Putting Mental Health on the Agenda

National Assembly elections 2016
Introduction

1 in 4 people will experience mental health problems in any given year\(^1\) and the cost of mental health problems in Wales is an estimated £7.2billion per year\(^2\). It makes economic sense to invest in prevention, early intervention and high quality mental health services that will deliver positive outcomes for people and savings for the public purse.

Mental health has risen up the agenda during the last two Assembly terms, with cross party support for new policy and legislation such as Together for Mental Health and the Mental Health (Wales) Measure. In addition, several Assembly Members have courageously spoken out about their own experiences of mental health problems, helping us to improve understanding and tackle stigma and discrimination in Wales.

However, this focus on mental health must be sustained during the next Assembly term. It is clear to us that much more needs to be done to improve early intervention and prevention, further develop high quality mental health services, address attitudes and help to create a mentally healthy Wales.

Mental health charities Gofal and the Mental Health Foundation - with the support of Bipolar UK, Diverse Cymru and Samaritans Cymru - have developed this manifesto to highlight our priorities for the next Assembly term. We hope that each of Wales’ political parties are prepared to embrace these challenges and take action to improve mental health and wellbeing during the fifth Assembly.
Supporting future generations

We believe that a mentally healthy Wales requires a focus on promoting good mental health and wellbeing from an early age. This includes support for women and their families during and after pregnancy, building confidence and resilience among children, encouraging young people to talk openly and positively about mental health and providing high quality support in schools, colleges and universities.

10-20% of women develop a mental health problem during pregnancy or within the first year after having a baby. Evidence demonstrates that investing in mental health during early stages of pregnancy can have a dramatic impact on the long-term outcomes for parents, children, the family and society. Unfortunately, service provision can be patchy and it is essential that the next Welsh Government ensures that women and their families have awareness of and access to mental health support during and after pregnancy through programmes such as Flying Start.

75% of mental health problems are established by age 24. Poor mental health amongst young people can lead to reduced life chances and impact on their education, social participation and ability to find and sustain employment. Children and young people who require specialist support must have timely access to high quality services.

However, it is also vital to improve the ability of schools, colleges and universities to build resilience, deliver effective early intervention and prevent mental health problems developing. We believe that the Welsh Government should implement the Donaldson Review recommendations by placing health and well-being at the heart of the curriculum and ensure a whole school approach to mental health. Ministers should also ensure that initial teacher training and professional development equips school, college and university staff with the knowledge and skills to support and signpost young people who are experiencing mental health problems. We also believe that inspection frameworks and funding levers (e.g. tuition fee plans) should be further developed to encourage investment in support services and improve mental health in schools, colleges and universities.
We would like political parties to make a commitment to:

- Ensure women and their families have access to mental health support during and after pregnancy.
- Improve access to high quality Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for those who require specialist treatment and support.
- Implement the Donaldson Review recommendations by placing mental health and wellbeing at the heart of the curriculum.
- Ensure the continuation and further development of school counselling services.
- Improve mental health training and support for teachers, teaching assistants, lecturers and support staff in schools, colleges and universities.
- Use inspection regimes and funding levers to encourage investment in support services and improve mental health and wellbeing in schools, colleges and universities.

1 in 10 children and young people experience mental health problems.
Improving access to psychological therapies

Timely access to psychological therapies can improve recovery and reduce the need for more acute services. However, too many people are still waiting too long to access this type of support.

Despite some investment from the Welsh Government and the introduction of the Mental Health (Wales) Measure we know that people are still facing lengthy waiting times for psychological therapies. Some people resort to private therapy while those who cannot afford to pay can be left waiting for months. People tell us that their health can deteriorate significantly during this time, leading to absence from education and work, hospitalisation or even homelessness. Early access to talking therapies can prevent deterioration and avoid the need for more acute services, benefiting the person and the public purse.

The recent Welsh Government commissioned review of access to psychological therapies in Wales found variation in the availability and relative quality of services. It also identified issues with training, supervision and career pathways. In response, the Wales Psychological Therapies Plan for Adult Mental Health is currently being developed - we believe its implementation must be a priority.

Timely access to psychological therapies has also been identified by primary mental health staff as the top barrier to the successful delivery of primary mental health services in Wales. People with mental health problems, health professionals and charities are united on this issue - access to psychological therapies must be improved.

It is important to improve access in both primary and secondary care services - people experiencing distress should not have to face lengthy waiting times which delay their recovery. It is also crucial that people in Wales have access to psychological therapies through the medium of the Welsh language. Seeking support and talking about your mental health can be challenging and people should not face additional barriers of having to do so through a second language.
We would like political parties to make a commitment to:

- Fully implement the Wales Psychological Therapies Plan for Adult Mental Health.
- Introduce waiting time measures for English and Welsh language psychological therapies across primary and secondary care. Record, and publish this data and reduce waiting times.
- Record and publish patient outcome data in relation to psychological therapies.
- Train, develop and retain more staff capable of delivering a range of psychological therapies within a formal supervision structure.
- Ensure that psychological therapies are available at accessible times e.g. for people in education or employment and in accessible places e.g. for people with disabilities.
- Develop the use of online interventions that may benefit people in rural areas or those who are less able to travel for other reasons.
Reducing inequalities

People with mental health problems are more likely to face a number of inequalities such as poorer physical health and difficulties accessing quality housing, education and employment opportunities.

Research shows that compared with the general population, people with a serious mental illness have twice the risk of diabetes, three times the risk of dying of heart disease and a life expectancy of up to 20 years shorter. People with mental health problems are less likely to be homeowners and more likely to live in unstable environments. Mental health conditions are the primary reason for claiming health-related benefits yet an estimated 86-90% of unemployed people with mental health conditions want to work.

Some groups within the population are also at a higher risk of developing mental health problems - including those living in poverty, homeless people, prisoners, people with learning disabilities, people with a long term health condition, older people, refugees and asylum seekers.

- BME groups are more likely to be diagnosed with mental health problems and admitted to hospital.
- LGBT people are more likely to experience mental health problems.
- 25-40% of people with learning disabilities experience mental health problems.
- Around 70% of people accessing homelessness services have a mental health problem.

As well as being more susceptible to mental health problems, these groups are often in receipt of poor quality care and are more likely to experience discrimination. This is why support must be universal (for everyone), selective (for people in groups with higher prevalence of mental health problems) and indicated (for those with early signs of mental distress). ‘Selective’ and ‘indicated’ support requires adjusting services to fit the needs of different population groups. It also requires looking at strategies for prevention that addresses those with higher vulnerabilities to mental health problems.
We would like political parties to make a commitment to:

• Measure and reduce the health, housing, education and employment inequalities faced by people with mental health problems - particularly those with a serious mental illness who face the greatest inequalities.

• Ensure that the physical health needs of people with a mental health problem are addressed - through appropriate health checks within both primary and secondary care and the inclusion of physical health issues within people’s care and treatment plans.

• Target support to the needs of groups who face inequalities and are more susceptible to mental health problems e.g. people living in poverty, homeless people, prisoners, people with learning disabilities, people with a long term health condition, older people, refugees and asylum seekers.

The life expectancy of people with a serious mental illness can be up to 20 years less than the general population.
Tackling stigma and discrimination

9 out of 10 people with mental health problems are affected by stigma and discrimination\(^7\). Many say that this can be a bigger burden than the illness itself.

Stigma can prevent people from talking about their mental health and stop them from seeking help. It can act as a barrier to people leading fulfilled lives and stop them from doing everyday activities like going to the shops, seeing friends or applying for jobs. With an estimated 9 out of 10 people with mental health problems facing stigma and discrimination it is crucial that we improve attitudes.

The Welsh Government and Assembly Members have been very supportive of **Time to Change Wales**, the first national campaign to end stigma and discrimination in Wales, and we particularly value the support and courage demonstrated by AMs from all four parties who spoke out about their own experiences of mental health problems.

So far the campaign has\(^8\):

- Reached over 19 million people via its social marketing campaigns
- Worked with over 250 organisations
- Developed a network of 300+ champions
- Delivered 2,500 anti-stigma sessions
- 3.5% positive attitude shift in the general public

The campaign has made great progress over the past three years but there is still much more to do. We would like a commitment to fund a long term campaign in order to deliver generational change, eradicate stigma and improve people’s lives.

In line with the **Together for Mental Health** outcomes, specific action also needs to be taken to improve attitudes and reduce discrimination within the health service. Additional work also needs to target stigma and discrimination in the workplace to ensure that people with mental health problems can access and remain in employment.
We would like political parties to make a commitment to:

• Visibly support the campaign to end stigma and discrimination.

• Commit to fund Time to Change Wales campaigns aimed at both the adult population and children and young people throughout the next Assembly term.

• Sign the Time to Change Wales organisational pledge and tackle stigma and discrimination within political parties.

• Take action to reduce stigma and discrimination within the health service and improve the values, attitudes and skills of those treating or supporting individuals of all ages with mental health problems.

• Support further action to reduce stigma and discrimination in the workplace.

9 in 10 people with mental health problems experience stigma and discrimination.
Improving mental health funding and outcomes

It is estimated that mental health problems account for 23% of the total impact of ill health in the UK\textsuperscript{19} - yet just 11.4% of the NHS budget in Wales is spent on mental health\textsuperscript{20}.

Mental health services have often been described as the ‘Cinderella service’ and many politicians and stakeholders have called for this issue to be addressed. Both the Welsh Government and opposition parties have helped to raise mental health up the political agenda in the National Assembly, but we feel that there is still some way to go to achieve equity with physical health.

In order to improve people’s mental health and aid recovery we need the Welsh Government to work towards funding a mental health service that is proportionate to its impact on people’s lives. Funding must be spent in an effective way that delivers high quality services and positive outcomes for people in Wales.

We welcome the recent Welsh Government decision to maintain the ring-fence on mental health spending as we believe it is essential that mental health services are not squeezed out when budgets are tight. However, it’s crucial that the current and future Welsh Government takes action to better link expenditure to patient outcomes. Both the Government and the public need to be assured that this funding is spent effectively to support people’s recovery.

This is particularly important in secondary mental health care, where the quality of services can have a huge impact on whether people achieve positive outcomes in relation to their recovery. Those who are most in need must receive high quality, outcome focused services in a timely manner - and health funding should be spent prudently to achieve the best possible outcomes for people with mental health problems.
We would like political parties to make a commitment to:

- Increase the proportion of health funding spent on mental health each year of the next Assembly term.
- Maintain the ring-fence on mental health funding throughout the next Assembly term.
- Take action to better link expenditure to patient outcomes to ensure that funding is spent prudently to achieve the best possible outcomes for people with mental health problems.
- Continue to develop and implement the mental health core data set - and regularly evaluate it to ensure that the data is transparent and meaningful.

Mental health problems account for 23% of ill health but just 11.4% of the Welsh NHS budget is spent on mental health.
Cross-government action and accountability

Most people with mental health problems are not using mental health services - it is estimated that only 1 in 4 people seek help from their GP\textsuperscript{21}. However, they do come into contact with a range of education, employment, housing and community services every day. We also know that all aspects of life can affect people’s mental health and wellbeing - including where we live, our finances, education, employment and the environment.

As a result, we believe it is crucial that all Welsh Government Ministers and departments contribute to improving mental health and wellbeing in Wales. We also believe that the impact of decisions on mental health and wellbeing should be considered in the development of all government budgets, policies and legislation. With the cost of mental health problems in Wales estimated to be £7.2 billion per year\textsuperscript{22} it is in everyone’s interest to take action to improve mental health.

We warmly welcomed the Welsh Government’s decision in 2012 to make \textbf{Together for Mental Health} a cross-government strategy. However, when a new Government is formed this commitment must be maintained. All Ministers and departments should make a clear contribution to the delivery of this strategy and help to improve mental health in Wales. It is also important that backbench and opposition Assembly Members continue to show their support, keep mental health on the agenda and hold the Government to account.

In addition it is important that the Welsh Government works effectively with non-devolved bodies in Wales, especially with regards to social security and criminal justice. The Crisis Concordat for Wales is currently being developed and the next Welsh Government should work with devolved, non-devolved and third sector agencies to reduce the number of people placed in police cells under Section 136 and ensure that people in crisis can access the support they need in a timely manner in a health-based or alternative place of safety.
We would like political parties to make a commitment to:

• Continue to make mental health a cross-government priority and report annually on how each Welsh Government Minister and department has contributed to the high level outcomes in Together for Mental Health.

• Introduce a duty on all Ministers to consider the impact of budget, policy and legislative decisions on mental health and wellbeing.

• Encourage all Assembly Members speak out in support of people with mental health problems.

• If in opposition, ensure that all Welsh Government Ministers are held to account for delivering Together for Mental Health.

• Work with devolved, non-devolved and third sector agencies to implement the Crisis Concordat for Wales, reduce the number of people placed in police cells under Section 136 and ensure that people in crisis have access to support in a timely manner.

The cost of mental health problems in Wales is an estimated £7.2billion per year.
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Get in touch:
We would love to hear from political parties or candidates in the lead up to the National Assembly elections. Please don’t hesitate to get in touch if you would like to discuss or show your support for any of the issues raised in this document.

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