Department of Health & Social Care

Policy paper

Staying mentally well this winter

Published 23 November 2020

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Introduction

This year has seen an unprecedented change to our lives, as COVID-19 has disrupted our routines, our livelihoods, and our way of life. For some, the pandemic has led to positive changes which have improved their wellbeing, such as greater flexibility in work schedules, or a sense of strong community spirit.

However, we know this sense of optimism has not been shared by everyone, with many reporting feelings of worry, anxiety, frustration or loneliness. Darker winter months and the measures in place from 5 November to control the spread of the virus may put strain on people's resilience, particularly the most vulnerable in our communities and neighbourhoods. These feelings are completely understandable when life unexpectedly alters in a way which is sudden, dramatic, and out of our control.

For many, these fears will subside as time moves on. By drawing upon our own resilience, we can adapt. There are things we can do for ourselves and each other which really can help. We know from the first wave how crucial it has been for people to adapt, while drawing on support within families and communities to keep well during these unprecedented times.

This government is absolutely committed to supporting everyone's mental health and wellbeing throughout the winter period and beyond, and to ensuring that the right support is in place. Next year, the NHS will receive around an additional £500 million to address waiting times for mental health services, give more people the mental health support they need, and invest in the NHS workforce.

This winter, it is important that we make use of the extensive resources and advice available on Public Health England's Better Health: Every Mind Matters platform to make conscious plans to support our own mental wellbeing, and that of those close to us. For those who have sustained negative feelings which become more difficult to cope with independently, NHS services and those provided by the voluntary sector remained open throughout the first wave and will do so throughout the second.

Since March 2020, we have worked collaboratively across departments, health bodies, local government and the voluntary sector to prevent and mitigate some of the most pressing impacts of COVID-19 on the nation's mental health and wellbeing. Action across government – from the furlough scheme to the Loneliness Minister's letter writing initiative – has helped to keep the foundations for many people's wellbeing in place.

Throughout this work, we have been learning lessons which are now informing how we support people's wellbeing and mental health during the second wave and beyond. For example, during the second wave, we have adapted the national restrictions to keep schools, further education colleges and universities open as we know how important this is for children and young people's wellbeing.

This plan sets out the support that will be in place in the immediate term to help mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on people's mental health and wellbeing this winter.

While this plan applies to England only (as mental health is a devolved matter), mental health remains a UK-wide priority and all 4 nations are taking steps to address the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are continuing to collaborate across the UK, share learning and ensure all nations can benefit from new initiatives where possible. Please follow the links for more information on the respective mental health responses to the pandemic in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Empowering everyone to look after their wellbeing

Good wellbeing and mental health are essential assets for individuals, communities and society. They can help each one of us to live fulfilled, productive and mentally healthy lives. We know that each person's mental health and resilience are shaped by a broad range of factors.

As we move into the winter period, this government is committed to ensuring everyone has access to the tools and resources they need to stay mentally well.

> We know that the winter months and shorter days can really affect our mood and wellbeing. Research shows that accessing green space in our parks, countryside and our own gardens and allotments promotes feelings of wellbeing and improves self-esteem, among numerous other benefits.
>
> As little as 30 minutes' exposure to natural light per day can improve mental health and help maintain a healthy sleep pattern. We therefore recommend going outside at least once a day, preferably to a natural environment or green space such as a park, during daylight hours to maximise these benefits. Public Health England's 'Better Health' campaign offers tips to move more and get active outside.

Already, we have taken steps to empower individuals to look after their own mental wellbeing during this time. As we entered the first national lockdown, Public Health England worked with experts and key mental health charities to rapidly publish official guidance to empower the public to manage difficult feelings and low mood.

Public Health England also adapted its Every Mind Matters mental wellbeing resources to include tailored content and advice which is relevant to the COVID-19 context, and launched a new set of mental wellbeing resources tailored to support children and young people and parents of younger children to coincide with their return to school in September.

