

## Mental Health and Wellbeing

### What do mean by mental health and wellbeing?

Good mental health is more than the absence or management of mental health problems; it is the foundation for wellbeing and effective functioning for both individuals and their communities.

Mental health problems generally refer to difficulties we may experience which affect us in our everyday lives. Mental health problems can affect the way we feel, the way we think and function. Mental health problems include conditions described as personality disorders and also dementia. They can be mild or serious, fleeting or long lasting.

Mental illness refers to more serious mental health problems that often require treatment in specialist service. Someone with a serious mental illness may have long periods when they are well and are able to cope. Many people with mild and serious problems are able to live productive, fulfilling lives.

Mental wellbeing is about our ability to cope with life's problems and make the most of its opportunities; it is about feeling good and functioning well, as individuals and collectively. You can have a mental health problem and still enjoy good mental wellbeing, just as people with a physical illness or long-term disability can live a productive life. Equally, someone can have poor mental wellbeing, without a clinically identifiable mental health problem.

Our mental health, like our physical health, will vary throughout our lives – at every age, whatever we do and where ever we live. It is important that we all understand what is needed to build and maintain our mental health from infancy into older age, as a person, family and community.

### Why is mental health important?

Good mental health is fundamental to everyone's quality of life. It's important to functioning in society, productivity, physical health, interpersonal relationships, life expectancy and capacity to deal with stress and adversity.

Mental health problems are extremely common: one in six adults will have a mental health problem at any one time. For half of those, the problem will last longer than a year. For others, mental health problems last for many years, particularly if inadequately treated.

The social and financial costs of mental health problems are immense: the burden on individuals, their families and society as a whole, the psychological distress, impact on physical health, social consequences and the financial/economic costs. Mental health disorders continue to be a serious and expensive global issue, affecting all people regardless of culture or socio-economic status.

The NHS spends 14 percent of its annual budget on mental health services. Recent estimates put the full economic cost at around £77 billion, mostly due to lost productivity.

Improving mental health benefits everyone. There is a clear association between good mental health and better societal outcomes: life span, physical health, educational achievement, criminality and employment status.

## Why is mental health important? (continued)

Mental health problems may happen as a result of a combination of genetics, environmental adversity and personal coping strategies. There are some defined risk factors linked to mental health problems that should be tackled. These are poverty, social deprivation, unemployment, poor education, social isolation and discrimination.

Fifteen per cent of children in the lowest socio-economic group develop mental health problems, compared with just 5 percent of children in the highest. Life for many black and minority ethnic communities can be more difficult than for the majority population, and that too is reflected in the incidence of mental health problems.

In Bristol the highest levels of suicide are found in areas where markers of social fragmentation are high, such as rapid population mobility, single person households and concentrations of rented accommodation.



## What are we doing about it?

NHS Bristol works in partnership with Bristol City Council to ensure the implementation of positive change in mental health focusing on four areas:

- Informing and supporting people to make healthier and more responsive choices,
- Creating an environment where it's easy to make healthier and responsible choices,
- Identifying, advising and treating those at risk, and
- Delivering system that effectively priorities and delivers action to reduce harmful behaviours.

Bristol has a number of strategies leading on work related to the prevention and treatment of mental health problems. These focus on the following main priorities:

- Race equality in mental health services,
- Implementing a national programme for social inclusion,
- Strengthening positive mental health promotion,
- Tackling stigma and discrimination,
- Improving access to psychological therapies, and
- Increasing primary care commissioning.

Strategies include:

- “Vision for the Future,” Bristol Mental Health Local Implementation, makes recommendations for actions to improve mental health services.
- Bristol’s “Promoting Positive Mental Health in Bristol Strategy, 2008 – 2011”, supports the development and delivery of preventative interventions and positive mental health promotion.
- Bristol’s “Emotional Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Children and Young People 2009-14,” coordinates the planning and commissioning of services to improve their emotional health.
- Bristol “Suicide Prevention Strategy 2007 – 2010,” tackles risk factors associated with self-harming behaviour and suicide.
- Bristol has well established Delivering Race Equality in Mental Health Care Programme, implemented by Community Development workers.
- Since 2009 Bristol has new psychological service called Right Steps offering quick access to talking therapies for people with mild and moderate mental health problems.

Improving mental health in Bristol requires commitment and action from all sectors of the community. There is something for everyone to do, as an individual, a community organisation, a public body, or from business sector. **Mental health is everyone’s business.**

## What works?

Historically, mental and physical health have been seen as separate and non-integrating domains, resulting in separate treatment approaches and policies. This is changing. Recent evidence based policies adopt holistic view emphasising the interconnection between mental and physical health, and consider the links with wider individual, societal and environmental factors. This approach to mental health addresses the impact of public policies, programmes and plans, and directs them towards promoting positive mental health and wellbeing, preventing ill health, and ensuring access to early interventions when mental health problems occur.

There are protective factors that promote the development and maintenance of positive mental health in individuals and communities.



The majority of mental health issues start before adulthood. Evidence shows **that a good start in life** increases the likelihood of greater life satisfaction. Supporting parenting and parental health, increasing social and emotional literacy in schools, providing early and effective interventions for conduct and emotional disorders in childhood can give a good start, impacting potentially upon the overall population's wellbeing.

Creating safer neighbourhoods, reducing fear of crime, building quality housing and green spaces **build resilience and a safe, secure base**. Everyone needs these tools to develop resilience.

A holistic approach to health and **integrating physical and mental health and wellbeing** requires acknowledging the factors that affect our mental health and that we become proactive in preventing health problems. Tackling lifestyle changes may be necessary to improve our mental health, especially where problems such as obesity, smoking and alcohol misuse are concerned.

If we reduce discrimination and stigma about mental health through education, social marketing and community engagement we can **develop sustainable connected communities**.

**Meaning and purpose** are important values for positive mental health. These promote improving access to psychological therapies following trauma, targeting high risk groups, intervening early to support people with mental or physical health problems to stay in or return to work, and by creating opportunities for social inclusion.

## What is the picture in Bristol?

National statistics indicate that Bristol is higher than the national average for people with mental health problems, and ranks fifth amongst the core cities. It is estimated that 416,400 living in Bristol, over 51,000 people regularly experience problems related to mental health. Approximately 27,692 people suffer from depression and anxiety related disorders and around 5,900 from dementia. Approximately 6,900 adults have severe and enduring mental illness.

It is very difficult to gather accurate data and estimate the actual number of people with mental health problems, especially at a mild and moderate level, due to stigma attached to the subject of mental health. Often, individuals are reluctant to disclose difficulties related to mental health and having treatment for noted on their health record. This has a huge impact on the accuracy of the estimated number of people with mental health problems.

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