MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION

GENERAL ELECTION MANIFESTO

2019

Mental health should be valued and understood as a key that allows us to unlock a wide range of health, social and economic benefits. When this resource is damaged, it leaves us unable to reach our individual and collective potential. The next UK government can make positive changes towards this critical goal of achieving better mental health for all.

Over recent years there has been a welcome increased focus on mental health. However, much remains to be done. Every week in England, one in six adults experiences a common mental health problem, such as anxiety or depression, and, at some point in their lives, one in five adults has considered taking their own life.[1] In 2017, 65% of people surveyed said that they have experienced a mental health problem in their lifetime; this figure rose to 71% amongst young people aged 18-34.[2] Mental health problems cost the UK economy 4.1% of GDP each year.[3]

It is unlikely that mental health services could ever cope with current demand; **mental health problems are already amongst the biggest causes of disability and illness in the UK**.[4]

The huge and growing prevalence of mental health problems places an unsustainable strain on NHS services and a crucial part of the solution is to reduce the levels of mental distress in society by acting to prevent mental health problems and reduce the risk factors associated with their development. The rates of preventable poor mental health would be considered unacceptable in any other area of health. Now is the time to develop a comprehensive, cross-government action plan that tackles the root causes of mental health problems and improves the wellbeing of the nation.

Over the next few years, we believe that the most effective way to make progress against these challenges is by taking action on five fronts:

1

A cross-government plan to address the social, economic and other contextual factors that lead to poor mental health

2

Supporting a mentally healthy start for children

3

Resourcing local authorities to fulfil their public mental health role

4

Assessing current resourcing, coverage and need for preventative mental health interventions

5

Supporting schools, health services, prisons, social welfare and housing services to be 'trauma-informed'

1

A cross-government plan to address the social, economic and other contextual factors that lead to poor mental health

There is strong and accumulating evidence that social inequalities – including poverty and income inequality, gender and minority statuses, and adverse childhood experiences and trauma – increase the risk of mental health problems.[5][6] The next government must therefore strive to reduce these inequalities to help prevent mental health problems.

Prevention cannot happen within the health sector alone – action must be taken across all UK government departments and in all relevant policy areas. The next government should increase the ambition of the existing prevention green paper by consulting on and developing a distinct cross-government plan for preventing poor mental health and promoting good mental health. This should lead to a workplan of policies and outcomes for each government department, overseen by the Cabinet Office and running alongside the NHS 10-year plan. The plan must meaningfully address the root causes of mental health problems – in particular, socio-economic inequality, inequality of access to public services and technology, and discrimination.

The next government should take a 'mental health in all policies approach'. To ensure buy-in from all departments, the cross-government plan should develop

mental health-related outcomes for each department, consistent with their existing priorities and goals. The cross-government plan should develop policies at three levels across all departments: action to tackle structural social inequalities, policies and programmes to promote mentally healthy families and community resilience, and mental health literacy across the life course.

The Foundation recommends that the next UK government develops a cross-governmental action plan to prevent mental health problems and promote mental wellbeing by addressing the social, economic and other contextual risk factors that lead to poor mental health. Projects such as the Foundation's Parc Prison Peer-led Self-management Project, the Peer Education Project in schools, and the Standing Together Project in later life housing are examples of interventions outside the health service.

2

Supporting a mentally healthy start for children

Some of the most well-evidenced and cost-effective programmes to prevent mental health problems focus on children's mental health, and there is a range of evidence-based interventions that can help to prevent adverse childhood experiences. In particular, programmes that support parents to develop their parenting skills have been proven effective, including in terms of their costs and benefits.[7] Furthermore, home visiting for new mothers has been found to have a cost-benefit ratio to the wider economy of 5.7 to 1 for high-risk women and 1.26 to 1 for low-risk women.[8]

The Foundation recommends investing in comprehensive health visiting services and evidence-based parenting programmes, together with support programmes for parents experiencing particular challenges. A good example of a support programme is the Foundation's Young Mums Together project that developed sustainable hubs of peer and professional support for young mothers (aged under 25 years) in three London boroughs.

In the context of education, **every school, higher and further education student should have appropriate mental health literacy lessons at each stage of their education and be able to access early support through their education provider.**

3

Resourcing local authorities to fulfil their public mental health role

Local authorities have a responsibility for preventing mental health problems and promoting wellbeing at a local level. Their role includes planning and delivering public health, providing good quality housing options and children's services, involving the community in local decision-making and providing access to parks and nature. However, reductions to council funding have made it difficult to fulfil these functions.

There has been a 4% year-on-year cut to local authority public health budgets to 2020, leaving the public health grant £850 million lower in real terms now than in 2015/16.[9] Public health cuts have hit the poorest areas hardest which means the most vulnerable are losing out on the prevention services that maintain health and wellbeing.[10] With population growth factored in, the King's Fund and the Health Foundation have argued that £1 billion is needed to restore funding to 2015/16 levels.

The Foundation recommends reversing recent cuts to council grants – particularly the public health grant – and supporting every local authority to have a plan for better mental health and to deliver their suicide prevention plans. Public mental health spending should grow at a faster rate than public health spending overall to rectify previous under-investment in this area and to bring it in line with other mental health spending commitments in the NHS. Thrive LDN, of which MHF is a partner, is a good example of how a local area can take an active approach to preventing mental health problems.