> Creating your own Mind Plan is an important step you can take to keep well this winter. By answering 5 simple questions about how you are currently feeling and sleeping you will receive NHS-endorsed top tips and practical advice tailored to you.

Tens of thousands of school and children's services staff accessed training modules and webinars to prepare them for the return. The steps we are taking to keep schools, colleges and universities open safely over the winter will in themselves play an important role in preserving good wellbeing.

For people who might be struggling with their wellbeing this winter

Refreshed official guidance will be available with tips for how to keep yourself well.

We will continue to promote the Every Mind Matters platform as a key source of expert advice and resources to support mental wellbeing and will launch a burst of media activity in January to further promote this to the public.

The £8 million Wellbeing for Education Return scheme jointly led by the Department for Education (DfE) and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), has enabled local authorities to fund mental health and wellbeing experts to provide advice and resources for school and further education staff over the winter. The training includes resources on staff wellbeing as well as for children and young people, as we recognise the importance of good mental health for staff in enabling them to support children and young people. The training will give staff increased confidence and local expertise so that they know how and where to access appropriate specialist support where needed.

To support those in higher education, the Office for Students has provided up to £3 million to fund the Student Space platform to bridge gaps in mental health support for students. Student Space provides access to dedicated support services, resources and information to help students manage the challenges of student life. It was recently announced that Student Space will be extended from December 2020 until the end of the academic year. Every Mind Matters also includes specific resources and content for higher education students.

Wellbeing and work

> Without steady schedules, the lines between work and personal time can get blurred and cause stress and fatigue. Visit the Every Mind Matters website for 7 simple tips which may help you tackle working from home.

We recognise the crucial role that employers play in ensuring we are supported to take positive actions to improve our wellbeing at work.

The 'talking toolkit' developed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is a useful resource to help employers both to have effective conversations with employees on how to prevent work-related stress and then use these discussions to inform tangible actions in the workplace (for example, complete a stress risk assessment).

As we move into winter, guidance and best practice will be available to employers via the Mental Health at Work website. The Department for Work and Pensions will continue to work with the 'Thriving at Work Leadership Council' and Mind to promote these resources. Our Disability Confident scheme will also continue working with employers to actively promote best practice and encourage employers to sign up to the Mental Health at Work commitments.

> Excessive pressure and demands at work can cause stress. HSE's Talking Toolkit helps you to have a series of conversations with workers to identify and help prevent work-related stress.

There is a well-evidenced link between financial insecurity and poor mental health, and we have taken bold, early action to support people's livelihoods, and protect mental health and wellbeing in return.

We took early action to provide financial security as the virus disrupted businesses and livelihoods. We put in place a series of income support measures, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, Self-employment Income Support Scheme and Coronavirus Statutory Sick Pay Rebate Scheme, and successfully managed the surge in demand for Universal Credit.

We have introduced a package of temporary welfare measures to help with the financial consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes the £20 weekly increase to the Universal Credit Standard Allowance rates as a temporary measure for the 2020 to 2021 tax year. We are continuing to work with the Treasury on the best ways to support those receiving benefits.

We have temporarily suspended all face-to-face assessments for sickness and disability benefits since March to safeguard claimant and staff health during the pandemic. As always, we will seek to undertake a paper-based review and we are now conducting telephone assessments with claimants where possible, to obtain additional information as required. This approach will continue to be kept under review in line with the latest public health guidance. We remain fully committed to making continuous improvements to the support we provide to people with health conditions and disabilities, and are evaluating the changes to our assessment approach which were temporarily introduced. This will inform the approach taken to conducting assessments in the future.

> You might be worried about money, have lost your job or are concerned you might become unemployed – these issues can have a big impact on your mental health and wellbeing.
>
> Poor mental health can make managing your finances harder, and feeling stressed about money can make your mental health worse, so it's important to take action.
>
> Through the Money Advice Service, the Money and Pensions Service has launched a COVID-19 response Money Navigator Tool, providing tailored signposting consumer support including mental health support.

