

The Rt Hon Helen Whately MP
Minister of State
Department for Health and Social Care
Sent by email

Tuesday, 10 October 2023

Dear Minister of State,

Re: Mental wellbeing of our social care workforce

We write to you today on behalf of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and the British Psychological Society (BPS) on World Mental Health Day to highlight concerning findings showing that councils have lost over 500,000 working days to mental ill-health and stress among social care staff last year.

The study, conducted by the BPS and BASW, underscores a dire situation: 30% of sickness absences among local authority adults' and children's services staff in 2021-22 were due to poor mental health and stress. These concerning statistics demand immediate and robust action to safeguard both the wellbeing of our social care workforce and the vulnerable individuals relying on these services.

These absences pose not only a significant challenge to the workforce but also a grave risk to those accessing social care services. When essential social care staff members are absent due to mental health issues or stress, vulnerable individuals are left without vital support. The very people who need our assistance the most are left without the crucial care and attention they require, which can have profound implications for their health, safety, and overall wellbeing.

In light of this pressing issue and the risks posed to vulnerable individuals, we urge the government to consider the following recommendations:

- 1. Monthly reporting of staff absences:** Implement a robust system for monthly reporting of staff absences to identify common patterns and gain a comprehensive understanding of the reasons behind these absences.
- 2. Long-term, ring-fenced funding of services:** Allocate sustained, ring-fenced funding for dedicated mental health and wellbeing support for health and care staff. The ongoing closures of the NHS Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing hubs, as mentioned in the report, has left a significant void in mental health support for social care staff, leaving both them and the individuals they serve vulnerable.

BASW is also calling for:

Improvement of pay and working conditions: Acknowledge the demanding nature of social care work and take decisive measures to improve pay and working conditions for social care workers. Valuing and supporting these professionals are essential not only for retaining existing staff but also for attracting new talent, thereby ensuring the provision of effective, safe services to our communities.

On this World Mental Health Day, it is imperative that we demonstrate our commitment to the mental wellbeing of our social care workforce. By taking swift and decisive action, we can create an environment where both the workforce and the vulnerable individuals they support can thrive.

We sincerely hope for your immediate attention to this matter and your commitment to ensuring the welfare of our social care professionals and the people who rely on their crucial services.

We would also be willing to meet and discuss these findings at a time of your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Vava Tampa
Chair, BASW England

Dr Roman Raczka
President Elect and Chair of the
Division of Clinical Psychology, BPS