

GE 2019 - Manifesto submission

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) is the leading and largest professional body for counselling and psychotherapy in the UK. Representing 49,000 practitioner members working across the United Kingdom, we set and maintain high standards of ethical practice. Our members are a registered, flexible and underutilised workforce who make a vital contribution to improving the mental health of people across the country.

We are pleased to present the following core mental health policy priorities for inclusion in party manifestos.

Importance of access and choice to psychological therapies

BACP recognises the investment made by successive governments into the availability of psychological therapies for common mental health conditions; primarily through the IAPT programme.

We believe that choice of treatment is an important principle in a modern NHS. Research shows that where a choice of evidence-based psychological therapies is offered, patient outcomes are better.

Currently clients are subject to a postcode lottery of service provision, with many unable to access the choice of therapies they need or deserve.

BACP recommends:

A full range of evidence-based psychological therapies should be offered and available to all clients accessing mental health services; bringing to an end the postcode lottery and ensuring a comprehensive choice of interventions and opportunities to access appropriate services. A choice of therapy should be enshrined in the NHS constitution.

The 'NHS Mental Health Implementation Plan 2019/20 - 2023/24' outlines the need for a substantial expansion of the psychological professions - estimated at around 50 per cent over the next decade. Achieving this unprecedented transformation and workforce

expansion, as well as delivering choice, will demand strong leadership, vision and coordination at a national level.

BACP recommends:

The establishment of a Chief Psychological Professions Officer, putting the psychological professions on a par with medicine, nursing and the allied health professions.

Parity of esteem and psychological therapies

Disparity between the treatment of physical and mental health is increasingly a headline issue and a cause of frustration for providers and service users in health and social care. Evidence suggests that a government commitment to achieving parity of esteem between mental and physical health will decrease costs and improve mental health.

BACP recommends:

All people referred to NHS psychological therapy services should begin treatment within 28 days of referral and assessment.

CCGs, with direction from NHS England, should allocate funds proportionate to the burden of mental health problems in their locality.

Research funding should be proportionate to the burden of disease relating to mental health problems in the UK.

Counselling in educational settings

School-based counselling is a cost-effective and proven early intervention which improves children and young people's mental health and emotional well-being.

Children and school staff respond positively to counselling as it is accessible, non-stigmatising and effective. School leaders report improvements in attainment, attendance and behaviour of young people who have accessed services.

England is now the only country in the UK without a government supported national programme for school-based counselling.

BACP recommends:

The development of a national school-based counselling strategy, demonstrating a commitment to children's mental wellbeing, on a par with the rest of the UK, delivering on the expectation set out in 'Counselling for Schools: a blueprint for the future' (DH, 2015) for a trained, paid counsellor in every secondary school. This should include access in Further Education institutions.

Evidence suggests that this commitment to an early counselling intervention should be extended to young children in primary schools.

Over the past 10 years there has been a fivefold increase in the number of students who disclose a mental health condition to their institution.

University students experience the psychological and developmental needs common to all young adults. However, students have additional worries: adapting to a new environment without the usual social supports, course demands, financial pressures, effects of digital technologies, plus peer pressure to misuse drugs and alcohol. As a result, many students will experience psychological distress sufficient enough to impact on their studies.

BACP recommends:

Adequate provision of embedded counselling services in all colleges and universities, provided by trained practitioners, to help students continue with and complete their studies.

Greater psychological support for Older People

Our growing population of older people suffers high levels of treatable depression. The majority (85%) of older people with depression receive no help from the NHS. Referral rates to IAPT for older people are just over 6% - half of the 12% target.

BACP recommends:

A greater emphasis on the mental health of older people and a push to ensure increased access to counselling for our ageing population, including those with dementia

Recognition of the psychological impact of the onset of later life physical conditions such as sight-loss and action to ensure all those affected are provided with accessible and regular information and a choice of psychological therapies.

Older people in Wales and Northern Ireland benefit from an Older People's Commissioner, providing an independent voice for older people and championing their interests.

BACP recommends:

Funding the position of Older People's Commissioner in England.

Supporting relationships and families

Adults in poor-quality and distressed relationships are much more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and other mental health problems, and from poor physical health. There is also clear evidence that poor-quality parental relationships and inter-parental conflict in particular have a negative impact on children's mental health and long-term life chances across many areas.

Studies have found relationship counselling and couples therapy results in significant change in relationship satisfaction. A government-backed evaluation of UK relationship support found that for every £1 invested the state could see £11.40 of savings.

BACP recommends:

That relationship counselling is accessible to anyone who needs it, regardless of income, and call on a future Government to invest in relationships.

Workplace mental health

Typically, a third of our lives are spent at work, and at least three in ten employees suffer from mental health problems (ranging from short-term depression to chronic conditions), costing businesses up to £1000 per employee each year.

Each year in the UK, 140 million working days are lost through sickness absence, costing employers £9 billion in sick pay and associated costs. Stress at work, a key driver of long-term absence, has more than doubled since the 1990s, with one in five workers having taken a day off sick for stress (of which 90% gave a different reason for their absence). Absenteeism and presenteeism together cost the UK economy £73 billion per year, with 27 days of productive time per employee are lost each year due to presenteeism.

Preventing and treating poor mental health in the workplace helps reduce these losses, enabling people to return to and stay in work. Moreover, workplace counselling boosts outputs, increases motivation and reduces the burden on other services.

BACP recommends:

All employees should have access to workplace counselling, giving both support to employees and reducing costs to businesses.

Protecting funding for mental health

Evidence from BACP members highlights a proportion of funding for vital third sector counselling services is currently obtained through our membership of the European Union. Life-changing mental health support must not be put at risk through Britain's exit from the European Union.

BACP recommends:

The level of funding for mental health projects currently obtained through the European Union and European Commission should be matched by the UK Government in the event of Brexit.

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