

Public Audit Committee Debate: Audit Scotland Report, Adult Mental Health - 22 May 2024

SAMH Briefing

We are in a mental health crisis

We welcome the opportunity to brief you ahead of the Public Audit Committee debate on adult mental health. We warmly welcome the committee's report and recommendations. We contributed both [written](#) and [oral](#) evidence to the inquiry.

As made clear by Audit Scotland's 2023 report into adult mental health,¹ and the subsequent work of the Committee, **fundamental reform of how we design, resource and deliver mental health care in Scotland is urgently needed.**

As we experience a cost of living crisis and recover from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, Scotland's mental health continues to deteriorate. Waiting times for NHS psychological therapies are still too long, with the national 18 week target never having been met for Scotland as a whole.² **The need for radical change and sustained investment in mental health cannot be overstated.**

The 2022 Scottish Health Survey shows that across all of the areas measured that relate to mental health – mental wellbeing, mental illness, loneliness, self-harm, anxiety, depression, attempted suicide – the results are worse than 2021 and in most cases the worst ever recorded in the Scottish Health Survey.³

Our briefing sets out key areas on which we would like to see the Scottish Government and Parliament take urgent action. We believe these changes, many of which reflected in the Committee's inquiry report and recommendations, are essential to creating a system and approach to better mental health in Scotland.

Whole system reform

The findings and recommendations from the Committee inquiry clearly demonstrate the need for a wholesale system reform to how mental health support is designed, delivered, resourced and – crucially – accessed.

While important and welcome progress has been made through programmes such as Distress Brief Interventions (DBI), we believe much more needs to be done to ensure people seeking support for their mental health can ask once and get help fast.

We welcome the Committee's recognition and recommendations on key aspects of mental health support that we believe need prioritisation, such as peer support – including a national peer support workforce target (recommendation

¹ Audit Scotland [Adult mental health \(audit.scot\)](#) 2023

² PHS [Psychological therapies waiting times - Quarter ending December 2023 - Psychological therapies waiting times - Publications - Public Health Scotland](#)

³ Scottish Government [The Scottish Health Survey 2022 – volume 1: main report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#) 2023

10) – and the need to ensure choice in the way people access services (recommendation 8).

Recent reform to mental health services has focused on the development of various national service specifications and standards (for example the psychological therapy national specification). While these contain welcome elements they do not represent the step change needed to ensure people can easily access timely support at the first time of asking. Changes we would like to see include:

- **A rapid expansion of psychological wellbeing support** without the need for either referral or lengthy waits to receive support.
- **Introduction of multi-agency triage for adults and young people** which can quickly assess and connect someone to the right support, without the threat of rejection. This would broaden traditional referral and assessment routes beyond statutory assessment practices (from primary care to secondary mental health services) and ensure the full scope of community wellbeing assets are embedded and utilised when someone first tries to get support for their mental health
- **Social prescribing and prevention**, including to physical activity and sports programmes. It is disappointing that the new national mental health and wellbeing strategy and delivery plan does not prominently feature social prescribing
- **Employment and employability**. Appropriate high quality employment is beneficial to mental health. The Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model is the most effective employability programme at supporting people with severe and enduring mental health problems into sustained employment. We strongly believe that the Scottish Government should reconsider its decision not to run a national IPS Service funded through health, as exists in England and is supported by its own review of IPS delivery through Fair Start Scotland.⁴

Issues to highlight:

- **How does the Scottish Government plan to improve access to peer support and social prescribing?**
- **The need for fundamental reform of mental health service to ensure quick access to appropriate community support, for example through introducing multi-agency triage**
- **What plans the Scottish Government has to ensure everyone who could benefit from Individual Placement & Support (IPS) has access to it in their local area?**

Outcomes and data

As part of radical reform of mental health care, we urgently require a shift to the measurement of personal and system wide care and support outcome measurement. The current lack of data on the impact of mental health care and

⁴ [Fair Start Scotland - individual placement and support review: findings - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2018/04/Fair-Start-Scotland-individual-placement-and-support-review-findings)

support is unacceptable. For example, only waiting times and referral data routinely published for NHS psychological therapies – not the impact of the treatment itself. We do not know if people are being helped to recover. Similarly, there is a lack of robust outcome data for projects supported by the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for adults (beyond periodic evaluations).⁵

Routine gathering of patient/service user experience and outcomes data will allow the effectiveness of mental health interventions to be evaluated. Models used in England and elsewhere, such as NHS Talking Therapies, provides one example of how this can be implemented.⁶ Collection of individual outcomes is key to understanding service quality and effectiveness, and promoting good practice.

