

Press release: PM launches new mission to put prevention at the top of the mental health agenda

Package of support will overhaul approach to preventing mental illness, building on record investment in mental health services.



Every new teacher will be trained in how to spot the signs of mental health issues, under a new prevention plan unveiled by the Prime Minister today (Monday 17 June).

Theresa May will pledge better access to education, training and support across communities as part of an overhaul of society's approach to mental illness.

The wide-ranging package of measures will make sure people have the confidence and skills they need to identify mental health issues before they become critical, particularly in young people.

Today's announcement means schools, social workers, local authorities and healthcare services will receive extra support to make sure people know how to promote good mental health in the same way that they look after physical wellbeing. These measures include:

- training for all new teachers on how to spot the signs of mental health issues, backed up by updated statutory guidance to make clear schools' responsibilities to protect children's mental wellbeing
- all 1.2 million NHS staff encouraged to take suicide prevention training from the Zero Suicide Alliance, which we have already committed to support with £2 million of government investment
- support for school mental health leads so they can help children struggling with self-harm and risk of suicide
- access to world-class teaching and training materials for all teachers to use in classrooms to meet the new requirements for mental health

education for all primary and secondary pupils

- extra funding to support local authorities to strengthen and deliver local suicide prevention plans so that they better meet the needs of the people they serve
- updated professional standards for social workers across England to increase their knowledge and skills when helping those with mental health issues

Today the Prime Minister will visit a school in South West London to meet with pupils learning about the importance of developing healthy habits for life-long good mental health.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

Too many of us have seen first-hand the devastating consequences of mental illness, which is why tackling this burning injustice has always been a personal priority for me.

But we should never accept a rise in mental health problems as inevitable.

It's time to rethink how we tackle this issue, which is why I believe the next great revolution in mental health should be in prevention.

The measures we've launched today will make sure at every stage of life, for people of all backgrounds, preventing mental illness gets the urgent attention it deserves.

Further plans to drive a step-change in public awareness around looking after your mental health include a new national awareness campaign called Every Mind Matters, launching in October.

From 2020 parents will also get access through the campaign to targeted advice on how to deal with issues like stress, online bullying and self-harm.

Vulnerable people are known to be at greater risk of mental illness, including those who face financial difficulties such as problem debt. Government will launch a new breathing space scheme to provide respite from debt collection while people seek support to help prevent the onset of mental health problems – with special access for those receiving crisis treatment.

As part of this prevention agenda, the Prime Minister has also announced:

- £1 million to the Office of Students for a competition to find innovative new ways to support mental health at universities and colleges
- research following the government's Children in Need review to build new evidence on the best ways to support children who have faced adversity, abuse and neglect
- greater transparency in how money is spent on mental health services,

with a commitment to independent audits to ensure that the funding committed under the NHS Long-Term plan reaches the front line

- support given to new parents from health visitors and other professionals will be modernised to better support their babies' behavioural and emotional development

Today's package of changes will also fast track action against undignified and unequal treatment for those in mental crisis – including by committing to overhaul the Mental Health Act to make it fit for modern society.

This legislation will include banning once and for all the use of police cells as a place to detain people experiencing mental illness, following the Prime Minister's work to stamp out this practice in the treatment of under-18s.

Today she has also confirmed that a White Paper will be published before the end of the year in response to Sir Simon Wessely's review of the Mental Health Act, setting out the steps taken to tackle unequal treatment faced by ethnic minority groups.

Professor Sir Simon Wessely, Chair, Independent Review of the Mental Health Act, said:

Theresa May deserves credit for drawing attention to those with the most severe mental illnesses yet who are the most overlooked.

The recommendations of the review of mental health legislation that she commissioned have been warmly welcomed from all sides but now need to be acted on.

Today's announcements are a further welcome step towards that goal.

Paul Farmer, Chief Executive of Mind, the mental health charity, said:

We welcome the sustained momentum from the Prime Minister and government to improving support for people with mental health problems.

It's particularly positive to see such priority given to young people's mental health – our recent work in schools has shown us the true scale of the need and, as most mental health problems start in childhood, decent support as early as possible is key.

We also welcome progress on the Mental Health Act review.

Finally, it's encouraging to see government acknowledge the enormous impact that financial problems can have on mental health, and recognition that improving the wellbeing of the nation is about more than getting NHS services right alone.

Professor Wendy Burn, President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists said:

We strongly welcome today's announcements from the Prime Minister. Her commitment to parity of esteem for mental health will lead to better care for people with a mental illness.

We fully support the need for a greater investment in prevention so that people can live happier, healthier and more independent lives.

The Independent Review of the Mental Health Act was an important step in making sure that people get the support and care they need when they are at their most vulnerable. It is good to see the start of the implementation of the recommendations from the review particularly in the area of equality.

But success will depend on continued commitment from future prime ministers to drive sustained investment and improvement across government departments.

The new measures launched today will build on the largest expansion of mental health services in a generation under the NHS Long-Term Plan.

Today marks one year since the Prime Minister announced a record £33.9 billion a year cash funding boost for the health service, including £2.3 billion more a year in real terms on mental health care to support an extra 345,000 children, at least 380,000 more adults with common mental illnesses, 370,000 adults with serious mental illnesses, and 24,000 more new and expectant mothers. The plan will make sure that funding for mental health services will grow as a share of the NHS budget.