4

Assessing current resourcing, coverage and need for preventative mental health interventions

There are examples of effective interventions to prevent mental health problems. However, their availability and coverage is not well recorded, making it difficult to know how well existing preventative interventions meet the needs of local communities. This makes it harder for national and local government to plan effective mental ill-health prevention.

Combined with a thorough assessment of mental health-related need, identifying the gaps in coverage of preventative mental health interventions would be an effective way to understand what resources are needed in which locations to promote population mental wellbeing and prevent mental health problems.[11]

The Foundation recommends that the next UK government carries out a needs assessment of public mental health interventions in relation to population need and develops a plan to meet this identified need. The Mental Health Foundation's mapping of the social circumstances of mental health in the boroughs of London provides a good example of an exercise that can be used as a starting point for a needs assessment.

5

Supporting schools, health services, prisons, social welfare and housing services to be 'trauma-informed'

Adversity in childhood, such as experiencing bereavement, abuse, neglect, poverty or the loss of a parent through divorce or separation, has been found to directly account for 29.8% of mental health problems, with evidence showing that the more severe and prolonged the exposure to adversity, the greater the risk of developing a mental health problem.[12]

For adults, experiencing two or more adverse life events in adulthood – for example, serious illness, job loss, or bereavement – is associated with mental health problems[13] and, for some, this can be more difficult to cope with due to earlier adverse experiences in childhood.[14] Traumatic experiences leave a powerful impact on people's brain, behaviour, and life opportunities. When public services understand and respond appropriately to people's experience of trauma, they can reduce the risk of doing further damage through 're-traumatisation' and help people to get more from the service.

The Foundation recommends that the next UK government establishes a national programme to support trauma-informed education, health, criminal justice, social welfare and housing services. The Foundation (in partnership with the Centre for Mental Health) has developed advice on how to develop trauma-informed approaches.

Conclusion

There is a growing consensus that preventing mental health problems is critical to easing the pressure on NHS services and improving the wellbeing and economic productivity of the population. The next UK government must build on our growing understanding of the social, economic and other causes of mental health problems and take positive steps to improve the wellbeing of the population. The five actions identified in this manifesto would lay a solid foundation for better mental health in our communities.

A government that commits to these five actions will be at the forefront of preventing mental health problems and can expect to see reductions in their prevalence over the coming years.

About the Mental Health Foundation

The Mental Health Foundation is a UK-wide 70-year old charity for everyone's mental health. With prevention at the heart of what we do, we aim to find and address the sources of mental health problems. Every year since 2001, we have been hosting and initiating Mental Health Awareness Week and, in 2019, we are chairing the Mental Health Policy Group (MHPG), a partnership of six national organisations working together to improve mental health through policy advocacy. The MHPG's general election manifesto can be read here, and its Towards Equality for Mental Health report here.

Endnotes

1 McManus S, Bebbington P, Jenkins R, Brugha T. (eds.) (2016). Mental health and wellbeing in England: Adult psychiatric morbidity survey 2014. Leeds: NHS digital.

2 Mental Health Foundation. (2017). Surviving or Thriving? The state of the UK's mental health.

3 OECD. (2018). Estimates of total costs (direct and indirect) of mental health problems in EU countries, in million EUR and as a share of GDP, 2015. in *Health at a Glance: Europe 2018: State of Health in the EU Cycle*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

4 Public Health England. (2019). Health Profile for England: 2019.

5 McManus S, Bebbington P, Jenkins R, Brugha T. (eds.) (2016). Mental health and wellbeing in England: Adult psychiatric morbidity survey 2014. Leeds: NHS digital.

6 Mental Health Foundation. (2017). Surviving or Thriving? The state of the UK's mental health.

7 Wahlbeck K, Cresswell-Smith J, Haaramo P, Parkkonen J. (2017). Interventions to mitigate the effects of poverty and inequality on mental health. Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol, 52(5):505-514.

8 Mcdaid D & Park A. (2011). Investing in mental health and well-being: findings from the DataPrev project. *Health Promotion International*, 26(1):108-139.

9 The King's Fund and Health Foundation. (2019). Health charities make urgent call for £1 billion a year to reverse cuts to public health funding.

10 Institute for Public Policy Research. (2019). Hitting the poorest worst? How public health cuts have been experienced in England's most deprived communities.

11 See also, Royal Society for Public Health. (2019). Public mental health: Evidence, practice and commissioning. London: Royal Society for Public Health.

12 Kessler RC, McLaughlin KA, Green JG et al. (2010). Childhood adversities and adult psychopathology in the WHO World Mental Health Surveys. British Journal of Psychiatry, 197(5):378-85.

13 Faculty of Public Health/Mental Health Foundation. (2016). Better Mental Health for All: A Public Health approach to mental health improvement. London: Faculty of Public Health and Mental Health Foundation.

14 Reiser SJ, McMillan KA, Wright KD, Gordon Asmundson JG. (2014). Adverse childhood experiences and health anxiety in adulthood. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 38(3):407-413.

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