Support in communities

While the pandemic has had difficult and challenging impacts for individuals and families, communities and local volunteers have played a crucial role in supporting people's wellbeing. We owe a great debt of gratitude to everyone who has taken the time to help others during this time and we are clear on the importance of this support continuing through winter and beyond.

> Engaging in meaningful activities such as volunteering can have a beneficial effect on your own mental wellbeing, through increasing feelings of self-esteem and social connection. Find out more about opportunities to volunteer and information about volunteering during COVID-19.

Voluntary sector and support

We recognise the crucial role of the voluntary sector and support in communities more broadly during the pandemic.

This government invested £750 million in voluntary and charitable organisations to support the needs of vulnerable groups throughout the first wave. Volunteers supporting individuals living with poor mental health or providing support to isolated or lonely people can continue to offer support throughout winter, irrespective of lockdown measures in place. Face-to-face support group sessions can also continue in COVID-19 secure venues, other than a private home, for up to 15 individuals.

Collectively, we have provided over £10 million of additional investment to support both national and local mental health charities to continue their vital work supporting people across the country.

We will work with the Mental Health Consortia to distribute £1 million of this funding, which was announced for mental health support lines this autumn. We will continue to work closely with mental health charities to understand levels of demand and pressure on their services.

> If someone in your community is struggling, there are many organisations that can help. The NHS website can help you find support from mental health-specific or other charities and voluntary organisations.

Individuals who are vulnerable or self-isolating, including those living with mental illness, who need help accessing essentials will continue to be able to get help from the NHS Volunteer Responder programme throughout winter to access food and medicines, transport to medical appointments or have a friendly chat. The NHS Volunteer Responders programme launched at the beginning of the pandemic, and has been a huge success with over a hundred thousand people receiving help and over 1 million tasks completed. The programme is open to self-referral for anyone who needs support, or people can be referred into the programme from a number of routes, including health and social care workers, local authorities, MPs and approved VCS organisations, including mental health charities.

> If you would like to support people in your community through the NHS Volunteer Responders programme, it is now open for recruitment.

Local authorities have played a key role in utilising community resources to support the most vulnerable in communities throughout the pandemic, including people who are clinically extremely vulnerable. The government has provided local authorities with an unprecedented package of support in response to COVID-19, allocating over £7.2 billion of support for spending pressures, including £4.6 billion of un-ringfenced grant funding and the £1.1 billion Infection Control Fund.

Local government continues to take action to support mental health as part of their local responses to the pandemic. This includes providing support to local voluntary and community sectors, as well as local businesses and workplaces.

To build on existing momentum, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government will work with local authorities to promote best practice nationally on mental health and wellbeing support for the clinically extremely vulnerable, building on the momentum and diversity of both national and local initiatives.

The role that unpaid carers play has perhaps been more important than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic. That is why we have focused on ensuring carers do not inadvertently stop receiving Carer's Allowance because of changes to patterns of care. This includes allowing emotional support to count towards the 35 hours of care being provided by the carer as well as relaxing the rules around breaks in care. These changes are aimed at supporting carers whose role, in many cases, has become harder due to the need to self-isolate or shield the person they care for. We have decided to extend these provisions until 12 May 2021. This is good news for those unpaid carers receiving Carer's Allowance who need some extra flexibility in the way they provide care during the current emergency.

We have also taken action to reduce loneliness during this time, recognising that social connections protect our wellbeing and health, by making £5 million available for charities tackling loneliness, providing new guidance and an awareness campaign to get people talking, and setting up a new cross-sector network to develop innovative ideas to connect people.

We know that frontline workers and volunteers in the community also play an essential role in picking up on mental health problems and signposting members of the public to sources of support. To facilitate this, Public Health England has developed online Psychological First Aid training tailored to frontline workers and volunteers so they can develop their skills and confidence in providing psychological support to people affected by COVID-19.

