

Tackling mental health issues

Local government's new public health role



Public health will become the responsibility of local government when it transfers from the NHS to local authorities in April 2013. This briefing for councillors and officers explains the challenges facing councils and the opportunities they have to improve mental health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities in local communities.

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Introduction – mental health and wellbeing explained

Mental illness is extremely common. One in four will experience a problem at some point in their lives.

This can range from mild bouts of depression to severe conditions, such as schizophrenia.

For some people they can be short-lived episodes, but others can struggle for much of their lives with illness.

All too often problems start at a young age. Half of those with lifetime mental illness first experience symptoms by the age of 14 and three-quarters by their mid 20s.

Improved mental health and wellbeing is associated with a range of better outcomes. These include improved physical health and life expectancy, better educational achievement, employment rates and reduced risky behaviours, such as smoking and alcohol misuse.

Mental health problems represent up to 23 per cent of the total burden of ill health – the largest single cause of disability.

Meanwhile, the cost to the economy is estimated to be about £105bn, of which about £30bn is work related, according to the Centre for Mental Health.

But in recent years the debate about mental health has moved beyond the absence or not of illness and towards the issue of good mental wellbeing. There are many different definitions of the term, although it is generally accepted to cover feeling good and functioning well.

This incorporates everything from emotional happiness and engagement to having a sense of purpose, achievement and control over your actions, according to the NHS Choice website.

Evidence suggests there are five steps to mental wellbeing: connecting with people, being active, keeping learning, giving and taking notice of the present moment from the environment around you to feelings and thoughts.

The policy context

It has long been acknowledged that mental health does not get the attention and funding it deserves.

Over the years countless government strategies have sought to address this.

The latest strategy, 'No health Without Mental Health', was published in July 2011. It talked about putting mental health services on 'parity' with physical health services.

The cross-government strategy stressed the importance of the 'life course' approach, recognising that the foundations for lifelong wellbeing are laid down before birth.

To achieve this, though, the strategy said it would need the combined efforts of government, employers, schools, local authorities and the voluntary and community sector.

To focus minds, it set six shared objectives:

- More people will have good mental health.
- More people with mental health problems will recover.
- More people with mental health problems will have good physical health.
- More people will have a positive experience of care and support.
- Fewer people will suffer avoidable harm.
- Fewer people will experience stigma and discrimination.

The strategy was followed a year later by the mental health implementation framework, which set out in greater details how the objectives of the strategy could be achieved.

The framework was co-produced with five leading mental health groups, the Centre for Mental Health, Mind, NHS Confederation Mental Health Network, Rethink Mental Illness and Turning Point.

It highlighted useful guidance and sources of information to help local organisations use their 'existing powers and resources to improve mental health and wellbeing.'

Following the publication of the Children and Young People's Health Outcomes forum's report, the government is now looking at how it can further embed mental health into both the NHS and public health outcomes frameworks, particularly in regards to maternal and children and young people's health.

The government has also provided support and funding for the 'Time to Change' programme, which has been set up to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination.

It runs media and marketing campaigns as well as supporting grassroots projects and events and providing strategic leadership to empower people with mental health problems.

Did you know?

- At least one in four people will experience a mental health problem at some point in their life and one in six adults has a mental health problem at any one time.
- One in 10 new mothers experience postnatal depression.
- One in 10 children aged between five and 16 years of age has a mental health problem, and many continue to have mental health problems into adulthood.
- Half of those with lifetime mental health problems first experience symptoms by the age of 14 and three-quarters before their mid-20s.
- Self-harming in young people is not uncommon – an estimated one in ten 15 to 16-year-olds has self-harmed.
- About one in 100 people has a severe mental health problem.
- The cost to the economy of mental health problems is over £100bn.
- Nearly nine out of 10 people who experience them say they face stigma and discrimination as a result.

Local government's new role

Under the terms of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, upper tier and unitary authorities will become responsible for improving the health of their population. The responsibility for public health will transfer from the NHS to local authorities in April 2013.

This will be backed by a ring-fenced public health grant and a specialist public health team, led by the director of public health.

Each top tier and unitary authority will have a health and wellbeing board (HWB) which will have strategic influence over commissioning decisions across health, social care and public health.

Statutory board members include a locally elected councillor, a Healthwatch representative, a representative of a clinical commissioning group, a director of adult social care, a director of children's services and a director of public health.

HWB members from across local government and the health and care system will work together to identify local needs, improve the health and wellbeing of their local population and reduce health inequalities.

The HWB is a key forum for encouraging commissioners from the NHS, councils and wider partners to work in a more joined up way. Central to achieving this is the HWB's responsibility for producing a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and a Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS).

