



From the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland

First Minister
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

16 August 2023

Dear First Minister

As senior officers of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland, writing on behalf of our 1,400 members, we would like to congratulate you on your election as First Minister earlier this year.

As you will be aware, the College in Scotland has worked closely with the Mental Health Directorate at the Scottish Government for many years. We want to continue this positive working relationship and were encouraged by our constructive meeting with your Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport, Maree Todd MSP.

Now, ahead of your first Programme for Government announcement in September, we ask you to give urgent consideration to the needs of mental health services in Scotland.

The College in Scotland welcomed the publication of the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. We are pleased that there is engagement to allow stakeholders, including our members, to influence the development of the Strategy's Delivery Plan. It is vital that we get this Delivery Plan right to ensure that the strategy meets its aims. This means the Delivery Plan must be fully funded. Without appropriate financial backing, the Strategy cannot succeed.

As a College, we have serious concerns around the funding of mental health services in Scotland. We supported the mental health spending commitments in the Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party's shared policy programme. In particular, we welcomed the commitment to *'increase spending on mental health services to 10% of the total frontline NHS budget by the end of this parliamentary session.'*

However, [recent Public Health Scotland data](#) has shown that, over the last ten years we have moved further away from this target in real terms:

- In 2011/2012, **9.12%** of NHS spending was for mental health.
- Now only **8.78%** of NHS spending is on mental health.

Furthermore, we were concerned to see that the direct spend on mental health was frozen in [the 2023/2024 Scottish Budget](#), which allocated £290.2m for mental health services. Whilst this reversed the 38m cut to mental health services delivered in [the Emergency Budget Review](#), this merely returned spending to the same level allocated in 2022/2023.

Our members repeatedly tell us that they and their colleagues in the mental health services face incredible pressure. If the workforce is not to be completely overwhelmed, it is essential that Government now honours its spending commitment.

In winter months – and in epidemics – there is understandably a tendency to redirect resources towards acute services. Last winter members told us of mental health staff moved into acute services to manage demand. Prioritising acute physical health services is an emergency tactic which must not become a habit. It reduces our ability to offer early interventions, that mental health patients then present to services at a later stage with more acute needs and poorer outcomes. As a College, we strongly warn against this self-defeating pattern. We support the Government’s own emphasis on prevention of mental disorder, including primary prevention, early intervention and effective prevention of severe consequences for those already diagnosed. However, impoverished services are not in a position to shift the emphasis to early work. There is a risk of staff demoralisation and further reduction in service, but of course most importantly, for people trying to access these services.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland is calling for urgent action ahead of the upcoming Programme for Government, as well as the Scottish Budget that will follow in the winter. Both present excellent opportunities to move closer towards parity of esteem in Scotland, where mental health is held in parity with physical health. Genuine parity is only possible with proportionate resources for mental health.

We are determined that, working together with the Scottish Government, we can restore and transform Scotland’s mental health services, in the service of the mental health of all people in Scotland.

With our best wishes,

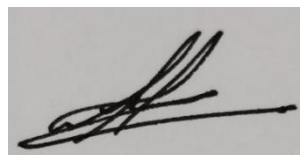
Yours sincerely



Jane Morris FRCPsych FRCPE

Vice Chair of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland

**Hon Senior Lecturer University of Aberdeen
Hon Associate Newnham College, Cambridge**



Dr Pavan Srireddy

Policy Lead for the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland

**Consultant in General Adult Psychiatry
Board Clinical Lead for MH Strategy**



Dr Jess Sussmann

Policy Lead for the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland

Consultant in General Adult Psychiatry and Rehabilitation Psychiatry