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The mental health challenge

Local councils championing mental health

The Mental Health Five Year Forward View: A guide for local council members

Introduction

The Mental Health Five Year Forward View was published in February 2016 following the work of the independent Mental Health Taskforce, chaired by Mind chief executive Paul Farmer.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mental-Health-Taskforce-FYFV-final.pdf>

The Taskforce was asked by NHS England to produce a five year plan to improve mental health support in England. Similar plans have also been developed for cancer services and for maternity care.

The Taskforce report sets out a wide range of recommendations for NHS England and the other Department of Health 'arm's length bodies', for government and for local health and care services. It sought the views of people living with mental health problems to inform its priorities, receiving 20,000 responses to its call for evidence.

The Government pledged funding of £1 billion by 2020/21 to implement key proposals from the report, over and above the £1.25 billion investment over five years already announced for improving children and young people's mental health services.

NHS England subsequently published a detailed implementation plan which set out how it would deliver its part of the report's recommendations

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/fyfv-mh.pdf>.

Priority actions for 2020/21

The report makes a total of 58 recommendations for improved mental health support and for system changes to help to create 'parity' between mental and physical health. Key recommendations include:

- **Improved crisis care**, including the provision of 24/7 Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment (CRHT) services in all local areas and **liaison psychiatry** services in all general hospitals
- Better help for the **physical health** of people with a severe mental illness, for example improved access to smoking cessation services
- Extending access to **psychological therapy** services, especially for people with long-term physical conditions (eg asthma and diabetes)
- Full implementation of new **access and waiting time standards** for adult psychological therapy and Early Intervention in Psychosis, with further standards for other mental health services over the next five years
- Improving **support for new mothers** with mental health problems, during pregnancy and in the year after giving birth
- Doubling the provision of **Individual Placement and Support** for people using mental health services who want help with employment
- A '**data and transparency** revolution' to ensure better information is available about spending on mental health care in local areas.

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The role of local government

Local councils hold a pivotal role in ensuring the report's recommendations are implemented across England. They can do this in a number of different ways:

Local leadership

The taskforce calls for all local councils to have a member champion for mental health. Already 80 councils have signed up to the Mental Health Challenge. Many councils have also signed the Time to Change pledge, to prevent stigma and discrimination. And some have become Mindful Employers (www.mindfulemployer.net), to ensure they support the mental health of their own staff, or sought training for staff and managers in mental health awareness. This 'leadership by example' is critical to raise the profile of mental health in a local area and show that simple steps by employers can make a difference.

Strategic planning

The report calls for all local areas to have a Prevention Plan that will seek to promote good mental health and prevent mental illness. The Mental Health Intelligence Network (available at <http://www.yhpho.org.uk/default.aspx?RID=198138>) provides data for local areas to identify levels of mental ill health and how they compare with similar localities and their region. A good Joint Strategic Needs Assessment that identifies mental health needs and assets in a community can be the bedrock for local efforts to improve wellbeing for all and to tackle the biggest inequalities.

The report also calls for each local area to develop a multi-agency suicide prevention plan, building on the promising results of the three pilot Zero Suicide programmes in Merseyside, East of England (<https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/zero-suicides>) and the South West.

Partnership building

The report reinforces the importance of the full implementation of the Future in Mind strategy (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-mental-health-services-for-young-people>). All local areas now have a Transformation Plan for children and young people's mental health care. Local authorities are key partners in these plans and can help to bring together schools, children's services, early years and health services to ensure that the plans are well implemented and involve children as equal partners.

The report also calls for continued improvements in mental health crisis care. The Crisis Care Concordat (<http://www.crisiscareconcordat.org.uk/>) has helped to bring together local agencies to ensure they work together better to support someone in an emergency. Councils play an important role in building and sustaining these partnerships.

Localities with new powers from devolution arrangements can develop further plans to use a range of public funds more efficiently, for example to help more people with mental health problems who are out of work to gain employment or to improve support for people in the criminal justice system.

Service commissioning and provision

Council services have a vital role in improving mental health support. Social care is a key component of mental health care in all local areas, including in the operation of the Mental Health Act. Public health and early years services help to prevent mental ill health and ensure children have the best start in life, for example through commissioning evidence-based parenting programmes. Drug and alcohol services are also crucial because a large proportion of people with substance misuse problems also have poor mental health.

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Housing services have a significant role too, for example in providing supported accommodation for people who need extra help to stay independent or who are leaving hospital or prison. It is vital that local housing allocation policies give priority to people with mental health problems and that people who need extra support to sustain tenancies are helped to avoid the risk of homelessness (<https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/briefing-49-a-basic-need>).

Monitoring and scrutiny

Local councillors can scrutinise the implementation of the report's recommendations by their own councils and by their partners in clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), NHS providers and police forces.

NHS England has asked all CCGs to secure real terms increases in mental health spending during 2015/16 and 2016/17. Council scrutiny committees are well placed to question whether this is the case and how money is being spent to achieve improved outcomes.

Next steps

All local areas are now developing NHS Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STPs) that are designed to bring their health economies into financial balance and improve efficiency, quality and wellbeing for local people (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/futurehhs/deliver-forward-view/stp/>). STPs provide an important backdrop for the implementation of the Taskforce report and it is essential they take the opportunity to begin the job of investing in better mental health support from the start.

Key actions for local councils

- 1 Sign up to the Mental Health Challenge** by appointing a member champion for mental health
- 2 Identify local mental health needs** and assets and opportunities to prevent mental ill health through JSNAs
- 3 Build and sustain partnerships** with NHS organisations and others locally to offer earlier and more holistic help for people's mental health
- 4 Promote mental health awareness** throughout the council and create a mentally healthy workplace
- 5 Encourage, monitor and scrutinise** local action to improve mental health and reduce inequalities

Facts and figures

- Mental health problems affect about **23%** of us at any one time and 44% at some point in our lives
- **Three children** in every classroom have a mental health problem at any one time
- It takes an average of **10** years from the first signs of a mental health problem emerging in childhood for a young person to get effective support
- People with a severe mental illness such as schizophrenia can expect to die **15-20** years sooner than average.
- **One third** of people with a long-term physical illness also have a mental health condition

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Taskforce website:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/mentalhealth/taskforce/>

The Mental Health Five Year Forward View:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mental-Health-Taskforce-FYFV-final.pdf>

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