

## The Future of the NHS – King’s Speech debate Monday 13 November 2023

### Summary

The King’s Speech was an opportunity to address the ongoing crisis in children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing. Instead, the Government has scrapped reforms to the Mental Health Act and missed the chance to put prevention and early intervention at the heart of the health service.

Barnardo’s welcomes the Government’s plans to ensure that no child under the age of 14 can legally buy cigarettes, but this cannot be the limit to the Government’s work on prevention.

New investment in mental health mentioned in the King’s Speech must address the crisis in children and young people’s mental health and provide preventative and early interventions. Without it, we risk creating a lost generation of children and young people, with lifelong impacts on health, wellbeing and earning potential.

Barnardo’s is calling for the Government to invest in children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing through:

- Expansion of Mental Health Support Teams to all schools and colleges.
- A national strategy for social prescribing for children and young people to support those with non-clinical mental health issues.
- Expansion of family hubs to provide universal support in every community.
- Addressing child poverty as a driver of poor health and wellbeing including through scrapping the two-child benefit cap.
- Implementing the reforms to the Mental Health Act.

### Children and young people’s mental health is in crisis.

In England, one in six children between the ages of 6-16 has a probable mental health disorder, rising to one in four between 17-19.<sup>1</sup>

While children and young people’s mental health has been worsening for several years, the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and resulting increase in demand is leading to increased pressure on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), primary care and within wider services including schools. These pressures are exacerbated by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.<sup>2</sup>

Increased investment in specialist CAMHS services has not kept pace with the scale of demand. The pathway to support is fragmented, with a limited number of early intervention services based in schools and communities. The number of

<sup>1</sup> NHS Digital (2021): 'Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021'. Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2021-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey>

<sup>2</sup> Barnardo’s, 2023; A Crisis on Our Doorstep  
<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/crisis-on-our-doorstep-child-poverty-report>

referrals to CAMHS is increasing along with waiting times, and fewer children and young people are being accepted for treatment.<sup>3</sup>

### **A lack of early mental health support is increasing pressure on the NHS.**

In 2021/22 there were 734,000 referrals to English CAMHS services. Of these, one in five children and young people entered treatment within four weeks, the average wait was 40 days and almost one in three had their cases closed before being treated.<sup>4</sup>

Long waits and limited support services are leading to increased pressure on primary care services, and inappropriate antidepressant prescriptions before children are seen by specialist services.<sup>5</sup> Growing numbers of children are reaching crisis point and presenting in Accident and Emergency departments or requiring inpatient care, with negative impacts on both children and young people and the health service.<sup>6</sup>

Without action to expand preventative and early intervention services, the crisis in children and young people's mental health will continue to grow, and support will be increasingly difficult to access.

### **Poor mental health is impacting the futures of a generation.**

Mental health and wellbeing issues in children and young people are affecting school attendance and attainment, with lifelong impacts on health, wellbeing, career prospects and earning potential.

Services are often least available for those who need them most. Recent research by the COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities (COSMO) study has found that those in the most socioeconomically deprived communities, and groups including LGBTQ+ children and young people are among those least likely to be able to access mental health services.<sup>7</sup>

The lack of consistent universal early support children, young people, and families, or targeted services for those most at risk, is embedding health inequalities, and impacting on the futures of a generation.

### **Children and young people are the future of the NHS.**

Barnardo's is calling on the Government to prioritise children and young people's mental health and the sustainability of the health service through;

- Expansion of Mental Health Support Teams to all schools and colleges.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Children's Commissioner, 2023; Children's Mental Health Services 2021-22 <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Childrens-Mental-Health-Services-2021-2022-1.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The Children's Commissioner, 2023; Children's Mental Health Services 2021-22 <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Childrens-Mental-Health-Services-2021-2022-1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> NIHR, 2022; Antidepressants for Children and Teenagers [https://evidence.nihr.ac.uk/collection/antidepressants-for-children-and-teenagers-what-works-anxiety-depression/?utm\\_source=partner&utm\\_medium=partner&utm\\_campaign=antidepressants](https://evidence.nihr.ac.uk/collection/antidepressants-for-children-and-teenagers-what-works-anxiety-depression/?utm_source=partner&utm_medium=partner&utm_campaign=antidepressants)

