

Eating Disorders Awareness Week

Tuesday 28th February 2023

Key points

- Members of our Mental Health Network – leaders of mental health services – are concerned that thousands of children and young people risk missing out on the help they need for their eating disorder unless the government commits to ongoing specialist funding.
- They are treating double the numbers of children with eating disorders who need urgent care now than before the pandemic, and we now face a cost-of-living crisis which is causing and exacerbating mental health issues.
- The NHS Confederation's Mental Health Network is calling for £12 million of additional funding over the next year to ensure children and young people who need treatment from specialist eating disorder services can access it.
- This needs to run alongside a further commitment to roll out mental health support teams in schools and colleges nationwide to provide preventative support and opportunities for early intervention. Government should increase its target of 15-25 per cent access by 2022-23 to 100 per cent blanket coverage and ensure that mental health support teams are rolled out rapidly.
- Government must provide mental health services with long-term and sustained investment to help meet demand which could mean an extra £900 million per year by 2024-25, so they can fulfil their ambitions of levelling up mental health.

Background

- There has been a 72 per cent increase in children and teenagers being referred for urgent support for eating disorders over the last two years, and waiting times are rising.
- An estimated 1.5 million children and teenagers will need new or additional support for their mental health over the next three to five years and this includes seeking treatment for eating disorders.
- In 2020/21, the government was explicit in its acknowledgement of the need for extra investment in children and young people's mental health services, allocating an additional £79 million, including around £12 million for eating disorder services.
- The rise in need for services is not just being felt in mental health services, but across the whole NHS including in primary care and acute paediatric services where patients are presenting due to a lack of access to specialist services.

The view of NHS leaders

- Mental health leaders want to see a clear commitment to continued investment in eating disorder services over the next year, coupled with a comprehensive package of support which includes early intervention and clear pathways of care for children not yet ill enough to require hospitalisation or waiting to access services.
- Without this, they warn that children will continue to face unacceptably long waits for treatment. Their mental and physical health will deteriorate, and it is more likely their eating disorder will remain with them into adulthood.

- Mental health leaders believe it's critical that government applies the same level of priority to the rising need for mental health services, as government is giving to addressing the elective care backlog where additional investment ensured the two-year waiting list was virtually eliminated last summer.

Key asks

- To ensure that children and young people with eating disorders can access the care they need, the NHS Confederation's Mental Health Network is calling for £12 million of additional funding to be made available over the next year in order to get children and young people's eating disorder services back on track.
- This needs to run alongside a further commitment to continue to transform children and young people's mental health services by rolling out mental health support teams in schools nationwide, with the Government's target of 15-25 per cent access by 2022-23 increased to 100 per cent coverage so every school and college has a support team in place to provide preventative support and early intervention.

Suggested interventions

- The NHS Confederation's Mental Health Network are concerned that thousands of children and young people risk missing out on the help they need for eating disorders unless the government provides funding for specialist services. What can the Minister say to us on Eating Disorders Awareness Week to allay their concerns?
- The NHS Confederation's Mental Health Network estimates that £12 million of additional funding needs to be made available over the next year to ensure all children and young people that need access to specialist eating disorder services do. Does the Minister agree and what discussions has she had with the Chancellor on this issue ahead of the Spring Statement?
- The NHS Confederation's Mental Health Network said it's critical to preventing and intervening early in cases where children and young people are developing an eating disorder, and that there should be mental health support teams in all schools and colleges. Will the government increase its target of 15-25 per cent access by 2022-23 to 100 per cent coverage and rapidly roll out mental health support teams?

If you would like to discuss the issues raised in this briefing, or would like some suggested questions to raise, please don't hesitate to be in touch via Adam.Croom@nhsconfed.org.

About the NHS Confederation

The NHS Confederation is the membership organisation that brings together, supports and speaks for the whole healthcare system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The members we represent employ 1.5 million staff, care for more than 1 million patients a day and control £150 billion of public expenditure. We promote collaboration and partnership working as the key to improving population health, delivering high-quality care and reducing health inequalities.

Our Mental Health Network represents providers from across the statutory, independent and third sectors. We work with government, regulators, opinion formers, media and the wider NHS to promote excellence in mental health service and the importance of good mental health.