

Press release: Measures to end unequal mental health treatment kickstarted by PM

New measures to overhaul urgently mental health laws and end the unequal treatment faced by ethnic minority groups have been set out by Prime Minister Theresa May today.

The government will take forward key recommendations from Sir Simon Wessely's independent review of the Mental Health Act, which found black adults are approximately four times more likely than white adults to be detained under the Act.

The Prime Minister also confirmed that a White Paper will be published by DHSC and MoJ before the end of the year in response to the review. This will set out the steps necessary to provide greater dignity and better care for all those treated under the Mental Health Act, and to tackle inequalities in the mental health care system.

Healthcare bosses and senior members of the Independent Review of the Mental Health Act attended a roundtable with the Prime Minister at Number 10 Downing Street this afternoon. They discussed the government's plans for early action to reform mental health legislation and services to particularly benefit ethnic minority groups, which include:

- the first ever Race Equality Framework will ensure NHS mental healthcare providers work with their local communities to improve the ways in which patients access and experience treatment, and ensure data on equality of access is monitored at board level and acted on
- working with Black African and Caribbean community groups alongside others to develop a White Paper formally setting out a response to Sir Simon's review
- further work towards eradicating the use of police cells as a place to detain people experiencing mental illness ahead of banning it in law, building on the Prime Minister's work to end this practice for under-18s
- launching a pilot programme of culturally-sensitive advocates in partnership with local authorities and others, to identify how best to represent the mental health needs of ethnic minority groups
- a partnership between the Care Quality Commission and Equality and Human Rights Commission to review how they can use their regulatory powers to better support equality of access to mental health services
- an open call for research into how different ethnic minority groups experience mental health treatment and how this can be improved – to be launched later this year by the National Institute for Health Research

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

Mental illness can affect us all, but the shocking evidence that black people are much more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act shows that we need urgent action to address inequalities in our healthcare system.

Today's measures will drive forward an important conversation about how we best look after people from ethnic minority backgrounds living with mental health conditions and make sure their needs are met.

These commitments come alongside a wide-ranging series of prevention measures announced today by the Prime Minister to make sure people have the support they need to look after their mental health. The package includes training for all new teachers so they can spot the signs of mental health issues and updated professional standards for social workers across England to increase their knowledge and skills when dealing with mental illness.

Today marks one year since the Prime Minister announced a historic cash funding boost for the health service, driving the largest expansion of mental health services in a generation under the NHS Long-Term Plan.

Attending today's roundtable were: