

APPG SAYS IT MUST BE 'CHILDREN FIRST!' IN NEW MENTAL HEALTH ACT

News release: from the APPG on a Fit and Healthy Childhood

Embargo:

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood has claimed that a reformed Mental Health Act will be little more than 'sticking plaster' unless the needs of children feature 'first, last and foremost.'

Launching a new APPG report: 'Children's Mental Health Beyond the Green Paper: The Role of Practice Based Evidence,' Chair, Jim Fitzpatrick MP said:

'The Prime Minister's pledge to reform the 1983 Mental Health Act ('The Times,' Thursday, 6th December 2018) is welcome in order to combat the 'burning injustice' of the disparity she has criticised in mental health care.

However, reform is long overdue. If new legislation focuses purely upon the adult population, it will be as ineffective as sticking plaster, because poor mental health often makes its first appearance in childhood and is either missed or dismissed. The resultant full-blown adult crisis becomes entrenched and measures to combat it will be correspondingly difficult and costly.

Our report offers a 'practice based evidence' approach. The needs of children are placed first, last and foremost and I am confident that the strategies outlined will contribute to a society that is mentally resilient as well as physically fit.'

Key recommendations:

- 'Practice based evidence'; child centred strategies measuring what progress *is* being achieved (not what might be possible) against objectives such as those supplied by the National Audit Office in assessing the delivery of mental health services to children as set out in the Green Paper
- A commissioned authority to ensure the establishment of unified policies and standards for the inspection of children's mental health
- The extension of responsibility for the children's mental health workforce development beyond the Department of Health and Social Care to encompass the Department for Education and others with a comparable and demonstrable interest
- Strong focus on the needs of parents; main agents for change
- A substantial extension of the range of interventions beyond the limited compass of behavioural family therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
- An extension of the definition of the Children and Young People's Health Service Data Set (CYPHS) to include all locations that deliver children's mental health services through the Data Coordination Board.

Speaking on behalf of report sponsors, Play Therapy UK, Registrar Jeff Thomas said that a commitment to 'joined up' working from all agencies concerned with children's welfare would be beneficial to health and cost effective:

'These proposals address the current crisis in children's mental health; are already proven in practice and used successfully in 55 other countries, so their adoption in the UK would not be reliant on expensive and lengthy Government trials. They focus on play and creative arts therapies rather than strictly medical interventions; are capable of adaptation for children and young people across the age range and foster 'joined up' working that makes sound health and economic sense.'

Lead author, Helen Clark said that the inclusion of the child centred strategies in the APPG report would enable a new Mental Health Act to stand the test of time:

'The Government's official announcement of the proposed legislation makes no mention of children. Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock says that one in four people will be affected by mental ill health at some point in their lives'.

What he does not say is that this may begin in childhood.

As Chancellor, Philip Hammond has said, 'there are few more pressing needs than the needs of those who suffer mental illness.'

<https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/politics/budget-hammond-reveals-measures-to-support-mental-health/7026537>).

We agree.

It makes sense therefore, that the mental health needs of children (who depend upon the adult society to act in their best interests) must be the top priority.

The policies we offer in our new report will be the missing link for a reformed Mental Health Act and ensure that it can, and will, stand the test of time - by putting children first.'