

Eating Disorders

House of Commons

27 February 2019

Key Messages

- Improving and maintaining community wellbeing, including mental health, is a key priority for councils. Poor mental health can affect any of us at any stage of our lives, including in childhood.
- We were pleased with 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. The increased funding for children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) in the last Budget was also welcome.
- Through their children, family and public health responsibilities, councils are pulling out all the stops to give children and young people high quality mental health support. As a result of funding reductions, many councils are being forced to cut vital early intervention work which helps children avoid reaching crisis point.
- Councils face a £8 billion overall shortfall by 2025. 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 communities.
- 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 2020¹. Councils' public health budgets, which fund school nurses and public mental health services, have been reduced by £700 million from 2015/16 to 2019/20. 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.
- 75 per cent of young people experiencing a mental health problem either cannot access treatment or their health deteriorates whilst they are waiting. Intervening early to help prevent issues from escalating can dramatically improve an individual's life chances and save money in the longer term.
- The LGA's [Bright Futures](#) campaign highlights the incredible early intervention and prevention work that councils across the country are doing to support our children and young people. The campaign draws on the powerful personal stories of some young people battling mental disorders, including eating disorders.

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. 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.

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 condition². Looked after children are four times more likely to experience mental health issues than their peers. Despite the increasing demand, funding for children's mental health has stagnated and only 6.7 per cent of mental health spending goes to CAMHS.

A lack of funding in CAMHS 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. Support for these young people then falls to councils and the voluntary sector. 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 £3.1 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 £700 million from 2015/16 to 2019/20.

It was pleasing that the LTP included a welcome prioritisation for CAMHS services and the additional funding for the NHS to prioritise mental health services for children and young people in the last Budget, with more money for crisis care and schools-based support teams. However, we need to see a similar investment in prevention, early intervention and preventing crisis, and we need to consider young people who are home-schooled, excluded from school and move schools frequently. It should also be noted that councils themselves commission CAMHS. 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, and this should be overseen by Health and Wellbeing Boards as a local statutory body that brings together health, local government and healthwatch.

Funding

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. In our response³ to the 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.

It is imperative that any increased funding reaches CAMHS. Currently, CCGs spend an average of 14 per cent of their overall budget on mental health, but just 0.9 per cent on children's mental health, and councils' children services are increasingly having to step in to support vulnerable children unable to access CAMHS⁴.

While we support improved crisis care, investment is needed in early intervention therapies for children and young people so they do not deteriorate to the level where they require more medicalised and crisis-based interventions.

Local leadership

Councils, and in particular councillors as local community leaders, can champion and raise awareness of mental health. The [Mental Health Challenge](#), advocated by the LGA as part of its Bright Futures campaign, is a platform where councillors of different political persuasions across England commit to championing mental health, share ideas, seek advice and receive support with the aim of enhancing the mental health of their local communities.

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. The campaign draws on the powerful personal stories of some young people battling mental health problems, including eating disorders. 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.

¹ LGA Bright Futures, <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-childrens-services/childrens-services-funding-facts>

² LGA Bright Futures, CAMHS facts and figures, <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-camhs/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-and>

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 LGA response to NHS Long Term Plan, <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/20190117%20LGA%20briefing%20-%20NHS%20Long%20Term%20Plan%20FINAL.pdf>