

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer

HM Treasury
Unit 1, Horse Guards Road
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27 October 2022

Dear Jeremy Hunt,

Congratulations on your recent appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer. We welcome someone with your expertise in the NHS and wider health sector in this role at this critical time and are writing as the Mental Health Policy Group to urge you to **protect mental health in the upcoming budget**.

As you will remember from our meetings when you were Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and Select Committee Chair, the Mental Health Policy Group is an informal coalition of six leading national organisations working together to improve mental health - comprised of the [Centre for Mental Health](#), [Mental Health Foundation](#), [NHS Confederation Mental Health Network](#), [Mind](#), [Rethink Mental Illness](#), and the [Royal College of Psychiatrists](#). We are writing to you today alongside our partners at the [Association of Mental Health Providers](#), the [Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition](#) and [Young Minds](#). As you know, together we represent providers, professionals and the hundreds of thousands of people who use mental health services, and advocate for cross-government approaches to improve services and support early intervention and prevention of mental health problems.

We were very pleased to hear your commitment to '*protect the most vulnerable people*' upon becoming Chancellor. The people we represent include the most vulnerable, of all ages. As we approach 17th November, **mental health service providers, practitioners and service users are anxious about the prospect of cuts** to mental health and NHS funding. We have made great strides over the last decade in expanding access to mental health services through the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health and the NHS Long Term Plan. However, progress is fragile and only just over a third of people with mental health problems can access treatment and support. Hardwiring this progress on mental health into our society is contingent on ensuring sustainable services are available to those who need them.

As you know, NHS staff are doing all they can to meet rising demand. For example, increasing access to mental health support in schools ahead of schedule¹ and Improving Access to Psychological Therapies resulting in 91% of people accessing talking therapies within six weeks². However, **we are now facing a crisis in the nation's mental health which the NHS alone cannot address on existing let alone reduced funding - no matter how dedicated and innovative its staff are**. The Royal College of Psychiatrists data shows children's mental health service referrals were up 104% in 2021/22 compared to 2019/20³ and at least 1.4 million people of all ages on an NHS mental health service waiting list. Modelling from Centre for Mental Health shows that 10 million people (8.5 million adults and 1.5 million children and young people) in England will need new or additional support for their mental health as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic over the next three to five years⁴ and many more will be made unwell by the cost-of-living crisis. We already know that one in six children and young people now have a probable mental health diagnosis compared with one in nine in 2017 and we will be letting down a generation if we fail to support them.

We appreciate difficult decisions need to be made about the nation's finances but **reducing the funding available to mental health services would be totally inconsistent with protecting the most vulnerable**. It would also be a false economy as many more people would become more seriously unwell, unable to work and die prematurely. At a very minimum, **we need to see the Mental Health Investment Standard protected**.

As well as protecting NHS services that treat and support people, when they become unwell, **there is also a need for investment in preventative programmes, VCSE and social care services** to support everyone but particularly those most at risk of developing poor mental health. Since 2010, public health funding has been cut by 24% and local authorities, which are responsible for running social care, have had their spending power reduced by 25% since 2010. Councils serving communities with the highest levels of deprivation (which often have the worst mental health outcomes), have faced disproportionate cuts⁵.

To reduce demand for services in the medium to long term and to improve health, with the consequent gains in productivity, growth, and efficiency, **we desperately need an effective and properly resourced 10-Year Cross Government Plan for Mental Health and Wellbeing** that ensures the drivers of mental ill health are tackled across Whitehall. We urge you to press for work to continue on this plan, for the necessary budget to be allocated to its activities and for it to be published by Christmas, as originally planned.

It is vital that poverty reduction measures and levelling up form part of this plan as poverty is the main factor that increases the risk of mental, and indeed physical, illnesses. To this end, **benefit payments must be uprated in line with inflation** as now-Prime Minister Rishi Sunak committed to when he was Chancellor. Resolution Foundation projections suggest that the number of people living in absolute poverty is currently projected to rise from 11 million in 2021-22 to 14 million in 2023-24 – a rise from 17 to 21 per cent, including 30 per cent of children⁶. **We urge you to uphold your commitment to protect the most vulnerable by ensuring mental health is protected in the upcoming budget**, and would be pleased to discuss these issues with you in more depth.

Yours sincerely,



Sophie Corlett
Interim Chief Executive
Mind



Sean Duggan
Chief Executive
Mental Health Network



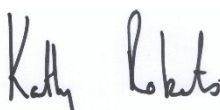
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Mark Winstanley
Chief Executive
Rethink Mental Illness



Centre for
Mental Health



**Children & Young People's
Mental Health Coalition**



YOUNGMINDS

Endnotes

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4. O'Shea, N. (2021) Covid-19 and the nation's mental health. London. Centre for Mental Health. Available at: https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/publication/download/Centre-forMentalHealth_COVID_MH_Forecasting4_May21.pdf
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6. Corlett, A. and Try, L. (2022) In at the deep end. London. Resolution Foundation. Available at: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/in-at-the-deep-end/>