

Independent Review into Mental Health, ADHD and Autism

Response from the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) is the largest professional body for counselling and psychotherapy in the UK, with over 76,000 members. Our members work with service users of all ages and are providing therapy across a wide range of sectors, including the NHS, education, charities and private practice.

BACP maintains a Register of qualified members which is accredited by the Professional Standards Authority under their Accredited Register scheme. The scheme is a UK-wide, government-backed programme that validates voluntary registers for health and social care roles not covered by statutory regulation. This means the Professional Standards Authority have assessed and approved our entry standards and other processes, such as complaints handling and governance, for public protection.

We welcomed the announcement of the Independent Review into Mental Health, ADHD and Autism, and support the Review's examination of changing trends in prevalence and inequalities, the impact of clinical practice on these trends, the wider social and cultural context and their impacts on service users and services as well as the risks and benefits of medicalisation and the role and effectiveness of short versus longer-term interventions in improving recovery and quality of life¹.

We also welcome the publication of the Review's Interim Report² and the evidence presented on changes in population level distress and need, rates of diagnosis, self-identification and demand on services as well as their clinical capacity to meet this demand.

We support this broad approach being taken by the Review as counselling and psychotherapy services routinely support people whose level of distress and functional impairment does not map neatly onto diagnostic thresholds.

¹ UK Government (2025). *Independent Review into Mental Health Conditions, ADHD and Autism: Terms of Reference*. Department of Health and Social Care.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-into-mental-health-conditions-adhd-and-autism-terms-of-reference>

² UK Government (2026). *Independent Review into Mental Health Conditions, ADHD and Autism: Interim Report*. Department of Health and Social Care.

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69cbdb2369dd81b3f213c660/independent-review-into-mental-health-conditions-ADHD-and-autism-interim-report.pdf>

BACP members views and experiences

Our membership of over 76,000 represents a very significant psychological workforce. Our member research indicates that we have members working across a wide range of sectors, including the NHS, schools, colleges and universities, voluntary and community sector organisations, Employee Assistance Providers, workplace counselling services and private practice; with around 60% of members indicating that some or all of their work is in private practice.

Evidence we have gathered from surveying our members over the past two years supports the initial conclusions from the Review's Interim Report, that multiple factors are impacting prevalence and demand at any one time and that the design of the health system, including requirements at different points in care pathways to provide evidence of need, might be contributing to incentivising certain behaviours.

We undertook a whole member survey³ to support our response to the Review, running through March and April 2026. Our survey results highlight that of those members that responded;

- 78% reported that their clients are presenting with common mental health conditions as the primary or a significant issue, with 44% of those clients having disclosed a formal diagnosis to their therapist.
- 46% reported that their clients are presenting with ADHD as the primary issue or an issue of significant concern to them, with 36% of those clients having disclosed a formal diagnosis to their counsellor or psychotherapist.
- 45% reported that their clients are presenting with autism as their primary or significant concern, with 34% of those clients having disclosed a formal diagnosis to their therapist.

In addition, our 2025 Mindometer survey⁴ found that almost two thirds of therapists (64%) reported that the public's mental health had deteriorated over the past year, as well as a rise in the numbers of both adults and children disclosing neurodivergence-related issues in their sessions - with 62% of respondents indicating it's one of the most common presenting issues they've seen an increase in adult clients bringing to therapy. That number increased to 71% when responding about the most common reasons children and young people are seeking therapeutic support.

The results of these surveys indicate that our members are seeing an increase in the number of people seeking therapy for issues relating to mental health, ADHD and/or autism to sessions; in line with the findings of the interim report. They also evidence that a sizeable proportion of

³ Unpublished BACP Member Survey on the Independent Review into Mental Health Conditions, ADHD and Autism (2026) [Number of survey respondents: n=207]

⁴ British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (2025). *Mindometer Survey Results 2024-2025*. <https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-us/about-bacp/bacp-mindometer-2025/> [number of respondents: n=2980]

clients are seeking support for issues related to ADHD and autism , are doing so without a formal diagnosis.