> Psychological first aid training is free for all and can equip you to help people with different needs to cope with the emotional impact of COVID-19.
>
> Over 90,000 people have signed up to the course already, and we will continue to promote within the health system and across government.

We recognise the important role that social care plays in delivering mental health support. We are currently reviewing the advice and recommendations made by the Mental Health Advisory Group to the Social Care Sector COVID-19 Support Taskforce and are considering next steps. We have also published the Adult social care: our COVID-19 winter plan 2020 to 2021, setting out the key elements of national support available, as well as the main actions for the social care sector to take over the coming months.

Supporting children

Action has also been taken to ensure children are supported in the community.

We have learnt lessons from the first wave and adapted the national restrictions to keep schools, further education colleges and universities open as we know how important this is for children and young people's wellbeing. We will continue to support schools to stay open and provide catch-up support to their pupils, using the £650 million catch-up premium. Academic catch-up will be a vital protective factor to many children and young people's wellbeing and the guidance is clear that the premium can be used for interventions focused on aspects of learning such as behaviour or pupils' social and emotional needs.

A £7 million grant for the 'See, Hear, Respond' service, led by Barnardo's, working in partnership with national children's charities and local organisations, has supported vulnerable children at most risk of harm or having negative experiences on their health and wellbeing, including in the early years. Additionally, we have provided an additional £125,000 for Fosterline for additional one-to-one and specialist help to fostering families in crisis and expert advice to help prospective carers make informed decisions.

We provided a £6.5 million COVID-19 Adoption Support Fund scheme to deliver support to up to 61,000 families involving children who had left care through an adoption or special guardianship order. The core Adoption Support Fund, which runs all year round, will continue to be available over the winter months to provide much needed therapeutic therapy such as play therapy, psychotherapy, family therapy and extensive life story work.

We adapted £3.6 million worth of Early Years Disadvantage grants to existing organisations to support children's early literacy and language development. We are providing an additional £1.15 million DCMS grant funding over 6 months to enable our existing VCS partners to broaden the scope of these grants to support the mental health and wellbeing of disadvantaged and vulnerable parents and children. The grants will also help children catch up and transition back into early education.

NHS-funded services, including school and college-based mental health support teams where available, will continue to work closely with schools and further education colleges and other partners adapting to support children and young people during the coronavirus outbreak.

We will continue to support the wellbeing of staff in schools and colleges. That is why DfE has set up an expert advisory group and created a wellbeing charter for the teaching sector which will help create an open culture around wellbeing and mental health, breaking down stigma, and will include a range of commitments to promote and protect staff wellbeing. DfE has also funded a new pilot led by the Education Support to provide online peer-support and telephone supervision from experts to around 250 school leaders to the end of this year. The Education Support also offers a free 24-hour confidential counselling helpline to all teachers, leaders, lecturers and support staff in education.

Children's social care remains an important role in supporting the wellbeing of children, which is why Social Work England, in partnership with the Principal Children and Families Social Worker (PCFSW) network, continually assesses the areas of practice most impacted by the spread of COVID-19 and together are publishing guidance that brings together the sector's expertise as well as good practice measures necessary to continue to support social workers. Most recently, they have published leadership and guidance to support social worker practice during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have extended our looked-after children mental health assessment pilots until March 2021, to maximise learning and inform what changes are needed to the mental health assessments of children in care.

Ensuring mental health services are there for those who need them

Mental health services and their dedicated staff have worked tirelessly to remain 'open for business' for people receiving care for severe and common mental health conditions throughout the pandemic.

Trusts have taken urgent steps to keep their patients safe in wards, introduce innovative, digital ways of delivering care and support remotely in the community, and ensure people experiencing mental health crisis can access urgent support and advice.

It remains a priority to keep these services and support going through the winter months too.

The NHS will continue to deliver the mental health priorities set out in the NHS Long Term Plan.

