

## Written evidence submitted by the National Youth Agency (PHS0534)

[The National Youth Agency](#) is the national body for youth work, and the Professional Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB) for youth work in England. We have been transforming lives through youth work for over 50 years. By championing, professionalising, and enabling youth work, we strive to find better, more inventive ways to empower more young people.

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### The role of youth sector services in preventative healthcare

From the long term impacts of lockdowns and COVID-19, and the current and long-term impact of the cost of living crisis, young people's mental and physical health has been severely affected with 1 in 6 young people with a probable mental health disorder<sup>1</sup>.

The Committee should consider how early, preventative services such as youth work services (local authority and VSC organisations) can step in to support local authority services and young people before crisis interventions in the Prevention inquiry. With schools, mental health services and social care struggling to meet the needs of young people, (Mental Health School Teams only support 26% of pupils in schools and learners in Further Education<sup>2</sup>), youth work services can ease pressures and workloads through early provision whether it focuses on wellbeing, social connection, sexual health, healthy relationships, substance misuse, healthy eating, sports and more. The [National Youth Work Curriculum](#) explores the variety of life skills that young people can gain from youth work supporting their social, emotional, educational, and mental wellbeing and development.

There are already emerging networks of youth workers working in preventative healthcare services. [Redthread](#), [Street Doctors](#), [Young Minds](#), [The Mix](#), [Youth Access](#) and [Brook](#), are just some of the regional and national youth organisations supporting young people by offering early preventative and crisis interventions surrounding health issues. More hospitals are establishing youth worker teams with examples in Nottingham and Manchester NHS Trusts. With specialist training available for youth workers on the new Level 4 qualification with units focusing on mental health and wellbeing in youth work, therapeutic youth work and trauma informed practice, there is more scope for trained specialist youth workers to work in healthcare settings.

In the Prevention inquiry, the Committee could explore which government programmes are focusing on early, preventative services for young people's health and how these pots of funding support multi-agency working in local authorities with statutory and non-statutory services (especially youth services). There are many government programmes that urge local authorities to ensure multi-agency working happens to support young people. However, this is harder in practice than in policy with strained local authority staff retention and recruitment, and funding focused on crisis intervention, not preventative services like youth services. Best practice examples of where and how youth services are included in multi-agency local authority programmes focusing on preventative healthcare would help understand what is needed for this to be replicated across the country.

The National Youth Agency is currently building a [National Youth Sector Census](#) that will highlight all youth service provision understanding where it is located and what it is offering young people. This will help the sector and allied sectors (health, social care, justice and education) to reach out to local youth services for support with referrals and/or engagement of young people. Mental wellbeing is

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<sup>1</sup> NHS Digital (2022), Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022 - wave 3 follow up to the 2017 survey

<sup>2</sup> NHS England, (2023), Mental health support in schools and colleges <https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/cyp/trailblazers/>

the highest provision offered by youth services in England with two-thirds (66%) of all VCS organisations and 4 in 5 (81%) of local authorities offering a programme of support (but the Census is still ongoing)<sup>3</sup>. For the Prevention Inquiry, the Committee may be interested in this data to understand how and where youth services can support integrated care systems, family hubs and social prescribing to ensure a joined up approach across the healthcare system in preventative services.

Bringing local youth services that offer young people a safe space to go, a trained trusted youth worker to talk to and something to do, into the preventative healthcare system is crucially important when late intervention services for young people are under increasing pressure.

If Government does not take action, young people's future outcomes will continue to worsen and there will be more long-term pressure on adult services in the future.

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<sup>3</sup> National Youth Agency (2021), Initial Summary of Findings from the National Youth Sector Census, [Online], <https://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Summary-Report-v5.pdf>