Crucially therefore, a substantial amount of need associated with common mental health conditions, ADHD and autism is being met by counsellors and psychotherapists already. As many of these are working outside of the NHS this additional provision may not be fully, or indeed at all, captured by service data from NHS sources. Additionally this service data will not reflect that counselling and psychotherapy are already delivering psychological support for people who are waiting for, unable to access, or have not pursued formal diagnosis.

Therefore, we urge that recommendations within the Review’s final report recognise the scale of the support already being delivered outside of the NHS by the counselling and psychotherapy workforce, but also the opportunity that bringing that expertise more centrally into care pathways, by recruiting counsellors and psychotherapists into the statutory sector in greater numbers, could deliver for both service users and services.

Changes to trends in prevalence of mental health conditions

Evidence from our own member experience surveys mirrors the observations within the Review’s Interim Report; that there has been an increase in psychological distress across children, young people and adults.

As part of the review remit is to consider structural changes that would benefit the system, it is important we reiterate the vast amount of unused capacity that exists within the already trained counselling and psychotherapy workforce. Our annual workforce survey⁵ found that around 50% of our members report an average of 5 additional unused clinical hours a week. This amounts to 190,000 additional sessions a week or nearly 10,000,000 additional sessions annually. Any proposed changes to the structure, interventions or services available must prioritise making greater use of the existing, but untapped, counselling and psychotherapy capacity.

The benefits, risks and perceptions of diagnosis

We appreciate that one of the most challenging questions for the Review to answer relates to the impact of diagnosis and medicalisation in service delivery, as well as their role as a gate keeper to accessing further support; including the value of diagnosis to individuals, barriers to receiving diagnosis, and the role of the independent sector in diagnostic pathways.

⁵ BACP (2025) Annual Workforce Survey (results awaiting publication). [number of respondents: n=4026]

As part of our member survey⁶ to support our response to the Review, we sought practitioner perceptions of the impact of diagnosis on their clients. Key findings from the survey, based on those members who responded, include:

- 58.9% reported that they felt receiving a diagnosis had a mostly positive impact on a client's sense of identity and wellbeing - a further 37.4% reported the impact was mixed, with 2.5% reporting it was a mostly negative impact, and the remainder were unsure of the impact.
- When asked to think about clients who they knew hadn't received a formal diagnosis, they were asked whether 'most of these clients express that obtaining a formal diagnosis would be beneficial for them'. In response 32.6% indicated strong agreement, with 36.6% agreeing, 18.9% neither agreed or disagreed and 12% disagreed.
- When asked to identify up to three of the most common barriers clients may have reported facing when seeking a formal diagnosis, the responses indicated:
 - 97.1% - long waiting times
 - 74.9% - cost of private assessment
 - 38.3% - lack of referral pathways
 - 21.7% - lack of information or awareness
 - 18.9% - stigma or fear of diagnosis
 - 18.3% - not meeting thresholds
- When asked to indicate all that applied in their experience of how waiting times for assessments or diagnosis affect their clients, responses indicated:
 - 81.8% reported that waiting times delayed access to support or adjustments for their clients
 - 80.6% reported increased levels of distress or anxiety for their clients
 - 38.2% reported that the waiting times gave clients a chance for emotional adjustment to the possibility of a diagnosis
 - 37.1% reported clients' disengagement from services
 - 34.7% reported worsening of a client's symptoms
 - 23.5% reported that waiting times resulted in a change in attitude towards seeking a diagnosis

⁶ Unpublished BACP Member Survey on the Independent Review into Mental Health Conditions, ADHD and Autism (2026) [Number of survey respondents: n=207]

- 18.8% reported that the waiting times offered time and space for self-understanding and reflection
- We also asked members to indicate all that applied about how, in their experience, having or not having a formal diagnosis influenced a client's access to support and their therapeutic journey.
 - 84.4% reported that having a diagnosis helps clients to understand their difficulties
 - 54.5% reported that a diagnosis helped to shape goals and/or the focus of therapy
 - 50.9% reported that having a diagnosis improves access to external support/services
 - 41.3% reported that a formal diagnosis creates challenges such as stigma or fixed identity

Finally we asked respondents to indicate, in their own words, by sharing up to three individual word answers to convey their perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks diagnosis may have had for their clients. There was a broad range of views expressed and we've clustered some of these into themes, we can share a more complete word cloud of submitted terms if requested:

- Themes of perceived beneficial impact of diagnosis included;
 - Understanding, validation and knowledge
 - Support, adjustment and access
- Themes of perceived drawbacks to diagnosis included;
 - Waiting, fear and anxiety
 - Stigma, judgment and misunderstanding

From our member survey data it is evident that diagnosis can offer validation for clients, but it is far from being a simple one-size-fits-all picture. It's also clear that delays in accessing services, including assessments and diagnosis can worsen an individual's mental health.