For those who might be struggling and need additional support from services this winter

Talking therapies delivered by IAPT (Improved Access to Psychological therapies) services will continue to be made available remotely so people can access help safely from home. Data suggests more than four-fifths of psychological 'talking' therapy appointments in IAPT services were delivered via telephone across April to July. This shift to remote delivery means that, for example, university students can access IAPT services anywhere in England based on the GP they are registered with, including their home GP if they haven't yet moved to a GP near their university address.

> If low mood or difficult feelings persist, you may need further support. Talking therapies are available through your GP, or through self-referral online.

The NHS will work to ensure that the option of face-to-face support is provided to people with severe mental illnesses across all ages, where care can be provided in COVID-secure settings. While digital and remote working can make services more accessible, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, decisions on how services are delivered should be responsive to the needs, choices and preferences of individuals, particularly those with more severe mental illnesses.

Community mental health services will ensure proactive outreach and review for the most vulnerable. In addition, in line with the guidance on supporting mental health providers to care for patients deemed clinically extremely vulnerable to coronavirus, providers should identify people deemed to be vulnerable who are in receipt of or have received care from their service, proactively contact these people, and optimise their care through review and amending care plans as necessary.

Children and young people's mental health community services also offered digital and remote access to maintain support and accept new referrals. This will continue over the winter, ensuring children, young people and parents can access appropriate support whether face to face, the telephone or via digital means.

This winter, the NHS's first national mental health campaign 'Help Us Help You' encourages people struggling with common mental illnesses to come forward for help. It promotes talking therapies as an effective, confidential and free treatment for young people, adults and older adults suffering from anxiety and depression.

The NHS will support the creation of a network of 40 long-COVID assessment clinics, which will include psychological assessment alongside physical and cognitive assessment. In parallel, training will be provided for staff in IAPT services to provide them with an understanding of the implications of long-COVID and where adaptations may be required.

Supporting mental health services

We are setting out clear commitments to support mental health services to manage pressures over winter.

We will help mental health services to reduce pressures on inpatient beds and to keep patients safe over winter, backed by £50 million of funding to boost capacity and support good-quality discharge from inpatient settings.

We will continue to make sure that mental health services including hospitals providing inpatient treatment get equal access to PPE.

All health and social care staff can access priority testing through the online booking portal when they show symptoms, including those providing mental health services in hospitals. Furthermore, NHS staff experiencing symptoms can also arrange testing directly through their Trust. Independent providers of health and care and who deliver NHS services can also access priority testing if their staff show symptoms.

Providers should test all patients for COVID-19 on admission to ensure appropriate bed allocation and isolate people wherever possible prior to any test results being received. Asymptomatic testing for all patient-facing NHS staff is now being rolled out across the country. This includes primary care and community-based staff providing NHS funded patient-facing services.

For people experiencing a mental health crisis

For those people experiencing a mental health crisis during the pandemic we want to ensure they get quick, effective help in the most appropriate setting. We have introduced a number of measures which will help to support and protect these individuals in particular, including the following.

All mental health trusts in England have established all-age 24/7 urgent mental health helplines where people experiencing a mental health crisis, or people who care for them, can access urgent support and advice. These were originally meant to be delivered by 2022 for adults and by 2023 to 2024 for children and young people but were brought forward to meet individuals' needs in response to the pandemic.

All parts of the country have continued to invest in significant additional capacity in 24/7 adult crisis and home treatment services, as well as voluntary sector alternative and complementary services, as part of the NHS Long Term Plan expansion.

To improve the efficiency and quality of care for people experiencing a mental health crisis in A&E we are continuing to expand mental health liaison services in all A&E departments.

> A new NHS.UK urgent NHS mental health helpline service finder has been developed to enable individuals to quickly locate their nearest

source of crisis support.

This government would encourage anyone who needs support to reach out for it – so the NHS can help you, just as we are together doing so much to protect the NHS.

Protecting physical health

We are acutely aware of the importance of protecting the physical health of those who are most vulnerable, including those living with severe mental illnesses.

