

Written evidence submitted by Place2Be (PHS0054)

Summary:

This is a response to the call for proposals to form the focus of the committee's inquiry into prevention in health and social care.

Place2Be is calling for one of the committee inquiry's areas of focus to be on preventing mental health problems developing and worsening in children and young people. This should encompass:

- the need to promote and teach positive wellbeing and mental health among children and young people, and,
- the need to provide preventative and early intervention mental health and wellbeing support at an early stage.

Why the Health and Social Care Committee should consider this issue as part of its Prevention inquiry:

According to NHS Digital data, one in six children has a probable mental health condition. The prevalence rate has increased markedly from one in nine in 2017. Waiting lists for NHS CAMHS services are long (in 2021 the average wait time was 98 days, some much longer). The Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have had a detrimental impact on the mental health of children and young people in recent years.

50% of mental health problems are first established by age 14 and 75% by age 24, so we must focus on preventing these problems from arising in children and young people. Spend on children and young people's mental health services ranges from £14- £191 per person. The average spend per adult is £225. These figures show that we are not investing enough in prevention.

Mental health problems cost the UK economy at least £118 billion a year – equivalent to around 5% of the UK's GDP. However, we know that if we invest in prevention, we can generate economic benefits.

Poor mental health is also disproportionately affecting the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in society. So, in terms of tackling persistent health inequalities, it's vital to focus on preventing poor mental health among children and young people.

Why the Committee should look at it now: in particular, whether there is an opportunity for it to add value to existing research and evidence:

With the growing prevalence of mental health issues among children and young people, it is vital for the committee to scrutinise this area and explore what more could be done.

In mental health, society often waits for there to be a problem, rather than preventing the problem in the first place. It is difficult to evidence the effectiveness of prevention, since its success would depend on the absence of the problem. It would be beneficial to add value to the body of research and evidence.

The committee could investigate identifying what the current problem is and how we prevent this in future. Place2Be has evidence from our service showing that early intervention works, but the committee could investigate how can we evidence prevention and early intervention further and ensure this is prioritised in policy and practice across the country.

Why this area would benefit from scrutiny:

Government policy in relation to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing has not been ambitious enough.

We are coming towards the end of the NHS Long Term Plan timeframe and the Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Green Paper timeframe. We are still awaiting publication of the 10-year mental health plan which was consulted on during 2022. We are also still awaiting the outcome of a consultation into NHS mental health waiting times and access standards. Guidance exists on the 'whole school approach' to mental health and wellbeing, but it's not compulsory and there is no mechanism for evaluating whether it is being effectively implemented. We need to be doing more and would welcome the committee's analysis and exploration of the current state of play.

Why the Government needs to act in this area:

We must turn the tide on the concerning trends we are seeing in the worsening of children and young people's mental health in England. The Government needs to act to ensure that children and young people grow up happier and don't reach the point of having severe mental health needs, experiencing self-harm, suicidal thoughts or actions.

Preventing serious mental health issues among children and young people would also positively impact on the economy and would mean less strain on the NHS and specialist CAMHS services. Pro Bono Economics have estimated that for every £1 invested in Place2Be's counselling service in primary schools, £8 of economic benefits are generated.

Stress, depression or anxiety accounted for most days lost due to work-related ill health in 2021/22. This is because society does not focus enough on promoting positive mental health and preventing poor mental health at an earlier stage.

Where should preventative health care be by 2030, and how the Government should go about fulfilling that ambition:

We need to see fewer children and young people struggling with their mental health and not getting the support they need before it develops into a more serious or long-term problem. We should see more investment in preventing mental ill-health than treating mental ill-health and its far-reaching consequences. Place2Be has a set of recommendations that we would like to put forward to the committee for discussion and debate.

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