

Mental health of children and young adults in the UK

House of Lords

16 May 2019



Key Messages

- Improving and maintaining good mental health for communities is a vital priority for councils. Poor mental health can affect any of us at any stage of our lives, including in childhood and as young adults. Intervening early to help prevent issues from escalating can dramatically improve an individual's life chances and save our public services money in the longer term.
- It was pleasing to hear the Budget announce additional funding for the NHS to prioritise mental health services for children and young people, with more money for crisis care and schools-based support teams. The commitment in the NHS Long Term Plan (LTP) to boost investment in children and young people's eating disorder services over the next five years is also important.
- Through their children, family and public health responsibilities, councils are supporting children and young people with high quality mental health support. As a result of funding reductions, many councils are now being forced to reduce vital early intervention work which helps children avoid reaching crisis point.
- The government's children's services Early Intervention Grant has been reduced by almost £600 million since 2013 and is projected to decrease by almost £100 million more by 2020. Children's services are facing a wider funding gap of £3 billion by 2025 caused by both funding reductions and increases in demand for support services. This is not sustainable if we are serious about tackling mental health in young people. Councils' public health budgets, which fund school nurses and public mental health services, have been reduced by £600 million from 2015/16 to 2019/20.
- Our current analysis projects an £8 billion gap in council funding by 2024/25. A range of services that contribute to the wider determinants of mental health are significantly underfunded, these include housing, leisure, green spaces, and culture. This makes it more difficult to promote mental wellness within our communities.
- Increased investment in children and young people's mental health services is urgently needed. In particular, the Government must ensure all of 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, the Government should make up the shortfall. This will be in line with the implementation of Future in Mind and the reforms stated in the Government's green paper *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision*.
- Councils and schools need to be given funding to offer independent mental health counselling so children have access to support as and when they need it.
- The LGA's [Bright Futures](#) campaign highlights the important early intervention and prevention work that councils across the country are doing to support our children and young people.

Briefing

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Further information

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. It is essential to prevent mental health issues arising, intervening early if problems do start surfacing, and helping people manage their lives going forward. 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.

Bright Futures

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 of 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.

Children's mental health

Supporting child and adolescent mental health and wellbeing continues to be a priority for councils, and councils have a key role to play. A recent report by the Children's Commissioner found that councils contributed half of the £226 million funding for low-level mental health services¹ planned for 2018/19 and NHS sources contributed the other half. About three-fifths of the contribution from councils is through children's services and two-fifths through public health.² Councils also have responsibility for supporting children with complex and multiple needs, which may include physical and mental health issues, as well as learning disabilities or autism.

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. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has estimated that presentation at A&E of children with mental health problems has more than doubled since 2010³. Despite the increasing demand currently only 6.7 per cent NHS mental health spending, and 0.9 per cent on of Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) spending⁴, goes to children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).

Unfortunately, a lack of funding means around 75 per cent of young people experiencing a mental health problem either cannot access treatment or their health deteriorates whilst they are waiting. There is an assumption that councils and the voluntary sector step in to support these young people, a point articulated in the 2018 Children Commissioner's report into children's mental health⁵. The government's children's services Early Intervention Grant has been reduced by almost £600 million since 2013 and is projected to decrease by almost £100 million more by 2020. Councils in 2015/2016 spent £8.3 billion in children's services; but they are facing a funding gap of £3 billion by 2025. This is not sustainable if we are serious about tackling mental health in young people. Councils' public health budgets, which fund school nurses and public mental health services, have been reduced by £600 million from 2015/16

to 2019/20.

It was pleasing to hear the Budget announce additional funding for 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. A 2018 National Audit Office report found that NHS England cannot be certain all the £1.7 billion funding committed by government for CAMHS has been spent as intended or that data on CCG's expenditure on children's mental health is reliable.⁶ 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 response⁷ 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.

The role of councils in supporting children and young people

Councils are uniquely placed to build communities that are inclusive, cohesive and promote the life chances. They do this by tailoring more than 800 local services to the needs of their populations, creating bespoke solutions to specific, local challenges. This includes working to protect and improve outcomes for children and young people, such as safeguarding and child protection services, as well as services like youth work and early intervention programmes to improve young people's health and wellbeing.

Many issues that impact on the wellbeing and life chances of children and young people are affected by decisions made in housing, health and employment, and not solely children's services. Ensuring that children and young people have access to opportunities and have their needs addressed must be seen as the responsibility of both the whole council and a wide range of partners, not just council children's services.

The importance of local partnership working is mirrored at the national level, as the lives of children and young people are inevitably affected by decisions over which councils and their partners have little control. It is therefore vital that Whitehall approaches improved outcomes for children with an integrated policy offer. Councils can play a central role in integrating services around the needs of families to improve their outcomes and life chances. All too often the savings from investment by one agency are recouped by another, resulting in disincentives to invest in early intervention. We need to reform how funding is allocated across local services to encourage joint working and investment in early intervention that shifts the balance from crisis spend towards prevention, while considering how best to balance universal and targeted services in a time of reduced public spending.

¹ The definition of 'low level' mental health surveys is provided by the Children's Commissioner: 'Low-level, non-specialist services comprise those preventative and early intervention services which fall below specialist referral thresholds'.

² Children's Commissioner early access to mental health support, April 2019, <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Early-access-to-mental-health-support-April-2019.pdf>

³ CQC review of children and young people's mental health services, 2017;
https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20171027_cypmhphase1_literaturereview.pdf

⁴ Children's Commissioner, children's mental health briefing, November 2018,
<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/childrens-mental-health-briefing-nov-2018.pdf>

⁵ Children's Commissioner, children's mental health briefing, November 2018,
<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/childrens-mental-health-briefing-nov-2018.pdf>

⁶ National Audit Office, improving children and young people's mental health services, October 2018, <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/improving-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-services/>

⁷ 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>