

Summary

- Barnardo's welcomes the intention of the Health and Care Bill to promote further joint working and integration of health and care services, which is essential to address health inequalities across the country.
- However, as currently drafted, it risks being a Bill written by adults for adults; and does not explicitly address the needs of 13.9 million children and young people in England.¹
- Children growing up in England today face some of the worst health outcomes in Europe, with those in the most deprived areas suffering most.²
- Pre-pandemic, almost a third of children (4.3million) in the UK were growing up in poverty, which leads a reduced life expectancy³ and worse health outcomes⁴, including increasing a child's likelihood of catching common childhood illnesses⁵ and developing a mental health condition.⁶
- The pandemic has placed a greater strain on children's health - 1 in 6 children (aged 5-16) are now likely to have a mental health condition.^{7,8}
- If we are to 'level-up' and fulfil the Bill's ambition to reduce inequalities, we must ensure the needs of children and young people are met. Investing in children is the best place to start as it lays the foundation for a lifetime of good health.
- Barnardo's is calling for the Bill:
 - To recognise the needs of young carers when discharging patients from hospital.
 - To expand the Better Care Fund to cover the integration of children's health and care services as well as adults.
 - To mandate that a Child Impact Assessment is undertaken by the Government within two years of the Bill's implementation to assess its impact on children.
- Barnardo's also supports NCB's *Children and Young People's Health Policy Influencing Group* calls to action which include:
 - Ensuring the Bill improves data and information sharing for children as well as adults.
 - Putting the Integrated Care System (ICS) guidance regarding babies, children and young people on a statutory footing.

¹ 12.6 million children and young people aged 18 or under in England. ONS, June 2021. [Population estimates for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2020.](#)

² Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2018. [Child health in 2030 in England.](#)

³ Office for National Statistics, 2020. [Health state life expectancies by national deprivation deciles, England: 2016 to 2018.](#)

⁴ Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2021. [One year on: State of Child Health.](#)

⁵ The British Medical Journal, 2020. [Adversity in childhood is linked to mental health physical health throughout life.](#)

⁶ Mental Health Foundation, 2021. [Physical and mental health.](#); World Economic Forum, 2018. [Half of all mental illness begins by the age of 14.](#)

⁷ NHS Digital, 2020. [Mental health of children and young people in England.](#)

1. Recognising the needs of young carers when discharging patients from hospital.

A young carer is a child under 18 who provides care to a relative. As drafted, the Bill fails to recognise the needs of **young carers when discharging patients from hospital. Currently, too few young carers are identified and assessed for support, and changes in the Bill risk making this worse.**

Clause 78, known as 'discharge to assess', removes the requirement under the Care Act 2014 for hospital patients with care and support needs to have a social care needs assessment prior to being discharged home, if they have been assessed as no longer needing hospital care. Young carers are often identified and assessed following an assessment of the adult they care for. Therefore, Barnardo's is concerned that this change will mean fewer young carers are identified and be referred to receive an assessment, when an adult is discharged from hospital.

Research carried out by the University of Nottingham with the BBC in 2018 estimated that there are 800,000 children providing regular care; 260,000 of whom are estimated to be providing high levels of care.⁹

Children who are young carers are entitled to a young carers assessment. The Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014 state that "all young carers under the age of 18 have a right to a needs assessment as a responsibility of the local authority, which must take 'reasonable steps' to identify young carers in their area who have support needs."

Barnardo's report, [Still Hidden, Still Ignored](#), found that many adults discharged from hospital were going back to households with only children to care for them and with little or no support from professionals. The report found that even if an agency solely works with adults, it is imperative that they are thinking about the children involved and the impact the adult's situation has on them. Over 70% of Barnardo's practitioners identified NHS services as an agency that needs to do more to identify young carers.

Young carer case study – November 2021

Following a short hospital stay after a stroke, a mother and her 13-year-old son were sent home with little information upon discharge beyond being told she would be referred to a stroke clinic. Immediately becoming a young carer led to her son being worried about his mother's safety and reluctant to go to school in case she needed him. There was no sign posting by the hospital for a young carer needs assessment or wider support.¹⁰

Hospital staff are in a vital position as professionals to ask questions and identify young carers. Children are often reluctant to identify as young carers as they don't want to get their parents into trouble. If the responsibility sits with hospital

⁹ University of Nottingham, September 2018. [New research suggests more than one in five children in England carry out some care for sick and disabled family members.](#)

¹⁰ Case study provided by a young carer supported by Barnardo's in November 2021.

professionals to ask patients who will be their primary carer on discharge from hospital it will stop children feeling responsible for involving services in family life.

