

Executive summary and key proposals

The Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Taskforce was set up in September 2014 to consider how to make it easier for children, young people, parents and carers to get help and support when they need it and to improve the help that is offered.

The topics that were covered include:

Helping children and young people stay mentally well (building resilience) tackling problems early to prevent them getting worse and taking action quickly if they do.

Making it easier to get support that works.

Care for the most needy young people.

Services doing things openly and honestly.

Having the right people in the right place at the right time in the workforce.

Why we need change

Mental health problems cause distress to people and all those who care for them. One in ten children needs support or treatment for mental health problems. These range from short spells of depression or anxiety through to more serious and long term conditions that can be lonely and frightening. Children and young people with mental health problems can do less well in school and are more likely to smoke, take drugs or alcohol and take part in risky sexual behaviour.

Around 75% of mental health problems in adult life (not including dementia) start by the age of 18. Not supporting children and young people with their mental health costs lives and money. Early help stops young people falling into crisis and avoids expensive and longer-term treatment in adulthood.

The large number of professionals, young people, parents and carers who gave evidence to the Taskforce emphasised the challenges facing child and adolescent mental health services.

These include:

- Not enough information is available about what services do, how many young people they see, what it costs and what the results are. This information (data) is needed to make improvements.
- There are increases in referrals and waiting times, with services reporting that the problems are becoming more difficult and severe.
- When young people hit crisis point their access to out of hour's services is different depending on where they live.
- Some children and young people find it especially difficult to access services they feel are suitable, even when they definitely need support.

The full Taskforce report and the proposals it makes are both based on the above issues.

A National Ambition

By 2020 we would wish to see:

- People thinking and feeling differently about mental health issues for children and young people, with less fear and discrimination.
- Services built around the needs of children, young people and their families so they get the right support from the right service at the right time. This would include better experience of moving from children's services to adult services.
- More use of therapies based on evidence of what works.
- Different ways of offering services to children and young people. With more funding, this would include 'one-stop-shops' and other services where lots of what young people need is there under one roof.
- Improved care for children and young people in crisis so they are treated in the right place at the right time and as close to home as possible. For example no young person under the age of 18 being detained in a police cell as a 'place of safety'.
- Improving support for parents to make the bonding between parent and child as strong as possible to avoid problems with mental health and behaviour later on.
- A better kind of service for the most needy children and young people, including those who have been sexually abused and/or exploited making sure they get specialist mental health support if they need it.
- More openness and responsibility, making public numbers on waiting times, results and value for money.
- A national survey for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing that is repeated every five years.
- Professionals who work with children and young people are trained in child development and mental health, and understand what can be done to provide help and support for those who need it.

Making it Happen

The Taskforce firmly believes that in order to create the best mental health care and support we must involve children, young people and those who care for them in decisions made about them and about the service.

What young people and their parents and carers say they want should be what they get from services. Those services need to be simple and easy to get into, be based on the best evidence of what works and show good results.

Making this happen means there will be real changes across the whole system. It means health organisations, local councils, schools and youth justice working together to:

- Concentrate on ways for children and young people to bounce back following setbacks (building resilience), promoting good mental health, treating problems early before they get worse.
- Make it easier for services to work together, making sure that children and young people have easy access to the right support from the right service.
- Link services together so the journey through services is easier to work out for all children and young people, including those who are most needy.
- Help local areas work with young people to develop plans for making mental health services better in their community.
- Use information better to drive change and improve standards, making sure we have a much better understanding of how to get the best results for children, young people and families, giving value for money.
- Encourage services to keep on improving what they do, by employing people with the right mix of skills, and experience.
- Understand exactly how resources are being used in each area, including how much money is being spent on different services and making sure those services can all show clearly they are giving value for money.

In some parts of the country people are already working together to do what is set out in this report. However, this is by no means happening everywhere