

GE 2019 - Manifesto submission Wales

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) is the leading and largest professional body for counselling and psychotherapy in the UK. Representing 49,000 practitioner members working across the United Kingdom, and over 2,000 in Wales, we set and maintain high standards of ethical practice. Our members are a registered, flexible and under-utilised workforce who make a vital contribution to improving the mental health of people across the country.

In recent years all parties have begun to do separate manifestos for Wales. We are pleased to present the following core mental health policy priorities for inclusion in those manifestos.

Protecting funding for mental health in Wales

Evidence from BACP members highlights a proportion of funding for vital third sector counselling services across Wales, and the UK as a whole, is currently obtained through our membership of the European Union. Life-changing mental health support must not be put at risk through Britain's exit from the European Union.

BACP recommends:

The level of funding for mental health projects currently obtained through the European Union and European Commission should be matched by the UK Government in the event of Brexit.

Improving access and choice and responsiveness

Disparity between the treatment of physical and mental health is increasingly a headline issue and a cause of frustration for providers and service users in health and social care. Evidence suggests that a government commitment to achieving parity of esteem between mental and physical health will decrease costs and improve mental health.

Choice is important in a modern NHS and patients who receive their therapy of choice have better outcomes. However, the majority of people accessing psychological therapies in Wales are not offered choice of treatment or a choice on when and where they receive it.

Whilst we welcome the investment already made by the Welsh Government with the aim of improving access to psychological therapies, many people are still waiting far too long to get the treatment they need.

BACP recommends:

All people referred to NHS psychological therapy services should begin treatment within 28 days of referral and assessment.

A full range of evidence-based psychological therapies should be offered and available to clients to ensure that they have adequate choice of treatment and opportunity to access appropriate services. Therapy choice should be enshrined in the NHS Wales constitution.

Measuring lasting impact should be at the heart of decisions about service provision. We are calling on the Welsh Government to measure the long-term impact of psychological therapies on people's lives.

Greater psychological support for older people in Wales

Older people in Wales suffer high levels of treatable depression, but don't receive the help and support they need. This is a growing problem as Wales' population is ageing faster than any other part of the UK - currently there are over 887,000 people in Wales aged over 60 years old. This is projected to rise to over 1 million by 2030. Shockingly, the majority (85%) of older people with depression in the UK receive no help or support from the NHS.

BACP recommends:

A greater emphasis on the mental health of older people and a push to ensure increased access to counselling for our ageing population, including those with dementia.

Recognition of the psychological impact of the onset of later life physical conditions such as sight-loss and action to ensure all those affected are provided with accessible and regular information and a choice of psychological therapies.

Supporting relationships and families

Adults in poor-quality and distressed relationships are much more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and other mental health problems, and from poor physical health. There is also clear evidence that poor-quality parental relationships and inter-parental conflict in particular have a negative impact on children's mental health and long-term life chances across many areas.

Studies have found relationship counselling and couples therapy results in a significant change in relationship satisfaction. A government-backed evaluation of UK relationship support found that for every £1 invested the state could see £11.40 of savings.

BACP recommends:

That relationship counselling is accessible to anyone who needs it, regardless of income, and calls on a future Government to invest in relationships.

Workplace mental health

Typically, a third of our lives are spent at work, and at least three in ten employees suffer from mental health problems (ranging from short-term depression to chronic conditions), costing businesses up to £1,000 per employee each year.

Each year in the UK, 140 million working days are lost through sickness absence, costing employers £9 billion in sick pay and associated costs. Stress at work, a key driver of long-term absence, has more than doubled since the 1990s, with one in five workers having taken a day off sick for stress (of which 90% gave a different reason for their absence). Absenteeism and presenteeism together cost the UK economy £73 billion per year, with 27 days of productive time per employee lost each year due to presenteeism.

Preventing and treating poor mental health in the workplace helps reduce these losses, enabling people to return to and stay in work. Moreover, workplace counselling boosts outputs, increases motivation and reduces the burden on other services.

BACP recommends:

All employees should have access to workplace counselling, giving both support to employees and reducing costs to businesses.

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For further information please contact: publicaffairs@bacp.co.uk