

How to influence change in the General Election

Why is the election important?

The December General Election offers an opportunity to promote counselling and psychotherapy to candidates looking for your vote.

This guide aims to help you to raise the profile of the counselling and psychotherapy professions, by suggesting ways to influence parliamentary candidates.

We've created this information to help you to communicate the role and relevance of the profession and advocate for better provision of psychological therapies by demonstrating that counselling changes lives.

There is no special training or previous experience needed to influence decision-makers, and many of the suggestions in this toolkit take just a few minutes to achieve but could have a huge impact. With your help, more politicians will better understand the need for, and value of, counselling and psychotherapy.

We hope that this helps to inspire and motivate you to engage with stakeholders to promote the counselling and psychotherapy professions and create a greater understanding and awareness of the life-changing work you do.

What can influencing achieve?

Change in policy and priorities of the next Government

Raise awareness of counselling and psychotherapy services

Challenge decisions relating to cuts to services

Influencing ideas:

If you have 5 minutes:

- Learn more about what BACP is doing in the 2019 General Election by visiting our General Election webpages at www.bacp.co.uk/ge19
- Follow BACP on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#) and tweet or share key messages about our election campaign to your followers, friends and family
- If you haven't done so already, [register](#) to vote

If you have 15 minutes:

- Ask any candidates you come across face to face what their party will do to improve access to counselling and psychotherapy (see questions below)
- Follow your local prospective parliamentary candidates on social media and send a tweet or post which highlights the need for parties to invest in counselling and psychotherapy

If you have 30 minutes:

- Write an email to your prospective parliamentary candidates using BACP's key messages below using our online tool
- After the election, write to your successful candidate to invite them to visit your service to show them first-hand how counselling changes lives

If you have an hour or more:

- Attend a local hustings event and ask a question to raise the profile of counselling and psychotherapy
- Write a blog or make a short video and post it on your social media platforms about the benefits of counselling and psychotherapy, including case studies where appropriate or send it to your local newspaper

Who is standing in your constituency?

There will be a range of candidates vying for votes in your constituency.

[Click here to find details of who is standing](#)

What we are asking for

BACP wants the next UK Government to commit to increased access to psychological therapies for anyone who needs them:

1. We want an end to the postcode lottery and ensure everyone has **the universal right to access a choice of psychological therapies**, enshrined in the NHS constitution
2. Creation of a new **Chief Psychological Professions Officer**, putting the professions on a par with medicine, nursing and the allied health professions
3. Ensure all people begin psychological therapies **within 28 days** of referral
4. Greater support for our children and young people with a **paid counsellor in every school in England**, to bring into line with the rest of UK, and **embedded counselling services in all colleges and universities**"
5. Increased **access to psychological therapies for our ageing population**, and funding for an **Older People's Commissioner** in England and Scotland, as exists in Wales and Northern Ireland.
6. **Relationship counselling** to be available to anyone who needs it, regardless of income
7. All employees to have access to **workplace counselling**
8. Ensure current European Union **funding for mental health projects to be matched** by the UK Government in the event of Brexit

Taking a Four Nations approach

BACP recognises the different political make-up in the devolved nations. Our bespoke manifestos for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales highlight policies relevant to each nation.

Northern Ireland: Everyone in Northern Ireland should have fair access to a counsellor through their General Practitioner; currently access is limited to only two-thirds of practices and the low levels of current funding means waiting times can often exceed six months. [More detail here](#)

Scotland: Funding for a new national programme of counselling support to help tackle addiction, whilst providing psychological support for families affected by Scotland's drug death crisis. [More detail here](#)

Wales: Greater emphasis on the mental health of older people, and a push to ensure increased access to counselling for our ageing population, reflecting that the population of Wales is ageing faster than any other part of the United Kingdom. [More detail here](#)

What questions could I ask?

If you meet any candidates over the election period, why not ask them the following simple question:

What would your party do to protect or increase access to counselling services?

You can then follow this up with your own local knowledge and experiences about psychological therapy provision and mental health services in your area.

Other possible Questions

- All the other nations of the UK fund school-based counselling in their secondary schools yet the ten per cent of children with a mental health disorder here in England don't have access to these services. What would your party do to address this imbalance?
- One in five students suffer a mental health problem during their studies. What will you/your party do to ensure that Universities and Further Education colleges have the funding to provide properly-resourced psychological therapy support services, like counselling for students?

- 85% of older people with depression receive no help from the NHS. What would you/your party do to tackle this huge injustice and increase access to psychological therapies for older people?
- People offered a full choice of evidence-based psychological therapies are five times more likely to report that therapy helped them back to work, yet over two thirds of people get no choice on the NHS.
- What will you/your party do to widen choice away from just cognitive-behavioural therapy and increase choice to psychological therapies, such as counselling for depression, couples therapy and dynamic interpersonal psychotherapy on the NHS?
- Waiting times for talking therapies reported as often six months or longer, what will you/your party do to reduce the wait for psychological therapies on the NHS?
- The cost of mental health illness to the UK economy is over £100 billion per year. What would you/your party do to encourage employers to provide professional support, like counselling, for their employees?

Having impact when writing to candidates

We've developed a simple template which enables members to generate an email which will be sent to all your prospective parliamentary candidates. Included within the template are some of key counselling asks for the next Government, you can make it even more powerful by following these 3 tips.

Keep it short and targeted - Prospective Parliamentary Candidates are generally one-person bands operating without admin staff so they won't have time to engage with lengthy emails - keep your writing succinct and targeted.

Make it local - an email highlighting an issue of local relevance is much more likely to grab the candidate's attention than an email highlighting general concerns. As well as making sure you present a local angle to your issue, your approach will also be much more effective as you're a local voter, so make that clear in your email.

Make the candidate an offer - candidates are always interested in meeting voters or visiting a local service, group or event. You could offer candidates the opportunity to visit your service, or where appropriate, to meet and hear directly from people with lived experience.

Counselling and Mental Health in the UK

We've pulled together some stats and figures that you may want to reflect on in your email or discussions with candidates.

- The annual cost of mental health illness to the UK economy is £105.2 billion.
- One in four British adults experience at least one diagnosable mental health problem in any one year, and one in six experience this at any given week.
- Mixed anxiety and depression is the most common mental disorder in Britain, with almost eight per cent of people meeting criteria for diagnosis.
- One in five (19.1%) women had common mental disorder (CMD) symptoms, compared with one in eight men
- In general, rates of mental health problems are thought to be higher in minority ethnic groups than in the white population, but these groups are less likely to have their mental health problems detected by a GP.
- One in four unemployed people has a common mental health problem. One in six workers will experience depression, anxiety or problems relating to stress at any one time.
- One in ten children under the age of 15 has a mental health disorder. Estimates vary, but research suggests that 20% of children have a mental health problem in any given year, and about 10% at any one time.
- Rates of mental health problems amongst children increase as they reach adolescence. Disorders affect 10% of boys aged 5-10, rising to 13% of boys aged 11-15, and 6% of girls aged 5-10, rising to 10% of girls aged 11-15.
- Depression affects one in five older people living in the community and two in five living in care homes.
- 70% of people who died from self-inflicted means whilst in prison had already been identified as having mental health needs. However, concerns about mental health problems had only been flagged on entry to prison for just over half of these people.
- 58% of people weren't offered choice in the type of therapies they received, and three quarters of people were not given a choice in where they received their treatment.