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Professor Eamon McCrory

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Analysis

10-Year Health Plan: Hits and misses for children's mental wellbeing

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Professor Eamon McCrory is chief executive of Anna Freud

Alongside many in the sector, <u>Anna Freud</u> actively fed into the government's consultation on the plan <u>last year</u>.

While we've waited, the situation has worsened, with recent NHS data indicating that one in four people aged 16-24 have a mental health condition.

Here are three ways we believe the plan delivers for children and young people's mental health, and three things that have been missed.



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Emphasis on early intervention and prevention

As outlined in our <u>2024 manifesto</u>, we believe that a radical approach and investment in prevention and early intervention is the only way to ease pressure on overwhelmed specialist services.

It's encouraging that there is an emphasis on earlier support and prevention across the board in the plan. For example, the roll out of mental health support teams (MHSTs) in schools will benefit young people specifically.

We also hope establishing dedicated mental health emergency departments, and recruiting thousands more mental health professionals will help young people get support at the right time.

An early years strategy

We called for a greater focus on early years, including a strategy to improve services, so it is good news to see a number of relevant policies introduced in the plan, with many shared in more detail through the Best Start for Life strategy.

For example, the expansion of Family Hubs to every local authority in England is welcome news. From our time leading the National Centre for Family Hubs, we've seen firsthand the difference family



hubs make within communities. They're a vital front door for families, providing access to a range of services to support children in their earliest years and beyond.

Other announcements – such as doubling the number of Stronger Practice Hubs and strengthening health visiting services - will also really benefit the wellbeing of families with young children if implemented.

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Better understanding of adolescents

We asked for better technological infrastructure to improve how we capture and interpret data about adolescents, so plans to build an increasingly digital NHS are a step in the right direction.

If promises to strengthen the NHS App are met, this technology may eventually gather vital information from across England. This could help us tailor care to better meet young people's mental health needs and tackle health inequalities.

However, more can be done. As a founding member of #BeeWell, through the <u>Our Wellbeing</u>, <u>Our Voice campaign</u> we're calling for a national wellbeing measurement to be included in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. This would provide significant



opportunities - both locally and nationally – to gather evidence and data to help improve policy and programme delivery.

YFunding and a strategic plan for prevention

While the plan acknowledges the need to prevent mental health difficulties in children and young people, there is lack of detail on how this will be achieved – both in terms of funding and what effective prevention approaches look like.

Currently, around £1 is spent on prevention for every £20 on treatment and there isn't anything specific in the plan on redressing this balance.

To turn the tide, we need rigorous evaluation and significant investment in preventative approaches, across family, school and community settings. These must take into account structural factors such as poverty, which we know increase vulnerability. These approaches also need to incorporate young people's voice, practice experience and scientific research.

Perinatal mental health

NHS England data shows one in four women and birthing people are affected by perinatal mental health (PMH) difficulties,



such as depression, anxiety and postpartum psychosis. And despite how pervasive and harmful PMH problems can be – potentially impacting both parent and baby in the long-term - we know many struggle to access timely support. Not seeing anything in the plan specifically about PMH issues is disappointing.

To build the wellbeing of the whole family, the national investigation into maternity and neonatal must look at mental health outcomes as well as physical.

More and earlier trauma-informed support

We called for more early interventions to support children and young people following potentially traumatic events; this group has not been mentioned.

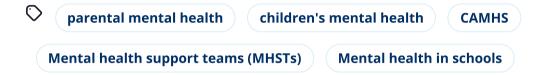
More than one in three children and young people are exposed to at least one potentially traumatic event by age 18 and are at significantly increased risk of mental ill health.

We need more spending on evidence-based trauma-informed training and accessible, digital prevention and early intervention services, which can reduce the likelihood of mental health difficulties emerging after traumatic experiences.



Future outlook

The new 10-Year Health Plan includes promising steps, especially around early intervention and support for young families. However, we need to see more emphasis – backed by significant investment - in preventing mental health problems in children and young people across family, school and community settings as well as for those impacted by traumatic events.



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