NHS England has issued communications to GP surgeries to ensure that the physical health of those living with severe mental illnesses (SMI) is protected this winter. This includes asking practices to identify people with SMI who are clinically vulnerable and offering those people comprehensive physical health checks and follow-up interventions, free flu vaccines (depending on their eligibility), and a care plan review as appropriate.

Services are also encouraged to conduct rapid outreach and engagement activity with SMI patients and carers, in partnership with VCS organisations where appropriate, to increase uptake of flu vaccines and physical health checks this winter. As part of the government's overall investment to support the NHS over winter, we will support systems to deliver local system-level tailored engagement with patients with SMI, and to develop national thought leadership on outreach.

Public Health England will issue tailored communications to those with severe mental illnesses around protecting their physical health this winter, and to encourage them to take up their free flu vaccination if eligible.

The NHS has committed to ensure that 60% of people with severe mental illness (SMI) receive a comprehensive physical health-check and follow up, as part of the NHS Long Term Plan. People with SMI face reduced life expectancy of 15 to 20 years when compared with the general population, and evidence suggests they have been disproportionately impacted in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, including higher mortality rates.

Beyond this winter, the NHS will receive around an additional £500 million next year to address waiting times for mental health services, give more people the mental health support they need, and invest in the NHS workforce.

Supporting frontline health and social care workers

We recognise the essential contribution of key and frontline workers to our efforts to contain and treat COVID-19, and to keep the country running during an unprecedented period of national lockdown.

The government wants everybody working in health and social care to feel like they have somewhere to turn, or someone to talk to, when they are finding things difficult.

Support for NHS staff

NHS England and Improvement has put in place a comprehensive package of emotional, psychological, and practical support for NHS staff.

Throughout the pandemic, NHS workers have been able to access a dedicated and confidential staff support line operated by the Samaritans. The support line is open 7am to 11pm and is there for people if they have had a tough day, are feeling worried or overwhelmed, or maybe have a lot on their mind that they need to talk through. Trained advisers will help with signposting to further services or simply be available to listen in confidence. A text helpline is available in parallel 24/7.

A separate bereavement helpline has also been established by Hospice UK, manned by a team of fully qualified and trained bereavement specialists.

For NHS workers, virtual staff common rooms, in partnership with NHS Practitioner Health have also been established. This has given staff the opportunity to reflect, share experiences and find ways to cope with how COVID-19 is affecting their life at home and at work.

Line managers have been given the resources they need to effectively support their teams through COVID-19. For example, REACT mental health conversation training has helped to equip NHS managers, supervisors and those with caring responsibilities for NHS people to confidently hold local supportive and compassionate mental health and wellbeing conversations.

REACT mental health conversation training launched in April and remains available to all NHS staff.

We would urge anyone struggling to come forward and speak to a colleague, their occupational health team or to call the helpline so that they can get the help they need.

Building on the commitments set out in We are the NHS: People Plan 2020 to 2021 the NHS is taking additional steps to support staff, specifically:

- investing an extra £15 million to strengthen mental health support for NHS staff during the second wave. This funding will be used to set up system-wide mental health and wellbeing hubs across the country that will provide outreach and assessment services to help staff receive rapid access to evidence-based mental health services and psychosocial support. It will also create a national support service for staff with complex needs, and support the development of wellbeing and psychological training for critical care staff, which will be rolled out this winter
- in addition to this, the NHS is also investing a further £15 million to introduce enhanced occupational health and wellbeing offers across 14 systems in 7 regions. The enhanced offer will build upon the holistic approach to health and wellbeing and will ensure that staff receive a range of support during the second wave. The offers will align with their local mental health and wellbeing hubs and will drive forward local campaigns, provide support to line managers, promote the range of national and local health and wellbeing offers and build upon digitally enabled health provision. Learning will be captured from each of the 14 systems with a view to share and spread and influence the provision of occupational health and wellbeing services going forward
- the People Plan also requires every organisation to have a Wellbeing Guardian who will provide assurance at board level that NHS organisations are promoting staff health and wellbeing through organisational policies and behaviours

Support for social care staff

On 18 September we published a winter plan for adult social care setting out the wellbeing support available to ensure we support the workforce through the winter.