<sup>6</sup> www.rcpsych.ac.uk. 2021. Record number of children and young people referred to mental health services as pandemic takes its toll. [online] Available at: <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/news-and-features/latest-news/detail/2021/09/23/record-number-of-children-and-young-people-referred-to-mental-health-services-as-pandemic-takes-its-toll>

<sup>7</sup> Holt-White et al, 2023; COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities Study- Mental and Physical Health. Available at: [mental-and-physical-health.pdf](https://www.cosmostudy.org.uk/mental-and-physical-health.pdf) (cosmostudy.org.uk)

<sup>8</sup> Barnardo's, 2023; Its Hard to Talk [It's hard to talk: Expanding Mental Health Support Teams in education | Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](https://www.barnardos.org.uk/its-hard-to-talk)

- A national strategy for social prescribing in children and young people to support those with non-clinical mental health issues.<sup>9</sup>
- Expansion of family hubs to provide universal support in every community.
- Addressing child poverty as a driver of poor health and wellbeing including through scrapping the two-child benefit cap.
- Reforming the Mental Health Act to improve access, experience and outcomes of the Act's implementation for all children and young people.

### **Action to take.**

We ask that you please attend the date "Building an NHS Fit for the Future" on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> of November and raise the issue of children and young people's mental health.

### **Suggested Questions**

1. To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care if he will meet with myself and Barnardo's to discuss a national strategy for children and young people's social prescribing?
2. To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care if he will commit to expanding Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) to all schools and colleges?

For more information regarding this topic, or the work of Barnardo's in supporting children and young people's health and wellbeing, please contact [becky.rice@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:becky.rice@barnardos.org.uk)

### **About Barnardo's**

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity. In 2021/22, we reached 357,000 children, young people, parents, and carers through our 794 services and partnerships across the UK. Our goal is to achieve better outcomes for more children. To achieve this, we work with partners to build stronger families, safer childhoods and positive futures.

<sup>9</sup> Barnardo's, 2023; The Missing Link. [bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=d4a8e882c485e4c6jmltdHM9MTY5OTQ4QDAwMCZpZ3VpZD0yMzg1NWY2Zi1kMDY1LTU1NmYtMTVhZDQ2NTZlZmImaW5zaWQ9NTIxNA&ptn=3&hsh=3&fclid=23855f6f-d065-656f-15d1-4d05d4656efb&psq=the+missing+Link%3a+social+prescribing+for+children+and+young+people+%7c+Barnardo%27s&u=a1aHR0cDovL2Jhcm5hcmRvcy5vcmcudWsvbmV3cy9iYXJuYXJkb3MtY2FsbHMTZ292ZXJubWVudC1wcm92aWRILW1pc3NpbmctbGluay15b3V0aC1tZW50YWwtaGVhZHRoLXN1cHBvcnQ&ntb=1](https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=d4a8e882c485e4c6jmltdHM9MTY5OTQ4QDAwMCZpZ3VpZD0yMzg1NWY2Zi1kMDY1LTU1NmYtMTVhZDQ2NTZlZmImaW5zaWQ9NTIxNA&ptn=3&hsh=3&fclid=23855f6f-d065-656f-15d1-4d05d4656efb&psq=the+missing+Link%3a+social+prescribing+for+children+and+young+people+%7c+Barnardo%27s&u=a1aHR0cDovL2Jhcm5hcmRvcy5vcmcudWsvbmV3cy9iYXJuYXJkb3MtY2FsbHMTZ292ZXJubWVudC1wcm92aWRILW1pc3NpbmctbGluay15b3V0aC1tZW50YWwtaGVhZHRoLXN1cHBvcnQ&ntb=1)