Barnardo's has long been calling for hospital staff to ensure that when someone is discharged from their care, the question of who will support the adult at home is routinely asked. This should be recorded and shared with other agencies, so that young carers are identified, supported and are not slipping through the net.

Recommendation: Barnardo's believes that removing Clause 78 will negatively impact young carers and be a missed opportunity for them to be identified and supported. Barnardo's recommends that the Health and Care Bill introduces a requirement prior to discharge to ensure that the hospital will inform the local authority where any new or existing young carer lives to ensure they are supported. Barnardo's has partnered with Carers UK to support their efforts in making sure carers are not forgotten in this Bill.

2. Extending the Better Care Fund to focus on children and young people's health and care services

The Better Care Fund (BCF) supports local systems to deliver integrated health and care services that support person-centred care, sustainability and better outcomes for people and carers. There are several funding streams to the BCF that equal £6.9bn for 2021/22.

Whilst the BCF has been used to promote integrated children and young people health and social care services in some local areas, this is only the case where it is a priority of the local Health and Wellbeing Boards. Currently, the BCF is primarily focused on addressing adult health and care and given the importance of effective integrated local systems for children and young people, there is a strong case to make explicit that this is included in the purpose of the Fund.

Across the four metrics that determine how the Fund is used, there is no reference to children and two of the four are specifically focused on adults over the age of 65.¹¹ One element of the BCF, the Improved Better Care Fund (iBCF) grant which is worth over £2bn, only funds services to meet the needs of adults.¹² In a Government review of the BCF, 93% of areas said that the fund had improved joint working in their locality. Yet the review recommended more clarity is required around the Fund's policy aims and objectives.¹³

Recommendation: Barnardo's recommends amending Clause 9 to ensure greater inclusion children and young people in BCF. This could include establishing a specific funding stream within the BCF for integrated children and young people's health and care services.

¹¹ NHS, September 2021. [Better Care Fund planning requirements 2021-22.](#)

¹² DHSC, MHCLG & DLHC, October 2021. [Policy Paper 2021 to 2022 Better Care Fund policy framework.](#)

¹³ DHSC, MHCLG & DLHC, October 2021. [Policy Paper 2021 to 2022 Better Care Fund policy framework.](#)

3. Undertake a Child Impact Assessment after two years of operation of the legislation

"The use of children's rights impact assessments is widely promoted across the Department and wider Government."¹⁴

Nadhim Zahawi, Education Secretary when Children's Minister in the Department for Education.

There are over 12.6 million children (18 and under) living in England compared to just under 10.5 million of 65-year-olds and older.¹⁵ As drafted this Bill risks being written by adults for adults and does not explicitly recognise the health needs of children and young people.

We know that around half of mental health disorders start by age 14¹⁶ and whilst research has shown that around 30-40% of the risk of anxiety and depression is genetic, 60-70% is environmental.¹⁷ In addition, this generation, from infants to older teenagers, will have had their physical health and mental wellbeing impacted by the pandemic, and in just over a decade over half of this group will have left school and entered further and higher education, or the workforce.

Barnardo's view is that this Bill cannot meaningfully address the challenge of improving overall population health without tackling child health inequalities. The success of this Bill should be measured by the practical and tangible impact it has in ensuring children and young peoples' access to timely and appropriate health and care services, and ultimately in improving health outcomes.

Recommendation: Barnardo's is calling for a Child Impact Assessment to be carried out within two years of the Bill's implementation to evaluate its impact on children.

About Barnardo's

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity. In 2020-21 we supported 382,872 children, young people, parents and carers, through around 800 services and partnerships. For more information contact Ceri Finnegan, Policy and Public Affairs Lead, on ceri.finnegan@barnardos.org.uk.

¹⁴ Hansard, 24 June 2019. [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child debate](#).

¹⁵ ONS, June 2021. [Population estimates for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2020](#).

¹⁶ World Economic Forum, Oct 2018. [Half of all mental illness begins by the age of 14](#).

¹⁷ World Economic Forum, Oct 2018. [Half of all mental illness begins by the age of 14](#).