In our 2025 Mindometer survey⁷, 62% of respondents indicated that support for neurodivergence-related issues is one of the most common presenting issues they've seen an increase in clients bringing to sessions.

It is crucial to maintain choice and client autonomy in the delivery of services, including assessments and diagnoses. Service users must be able to make the choices that they feel are

⁷ British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (2025). *Mindometer Survey Results 2024-2025*. <https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-us/about-bacp/bacp-mindometer-2025/> [number of respondents: n=2980]

right for them at that particular moment in time and should be offered sufficient support, including psychological support, to process their choices if required.

Crucially it is widely perceived that a diagnosis is a gateway to support, adjustments and legitimacy, and as the Interim Report recognised; the system as it currently exists creates incentives for individuals in securing diagnoses as it shapes people's ability to access help.

Diagnosis shouldn't be the only or primary way of enabling an individual to access further support, a holistic, whole-person needs assessment should be routinely offered.

Importance of choice

The scope of the Review includes the role and effectiveness of different interventions, including short- versus long-term interventions, and a need to identify different models of support available throughout the system.

To deliver much-needed system improvements, service users need quicker access to services, including access to a range of evidence-based psychological therapies, reflecting differences in need, preference, complexity and comorbidity.

Existing NHS services for mental health conditions often prioritise CBT approaches above all other evidence based interventions. Despite strong, and growing, evidence that providing a wider choice of intervention is crucial to achieving the very best outcomes and frequent service user reports that they'd like more, quicker and easier access to counselling and psychotherapy.

An example of this can be seen in the findings from the 'Community Mental Health Survey 2024: National Qualitative Report' published by NHS England in February 2026⁸ - where several reported statements from service users indicate their desire to access counselling as part of their care, but the difficulties they had in doing so.

Research also shows that counselling and psychotherapy interventions, beyond CBT, have an equally strong research base, evidenced through both routine NHS outcome data and randomised trials, including the recent the PRaCTICED Trial⁹.

⁸ NHS England (2026) Community Mental Health Survey 2024: National Qualitative Report.
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/community-mental-health-survey-2024-national-qualitative-report/#2-headline-findings>

⁹ Michael Barkham, David Saxon, Gillian E Hardy, Mike Bradburn, Deanna Galloway, Nyantara Wickramasekera, Anju D Keetharuth, Peter Bower, Michael King, Robert Elliott, Lynne Gabriel, Stephen Kellett, Susan Shaw, Toni Wilkinson, Janice Connell, Phillippa Harrison, Kerry Ardern, Lindsey Bishop-Edwards, Kate Ashley, Sally Ohlsen, Stephen Pilling, Glenn Waller, John E Brazier,

The Review must recommend that commissioning guidelines are developed to enshrine a wider choice of psychological therapies for all service users, irrespective of the service they're accessing.

Conclusion

BACP supports the Review's aims. Evidence from our member surveys demonstrates that prevalence of common mental health conditions has increased and that demand for support for mental health conditions, ADHD and autism has also grown significantly - potentially exacerbated by the impact on individuals of delays in being able to access assessment and diagnosis.

The review recommendations must therefore include making counselling and psychotherapy more widely available to all who wish to access them. Strengthening choice and access will deliver more responsive services and effective outcomes, that will ultimately help to achieve the Government's commitments to raise the healthiest generation, to increase healthy life expectancy, reduce suicide and reduce economic inactivity.

Person-centred experiential therapy versus cognitive behavioural therapy delivered in the English Improving Access to Psychological Therapies service for the treatment of moderate or severe depression (PRaCTICED): a pragmatic, randomised, non-inferiority trial, *The Lancet Psychiatry*, Volume 8, Issue 6, 2021, Pages 487-499.