This winter plan summarises the range of support we already were providing, as well as making a new commitment to work with local authorities to assess access to occupational health provision and other wellbeing support available to social care staff, highlight good practice and consider where we can make improvements.

We have worked with the NHS, Skills for Care, and other organisations to develop a package of practical support. This includes bespoke support for Registered Managers, who we recognise are facing particular challenges, such as series of webinars and a dedicated advice line.

'Our Frontline', a collaboration between Samaritans, Shout, Hospice UK and Mind, provides information, emotional support and access to a crisis text service for those working on the frontline, including in social care.

Care staff can send a message with 'FRONTLINE' to 85258 to start a conversation. This service is free on all major mobile networks and is a direct support for those who may be struggling to cope and need help.

Hospice UK has also extended its bereavement and trauma line to provide support to social care staff. This service offers a safe space for care workers to talk to a professional if they have experienced bereavement, trauma or anxiety as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In May we published wellbeing guidance for all those working in adult social care, providing key advice and resources on maintaining mental wellbeing and how employers can take care of the wellbeing of their staff during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chief Social Workers have also issued guidance, in partnership with the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, for the support and wellbeing of adult social workers and social care professionals.

We have introduced a new CARE-branded website and app, CARE Workforce, developed in partnership with the NHS, for the social care workforce, aimed at providing timely information and signposting to support, all in one place.

Conclusion

This plan sets out the steps that government is taking in the immediate term to support people's mental health and wellbeing this winter. We have outlined the key resources being provided to look after mental wellbeing, our plans to strengthen the support available for those struggling in communities, commitments to ensure services are there to support those who need it, and the packages available to help keep our frontline workers well.

We are working with the NHS, Public Health England, Health Education England and others to gather evidence and assess the potential longer-term mental health impacts of COVID-19. Monitoring and tracking the impact of COVID-19 on people's mental health is a key part of the overall public health response to the pandemic. Public Health England will continue to publish its surveillance tracker to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 on the population's mental health.

We will closely assess the impact of the actions set out in this plan and will not hesitate to go further if needed.

Data and evidence we will monitor include:

- trends in self-reported mental health and wellbeing outcomes, such as life satisfaction, loneliness, major stress, depression and anxiety, through the Public Health England Surveillance Report
- demand for mental health services, including referrals to secondary mental health services and psychological therapies programmes
- prevalence of mental ill health, particularly of key at-risk groups including children and young people
- trends in suicide data. Public Health England is currently piloting a national surveillance system to monitor suspected suicide, by collecting in near real time data from local systems. Collecting real-time data on suicide and self-harm can transform our approach to prevention by giving areas more accurate, timely and comprehensive data of incidents and trends, to identify patters of risk and inform national and local responses.

To understand the impact our actions are having on services, we will continue to monitor key metrics to measure access and quality standards for NHS services, including but not limited to:

- the proportion of children and young people who are accessing treatment by NHS-funded community services
- the proportion of adults with depression or anxiety who are accessing NHS-funded psychological therapies programmes
- the number of patients in adult acute mental health care who have started an inappropriate out-of-area placement (due to unavailability of a bed)

While the pandemic poses an unprecedented challenge, long-term negative effects on the nation's mental health are not inevitable.

We know that each person's mental health, wellbeing and resilience are shaped by a broad range of factors and a holistic approach is needed. The pandemic and its effects across society present us with a unique opportunity and impetus to take bold, cross-government action to address the root causes of poor mental health and support people to stay well. Looking beyond this winter, a cross-government group of ministers has been established to consider and respond to the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on mental health and wellbeing more broadly and will set out its plans in the new year. We will also publish a progress report on our National Suicide Prevention Strategy and an updated Cross-Government Suicide Prevention Workplan in due course.

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