is spent and recognising the expertise of health and wellbeing boards locally.
- Prioritise prevention and early intervention funding to councils to allow them work with schools to commission independent school-based counselling.

¹ LGA, Building resilience: how local partnerships are supporting children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing, <https://www.local.gov.uk/supporting-good-mental-health>

² The Mental Health Foundation, The Mental Health of Looked-After Children https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/mental_health_looked_after_children.pdf

³ LGA response to Government response on children's mental health Green Paper, <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-childrens-mental-health-green-paper-consultation-response>

⁴ National Audit Office, Improving children and young people's mental health services, <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Improving-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-services.pdf>