

SAMH'S VIEW: TREATMENT & SUPPORT

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ABOUT THE SAMH'S VIEW SERIES

SAMH's View statements set out SAMH's position on a particular policy topic.

In developing SAMH's position, the issues of equalities, diversity and human rights are investigated.

SAMH Views are produced by the Public Affairs team.

Context

There is a range of treatment and support options for people with mental health problems. This SAMH's View focuses on medication and psychological therapies, but there are many other approaches which people find helpful. There are five main categories of medication used for mental ill-health: hypnotics and anxiolytics, antipsychotics, antidepressants, medication for ADHD and medication for dementia. Psychological therapies describe a range of interventions that are designed to help someone understand and make changes to their thinking to relieve psychological distress. Only a specially trained psychologist can deliver psychological therapies.

Key points

- Medication can be very important in facilitating recovery,¹ and increases in antidepressant prescriptions in part reflect longer, more effective treatment.²
- Medical guidance states that people should be actively involved in prescribing decisions,³ but 28% of respondents to a SAMH survey experienced no discussion about their medication.⁴
- The side effects of medication for mental ill-health can be severe and distressing, with SAMH research showing that 1 in 10 people feeling unheard when they raised concerns.⁵
- Medical guidance states that people with moderate to severe depression should be offered a psychological therapy alongside antidepressants,⁶ but SAMH research showed that 49% of respondents who were taking antidepressants had not been referred for a psychological therapy.⁷
- Forty-six percent of respondents to SAMH's survey had not been offered options for treatment and support for depression and 48% had not been referred for a psychological therapy.⁸
- A Scottish Government target means that 90% of people who are referred for a psychological therapy must get a first appointment within 18 weeks. NHS Boards continually fail to meet the target⁹ and around 1 in 5 people wait over 18 weeks before starting psychological therapy.¹⁰
- Waiting times are seen as a barrier to accessing psychological therapy.^{11, 12}
- Most NHS Boards do not monitor the types of therapies provided, the outcome of psychological intervention or equalities data.
- SAMH research shows that people who are more involved in decisions about their treatment are more likely to be happy with their treatment,¹³ and that people who access therapy faster and feel like their therapy has lasted long enough are more likely to feel it has helped.¹⁴
- The most up-to-date workforce figures show a vacancy rate of 8.9% for psychology services overall and almost 30% for specialist therapists.¹⁵



SAMH calls for:

- A review of the psychological therapies waiting time target, to establish why NHS Boards continually fail to meet it.
- A review of psychological therapy provision across Scotland, to establish if people have access to the full range of evidence-based therapies outlined in the NHS Psychological Therapies Matrix.
- NHS Boards to remove time limitations on all psychological therapies.
- NHS Scotland to develop individual information resources for each of the psychological therapies outlined in the NHS Psychological Therapies Matrix, so that people know what their therapy involves.
- SIGN to refresh its guidance on non-pharmaceutical treatment for depression, which was archived in February 2020.
- NHS Boards to collect and evaluate equalities data for people receiving psychological therapy.
- NHS Scotland to take measures to ensure that psychological therapies are easily accessible for people with sensory impairments and other disabilities, including people who experience deafness.
- The Scottish Government and NHS Scotland to develop a minimum data set on outcomes of psychological therapies, to allow measurement of effectiveness.
- NHS Scotland to work with NHS Education for Scotland and the Royal College of Psychiatrists to reduce the vacancy rates in psychology services in Scotland, in particular the high vacancy rate for specialist therapists.
- The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency to review the Patient Information Leaflets for all medicines used in the treatment of mental ill-health, to ensure that the information contained in the leaflet reflects peoples' experience of side effects and withdrawal symptoms.
- The Royal College of GPs and the Royal College of Psychiatrists to regularly communicate with their members about the yellow card scheme, to encourage reporting of adverse side effects of medicines.
- The development of guidance for clinicians on shared decision making for people with mental health problems, including suicidal thoughts.



Further detail:

STATISTICS

- [ISD Scotland, Psychological therapies waiting times](#)
- [NHS Education for Scotland, The Matrix: a guide to developing evidence-based psychological therapies in Scotland](#)
- [ISD Scotland, Medicines used in mental health](#)

FURTHER READING

- [SAMH, 'Decisions were made about me not with me' A SAMH Research Report: Treatment and Support for Depression](#)
- [SAMH, Talking it Out: Psychological Therapies in Scotland](#)
- [SAMH, What's the Script?](#)
- [Cross-Party Group on Mental Health, Report: Priorities for Prevention and Early Intervention in Scotland](#)

Notes

¹ SAMH, [What's the Script?](#), 2012

² Scottish Government, [Key information on the use of antidepressants in Scotland](#), 2014

³ GMC, [Good practice in prescribing and managing medicines and devices](#), 2013

⁴ SAMH, [What's the Script?](#), 2012

⁵ SAMH, [What's the Script?](#), 2012

⁶ Nice, [Depression in adults, recognition and management](#), October 2009

⁷ SAMH, ['Decisions were made about me not with me' A SAMH Research Report: Treatment and Support for Depression](#), March 2020

⁸ SAMH, ['Decisions were made about me not with me' A SAMH Research Report: Treatment and Support for Depression](#), March 2020

⁹ ISD Scotland, [Psychological therapies waiting times](#)

¹⁰ ISD Scotland, [Psychological therapies waiting times](#)

¹¹ SAMH, ['Decisions were made about me not with me' A SAMH Research Report: Treatment and Support for Depression](#), March 2020

¹² SAMH, [Talking It Out: Psychological Therapies in Scotland](#), 2015

¹³ SAMH, ['Decisions were made about me not with me' A SAMH Research Report: Treatment and Support for Depression](#), March 2020

¹⁴ SAMH, [Talking It Out: Psychological Therapies in Scotland](#), 2015

¹⁵ ISD Scotland, [Psychology Services Workforce in Scotland](#), June 2019