



## Equality and Human Rights Committee

### Pre-budget scrutiny 2021-22 – impact of COVID-19 on equalities and human rights

#### SAMH Evidence

##### Introduction

Around since 1923, SAMH is Scotland's national mental health charity.

Today, in over 60 communities we work with adults and young people providing mental health social care support, services in primary care, schools and further education, among others. These services together with our national programme work in See Me, respectme, suicide prevention and active living; inform our policy and campaign work to influence positive social change.

There has been much discussion about the impact on mental health of coronavirus and lockdown, and we have welcomed this. However, it's clear that this impact is not being felt equally across all areas of society. Therefore, in this response and our [previous response](#), we have focused on the needs of people who were already experiencing mental health problems before the pandemic began, and on those whose mental health is likely to be disproportionately affected.

It may be helpful initially to briefly outline SAMH's response so far to coronavirus. SAMH is a major social care provider, with many frontline staff who are defined as keyworkers in the current situation and who have continued to work in the community throughout lockdown. Our services include housing support, care at home, supported accommodation, employability services, therapeutic horticulture services and many other community services. Almost all of our services have remained operational, but we have introduced new models of working in line with Scottish Government guidance. At present some SAMH services are working to a restricted model of delivery, while many are operating as normal within appropriate guidelines or delivering a blended approach of telephone and face to face support.

We have also created a [web hub](#) which provides information on coronavirus and mental wellbeing. And our information service has remained opened throughout, providing mental health information and signposting via telephone and email contact.

##### What more should be done and how can the 2021-22 budget contribute?

Overall, we wish to see greater ambition from the Scottish Government. Current plans focus on the maintenance of safe and effective care and treatment: but in truth, the mental health system was struggling before coronavirus. Much of the mental health system requires redesign, not maintenance: we must seize this opportunity to think differently and do better.

#### 1. Social Care

We would like to see a greater focus on people with pre-existing mental health problems. There has, rightly, been a focus on population-level mental health in the last few months. However, there is no doubt that people who were already experiencing mental health problems have been

hard hit, with the withdrawal of both services and informal supports, and uncertainty about when these will be able to resume.

In particular, people with serious mental health problems receiving care and treatment in community settings need more attention. Many people with mental health problems receive the bulk of their support through statutory and third sector social care providers, rather than the NHS. These services have been under severe strain in the past few months, and this is likely to worsen as the financial impact of recent events begins to take effect. We must have a recovery plan which sees the NHS and social care as two interlinked parts of the same structure, and places equal emphasis on each. This equal emphasis must be reflected in the 2021/22 budget.

## 2. Psychological Therapies

As well as planning for a second wave, we must plan for the knock-on effects of lockdown. Recent statistics show a 44% decrease in the number of people referred for psychological therapies in the midst of lockdown, which will have inevitably resulted in a build-up of unmet need.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, a forecasting brief on the UK's mental health needs and risks by the Centre for Mental Health suggests that, if the economic impact is similar to that of the post 2008 recession, then we could expect 500,000 additional people experiencing mental health problems across the UK, with depression being the most common.<sup>2</sup>

The Scottish Government admitted in its Programme for Government 2020/21 that the pace of change in improving waiting times for psychological therapies has not been good enough, despite investment of £61 million in mental health services reform in 2019/20.<sup>3</sup> SAMH was therefore dismayed that no substantial investment in psychological therapies was announced. The only announcement on psychological therapies was the provision of computerised and internet enabled Cognitive Behavioural Therapy; while some people will find CBT helpful, it will not help everyone and does not help those people who have been waiting up to a year for other therapies.

This needs addressed as a matter of urgency. NHS Boards continually failed to meet the waiting time target for psychological therapies before coronavirus and the latest psychology workforce statistics show an 8.6% vacancy rate, rising to almost 30% for Specialist Therapists.<sup>4</sup> Substantial investment in the 2021/22 budget is needed in order to support people to access psychological therapies easily and without delay.

## 3. Children and young people

We welcome the commitments to improve mental health support for children and young people since the publication of the Mental Health Strategy: how we respond to the mental health needs of our children and young people in the coming months will be crucial to our ability to recover from this pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> ISD Scotland, [Psychological therapies waiting times](#), September 2020

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Mental Health, [Covid-19 and the nation's mental health](#), 2020

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Government, [Scottish Budget 2020-2021](#), February 2020

<sup>4</sup> ISD Scotland, [Psychology Services Workforce in Scotland](#), June 2019



for Scotland's mental health

For several years, SAMH has been calling for urgent action on children and young people's mental health. Almost two years ago, the Scottish Government published an audit of rejected referrals to CAMHS, which included 29 recommendations for improving the experience for children, young people and their families.<sup>5</sup> At the time, the Minister for Mental Health accepted all 29 recommendations and established a Children and Young People's Mental Health Taskforce.<sup>6</sup>

In the months that followed, it was frustrating to see the lack of action on the ground, with the rate of rejected referrals (over 20%) remaining steady over the course of the last two years.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, statistics published at the start of September show a 55% decrease in the number of young people referred to CAMHS between April and June this year.<sup>8</sup> This means a build-up of unmet need, which will need substantial transformational investment, as well as targeted resources and effort to address.

We have to see this transformational investment in the 2021/22 budget, because without it we will not be able to create the change that is urgently needed within the children and young people's mental health system. Too little has changed, children and young people continue to find themselves rejected from support services, despite their distress, with very few alternatives available to them.

#### 4. Active living

It's not all about mental health services: we need to use all the tools we have to tackle mental health problems, and that includes physical activity and sport. Being active can be highly effective in maintaining good mental health and managing poor mental health.<sup>9</sup> However, to do this we have to tackle the inequalities that prevent people from living a more active life.

People with mental health problems can face a number of barriers to participating in physical activity, and tend to be less active than those without.<sup>10</sup> Mental health problems can negatively affect self-esteem, energy and motivation, making it harder for people to participate in physical activity.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, people who live in deprived areas are not only more likely to have poor mental health,<sup>12</sup> but are also less likely to meet physical activity guidelines<sup>13</sup> and access greenspace.<sup>14</sup>

The 2021/22 budget must ensure that sports clubs, council and leisure trust facilities and sporting governing bodies can make the most of the opportunity to use this effective means of supporting Scotland's mental health.

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<sup>5</sup> Scottish Government, [Rejected Referrals to CAMHS audit](#), 2018

<sup>6</sup> Children and Young People's Mental Health Taskforce, [Recommendations](#), July 2019

<sup>7</sup> ISD Scotland, [Child and adolescent mental health services \(CAMHS\) waiting times](#)

<sup>8</sup> ISD Scotland, [Child and adolescent mental health services \(CAMHS\) waiting times](#)

<sup>9</sup> Teychenne, M. et al., [Do we need physical activity guidelines for mental health: What does the evidence tell us?](#), 2010

<sup>10</sup> Schuch, F. et al., [Physical Activity and Incident Depression: A Meta-Analysis of Prospective Cohort Studies](#), 2018

<sup>11</sup> Knapen, J. et al., [Exercise therapy improves both mental and physical health in patients with major depression](#), 2014

<sup>12</sup> Public Health Scotland, [Impact of deprivation on health](#) [accessed 25<sup>th</sup> August 2020]

<sup>13</sup> Scottish Government, [Scottish Health Survey 2018](#), 2020

<sup>14</sup> Scottish Government, [Scottish household survey 2018: annual report](#), September 2019