Local authorities will also have a statutory function to provide public health advice to clinical commissioning groups, while HWBs will have to monitor performance.

In terms of promoting good mental health, the government's strategy said councils have a 'central role' in providing local leadership through the HWBs.

This includes ensuring there is good partnership work between all partners from the NHS and police to schools, local employers and the voluntary sector.

And while the provision of services, such as talking therapies and in-patient hospital care is the responsibility of the NHS, councils can still play an active role in tackling problems through their responsibility for public health services.

Evidence shows that mental health problems often co-exist with alcohol and / or drug abuse and so the work local government does in these sectors needs to take into account the likely presence of mental illness.

They also have a key role through addressing the wider social determinants of health, such as the social, economic and environmental conditions that influence the health of individuals and populations through other council-led services like housing and environment.

Ideas for success

- ✓ Address problems through strategic multi-agency partnership working. This may involve working over larger geographical areas to achieve greater levels of efficiency and effectiveness.
- ✓ Consider appointing an elected member as mental health champion. The role might include raising awareness about the issue and tackling stigma.
- ✓ HWBs can provide strategic influence. This can be achieved through relationship building. Consider getting partners together in workshop settings or by holding local events to tackle mental health issues in local communities.
- ✓ Involve the local community, including service users, their families and carers, in the co-production of services. Ensure children and young people's voices are also heard and fed into this process.
- ✓ Sign up to the 'Time to Change' campaign to raise the profile of mental health and address stigma and discrimination.
- ✓ HWBs should encourage joint commissioning between mental health and other related services, such as drug and alcohol teams.
- ✓ Make the links across other council led services such as planning and housing which has an impact on mental health
- ✓ Work alongside schools and wider children's services to focus on early intervention and integrated support. The 'Targeted Mental Health in Schools' programme provides school-based early intervention and support for vulnerable children up to the age of 15 and their families.
- ✓ Support positive parenting, which can play a vital role in supporting attachment and wellbeing of children. Working with family nurse partnerships and health visitors can help.
- ✓ Remember school nurses are responsible for delivering cost effective public health programmes or interventions to improve health outcomes for school aged children and young people aged five to 19 years of age. This includes the management of mental health disorders.
- ✓ Ensure there are joined up services for children and young people with health visitors and school nurses working together with other partners.
- ✓ Ensure mental health services also address physical health needs. This requires integration between the two.
- ✓ Encourage all elected members to discuss mental health and wellbeing with their constituents.

Key questions to ask

- Have you got a locally tailored strategy for improving mental wellbeing? Ensure it is a priority at strategic and delivery levels.
- Are you assessing how strategies, commissioning decisions and directly provided services support and improve mental health and wellbeing? Almost all areas of local government have the potential to contribute to good – or bad - mental health and wellbeing. Decisions about employment, housing, planning, transport, leisure and green spaces can all have an impact.
- Have you defined what success looks like for your local area? The JSNA and JHWS are seen as critical in establishing a clear vision for local communities so ensure that mental health issues are sufficiently addressed in them.
- Is mental health and wellbeing receiving the same billing and priority as physical health in the work you do?
- Are the gaps joined up? For example, if mental health and accommodations services are not properly integrated people can be discharged from inpatient facilities and have nowhere to go.
- Are you working alongside clinical commissioning groups to remodel existing support to focus on early intervention? Remember the ‘life course’ approach – the foundations of good mental health and wellbeing are laid down before birth.
- Think about hard-to-reach groups. For example, the homeless are 50 times more likely to have mental health problems, while new mothers experiencing post-natal depression, the elderly in care homes and children in care can easily slip under the radar.
- Do you promote mental wellbeing as well as tackle poor mental health? The role councils have in shaping local communities from providing good quality green spaces to supporting events that bring people together can all have an impact.

Case studies

Integrating housing (East London)

The NHS and local authority in the London borough of Tower Hamlets have been working with local housing provider, Look Ahead Housing and Care, to ensure the housing needs of people with mental health problems is not overlooked.

They run a rehabilitation service from a fully self-contained complex of flats which is staffed 24 hours a day.

It works with people with serious personality disorders, many of whom have been released from inpatient stays in hospital.

Patients are encouraged to develop coping strategies as well as independence during their stay. Savings can be as high as £240,000 per person as the aim is to move people on to independent living within 12 months whereas in the past they could spend years in residential care.

Further information:
<http://www.lookahead.org.uk/>

Tackling discrimination (East Dorset)

‘Tea and Talk’ is one of the many projects up-and-down the country that has been funded by the ‘Time to Change’ programme.

