



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Nadine Dorries MP
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Chair, Women and Equalities Select Committee
House of Commons
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Cc: Victoria Atkins MP and the Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP

16th January 2020

Dec Chen,

Congratulations on your election as Chair of the Women and Equalities Select Committee. Thank you for your letter of 30 October and to your previous committee for undertaking this inquiry into the Mental Health of Men and Boys. It is vital that we continue to shine a light on the important issues associated with men's mental health. This inquiry is timely, and I look forward to discussing our plans and taking on board your findings as we develop them further and put them into practice. We know that men have their own particular mental health issues. Men tend to be more impulsive and behave in more risky ways than women and have higher rates of drug use, problem gambling and alcohol use. Men can also be less likely to seek help or talk about suicidal feelings.

We welcome your previous committee highlighting the need for further research into the specific issues for men and boys. We know that men are more likely to die by suicide and so we are working across Government to prevent suicides. After three consecutive years of decreases, data published in September by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showed increases in the suicide rate in 2018, mainly driven by male suicide. These latest figures are disappointing but reinforce why suicide prevention continues to be a priority for this Government. Experts are clear that we need more data to be able to draw firm conclusions, and we have set up a working group with the Office for National Statistics, Professor Louis Appleby and other academics to consider the data in more detail, including further analysis by gender and age. We accept that there is more that we can do with regards to research and my officials will consider potential options for strengthening the focus on gender in mental health research.

We know that men are often reluctant to engage with health and other support services. It is a sad fact that a lot of people who take their own life, men especially, never contact the mental health and care system about their problems. We need to reassure men and boys that asking for help is not a sign of weakness and is nothing to be ashamed of. We need services that reach out to men and boys to ensure that when they do ask for help, the help is there.

We are tackling the stigma associated with mental health which may prevent many men from seeking help through various campaigns. We are funding the Time to Change initiative to reduce the stigma including through campaigns targeted at men including the 'In Your Corner' campaign to encourage men to be in their mate's corner and be more open and support of those fighting a mental health problem.

We also launched Every Mind Matters in October 2019, aiming to help adults across England be better able to look after their own mental health and support others. Since launch, over 1.3 million Mind Plans have been created, which provide simple tips on actions to take. To help promote the campaign to men we have developed partnerships within the construction industry and in January launched a major partnership with the Football Association's and charity Heads Together's "Heads Up" initiative, with kick-off for all FA cup third round ties delayed to encourage football fans to "Take A Minute" to start taking action to look after their mental health and that of their family and friends." In addition to these campaigns, we will consider what wider cross government work we can do to shift wider societal stigma and stereotypes.

With regards to the development of a strategy and service design targeted at men and boys, our primary focus at this stage is to expand access for all groups through the roll out of the Long Term Plan. We have committed to investing an extra £2.3 billion a year by 2023/24. Around half of this will go to improving community mental health services and services to help people experiencing mental health crises. Some of this investment will also support further service developments for perinatal mental health which will support new fathers during the early stages of their child's life to prevent them from developing mental health issues.

In addition, we are expanding mental health support in schools and mental health in the curriculum. We must do more to improve our children's mental health as it can affect anyone from any age, gender or background. Therefore, in addition to Mental Health Support Teams, we have commissioned further research into engaging vulnerable families in parenting programmes, and how local areas can encourage evidence-based commissioning of interventions aimed at supporting parents and carers. The Children and Young People's Mental Health Green Paper also highlighted the importance of supporting families with children at risk of developing mental health problems. Therefore, we have commissioned further research into

engaging vulnerable families in parenting and parental conflict programmes, and how local areas can encourage evidence-based commissioning of interventions aimed at supporting parents and carers.

We accept that we also need to consider how to offer appropriate services to higher risk groups, including BAME and GBT men and boys. We have made efforts to understand the mental health needs of those from BAME communities through input to the Independent Review of the Mental Health Act. During the Review, the Mental Health Act Review African and Caribbean group (MHARAC) was established to support one of the core aims of the Review: to understand the reasons behind the disproportionate number of people from ethnic minority groups detained under the Mental Health Act, and to identify ways to make the Act work better. MHARAC led work to develop the recommendations in the final report designed to ensure that people of black African and Caribbean descent with mental health challenges receive the treatment and support they need. In addition, we have also appointed Dr Jacqui Dyer MBE as the Mental Health Equalities Champion for England to support our work with BAME communities. The Mental Health Support Teams, being set up in schools, will provide a good opportunity to intervene early for younger BAME people.

It is vital that we continue to shine a light on the important issues associated with men's mental health which this inquiry has done. The Government will take the recommendations in your letter on board in future work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yours, Nadine'.

NADINE DORRIES