We strongly welcome recommendations (7-23 in the Committee's report and urge the Scottish Government to fully implement them as a priority.

Issues to highlight:

- **The need for routine and publicly available outcome data – at a minimum for NHS Psychological Therapies**
- **The need for an update from the Scottish Government on progress against Public Health Scotland's commitment to publish Mental Health Quality Indicators in a dashboard format (as called for in recommendation 20 of the Committee report).**

Primary Care

While we believe an expansion of self-referral and easily accessible psychological wellbeing supports in the community is essential, the role of primary care in supporting mental health and as acting as a gateway to secondary mental health care will remain key.

Innovations over recent years such as the roll out of Community Link Workers (CLWs) have been very welcome. SAMH provides link workers in all Aberdeen City GP practices. We believe this essential resource must be retained and expanded in the future, with a particular focus on ensuring provision in communities experiencing higher levels of poverty and health inequalities. The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport, writing to the committee in response to its inquiry report stated that the Scottish Government had recently begun a review of national CLW policy, including funding arrangements.⁷

Issue to highlight:

- **When will findings from the CLW policy review be published, and will the Scottish Government commit to sustainable, long-term funding for the expansion of the CLW programme?**

⁵ [Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for adults: evaluation - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot) 2023

⁶ [NHS England » NHS Talking Therapies, for anxiety and depression](https://www.nhs.uk)

⁷ [Adult mental health Minister to PAC 24 April 2024 \(parliament.scot\)](https://www.parliament.scot)

Beyond the CLW programme, we believe urgent action is required to ensure the Scottish Government fulfils its commitment to ensuring that every GP practice has access to a multi-disciplinary mental health and wellbeing service by 2026, backed by £40m funding a year.⁸ Since this commitment was made in 2022 there has been a lack of clarity over its current status (highlighted by the Committee) – including in the Minister’s written response to the Committee. Audit Scotland noted that as of March 2023, 17 per cent of GP practices across Scotland reported having no access to mental health workers.⁹

Issues to highlight:

- **Is the Scottish Government still committed to the full roll-out of a primary care multi-disciplinary mental health and wellbeing service by 2026?**
- **Is the Scottish Government still committed to providing £40m annual funding to support primary care multi-disciplinary mental health and wellbeing services by 2026, and when will a fully-costed delivery plan be published (as recommended by the Committee)?**

Resourcing

To deliver the reformed mental health system that Scotland urgently requires, it is essential that the Scottish Government prioritises mental health spending. At a minimum the Scottish Government must meet its own targets to increase mental health spend over the course of the parliament by 25%, ensuring that at least 10% of frontline NHS spend goes to mental health.¹⁰

Unfortunately progress against the 10% commitment is not being made. The latest data from Public Health Scotland show that in 2022/23 only 8.53% of NHS expenditure was on mental health, down from 8.66% in 2021/22.¹¹ We are also very concerned that the 2024/25 Scottish Government budget freezes direct mental health spending, representing a real terms cut. While we recognise the current financial situation is challenging it is essential the Government prioritises mental health to meet demand.

Issue to highlight:

- **When will the Scottish Government meet their own target of at least 10% of frontline NHS spend going to mental health?**

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⁸ Scottish Government [Increasing mental health support in GP practices - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/increasing-mental-health-support-in-gp-practices-2022/pages/1-10.aspx) 2022

⁹ [Adult mental health \(audit.scot\)](https://www.audit.scot/publications/adult-mental-health-2022-23/pages/1-10.aspx)

¹⁰ [A Fairer, Greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22 \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/a-fairer-greener-scotland-programme-for-government-2021-22/pages/1-10.aspx)

¹¹ PHS [nhsscotland-mental-health-expenditure-2022-23.xlsx \(live.com\)](https://www.phs.gov.scot/publications/nhsscotland-mental-health-expenditure-2022-23/pages/1-10.aspx)