The scheme – a partnership by the East Dorset Mental Health Forum and local NHS trust – delivers informal workshops to tackle misconceptions and discrimination about mental health.

Sessions have been held with NHS and council staff as well as private sector employees and young people in further education.

They involve a quiz which deals with the myths of mental health and a film about the impact of discrimination.

But the key to their success has been the relaxed environment they are delivered in – participants are encouraged to discuss the subject over tea and cake by the mental health professionals who run the sessions.

Since 2009, more than 800 people have taken part and it has even led to some workplaces setting up support networks for staff. Funding has been secured to deliver the support to another 2,000 people over the next year.

Further information:
Contact Tea and Talk founder Helen Hutchings at helenhutchings29@gmail.com

Promoting wellbeing (West London)

Earls Court Health and Wellbeing Centre offers the traditional services you would expect from a modern, integrated clinic. There is a GP practice, dentists and sexual health services.

But it does not stop there. The centre in west London – a collaboration between the local NHS, council and voluntary sector – also has a team of wellbeing coaches and peer mentoring support to allow it to offer a truly holistic service.

The wellbeing coaches offer a lifestyle assessment and then six coaching sessions where everything from nutrition and life skills to hobbies and education is addressed.

Peer mentoring can also provide one-to-one support over a longer period of time to help individuals remain confident and to get them involved in the local communities.

Further information:
<http://www.echwc.nhs.uk/>

Reaching out to care homes (Doncaster)

In Doncaster, the NHS and local authority have worked together to develop a care home liaison service to provide rapid access to specialist mental health services for people in residential care.

The service was set up six years ago with a view to intervening at an early stage so people can stay in their care homes rather than being admitted to hospital. It is run by a psychiatrist and team of mental health nurses.

As well as providing support to residents – about 500 people are helped each year – the team also delivers training and advice to care home staff.

It has helped to reduce the number of admissions to specialist mental health services four-fold. There is also evidence of a fall in use of psychotic medicines.

Further information:
<http://www.rdash.nhs.uk/>

Early intervention (Birmingham)

As part of its Brighter Futures strategy, Birmingham City Council has focussed on improving behaviour and emotional wellbeing of children.

One of its key projects is Incredible Years, which works with the families of three to four-year olds showing the symptoms of conduct disorder, such as temper tantrums, spitefulness and fighting.

It involves a 12-week group parenting course to teach parents how to communicate with their children, encourage them to behave better through praise and incentives and control problem behaviour by setting clear expectations and consistent, gentle consequences.

Referrals are made via children's centres, parents themselves or other agencies such as social services. Formal evaluation of the scheme published last year concluded it had had 'significant benefits'.

Further information:

<http://www.brighterfutures.bham.org.uk/>

Getting members to champion mental health (Dorset County Council)

With mental health becoming more of a priority, a number of councils have explored appointing a member champion. One of the most well established posts is in Dorset. Councillor Michael Bevan has been member champion for the county council since 2010.

His role is to raise awareness of mental health issues in all areas of the council's work and to improve links between the council and local health services. He works closely with local employers and with the Time to Change programme to tackle stigma and improve public understanding about mental health.

One of his major successes has been to bring together 140 local organisations from across the public, private and voluntary sectors to agree shared actions to improve mental health and the lives of people affected by mental illness. Their pledge included supporting, respecting and helping those with mental health problems who work for them and use their services.

Councillor Bevan says: "I think it has led to a greater understanding of the issue across the county."

Further information:

Contact Councillor Bevan at m.bevan@dorsetcc.gov.uk

Want to know more?

No Health Without Mental Health (the government's mental health strategy, published July 2011)

<http://tinyurl.com/6czojj6>

No Health Without Mental Health implementation framework (published July 2012)

<http://tinyurl.com/9zheym4>

NHS advice on five steps to mental wellbeing

<http://tinyurl.com/bz2dfu2>

The Economic and Social Costs of Mental Health Problems (Centre for Mental Health publication, released in 2010)

<http://tinyurl.com/bzgep9a>

Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our strategy for public health in England (Department of Health 2010 publication)

<http://tinyurl.com/healthyliveshealthyPeople>

Capital and Wellbeing: Making the most of ourselves in the 21st century (Government office for science report published in 2008)

<http://tinyurl.com/ao9zavy>

The Department of Health's response to the Children and Young People's Health Outcomes Forum's report

<http://tinyurl.com/ayfa8n4>

Useful resources for Health and Wellbeing Boards

<http://tinyurl.com/blnwk2w>

Local Government Association (dedicated health web pages)

<http://www.local.gov.uk/health>

Tackling drug and alcohol: local government's new public health role (LGA resource sheet)

<http://tinyurl.com/cm4tcqu>



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