

2016 SURVEY FINDINGS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mental health services in the UK have been chronically underfunded for a number of years. This is having a negative impact on mental health workers who are struggling to cope in under-resourced teams, and those seeking support unable to access services they need.

UNISON's 2016 mental health survey found over two thirds (68%) of respondents stated there was less access to services as a result of funding cuts. A recent *Public Accounts Report*¹ found that only a quarter of people thought to need mental health services have access to them. It recognised that there are different ways individuals initially seek help, and that the processes involved in referrals often result in individuals experiencing delays.

Access to services is a key part of ensuring those who need help are able to begin their recovery. It is essential that the government acts to provide fair funding for mental health services, with a guarantee that money provided goes to those who need it most.

Mental health services need to be prioritised and given recognition in the same way as physical health. NHS England recognises that “people with poor physical health are at higher risk of experiencing mental health problems and people with poor mental health are more likely to have poor physical health”. This is relevant not only in England, but across the UK. Prioritising mental health could improve the way service users are supported, as they would be able to access a range of appropriate services at the right time.

What we are asking for

- Fair funding from the government for mental health services, with a guarantee that money goes to those that need it.
- Mental health services prioritised by the government with recognition of the links to physical health.
- A commitment from employers to improve the training of mental health workers creating a well informed workforce able to deliver the highest standards of care.
- Commitment to support the mental health and wellbeing of NHS workers.
- A greater commitment from the government to help the NHS tackle the stigma that continues to exist around mental ill health.

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http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmpubacc/80/8002.htm?utm_source=80&utm_medium=fullbullet&utm_campaign=modulereports

Introduction

Mental health workers are struggling to cope due to staff shortages and poorly funded services. Mental health services in the UK have been severely underfunded for many years. A BBC freedom of information request carried out earlier this year, revealed that budgets for mental health trusts fell by 2% from 2013/14 to 2014/15, when hospital trusts' budgets were rising by 2.6%. Failure to dedicate required funding to mental health services has led to under-resourced teams and service users unable to access the help they need. According to the Department of Health, the estimated cost of mental health to the economy, NHS and society as a whole is approximately £105bn in England. Yet mental health has not been prioritised in the same way as physical health.

In February 2016, the *Five Year Forward View for Mental Health*², a report focussing on services in England, was submitted by the independent Mental Health Taskforce. The taskforce was chaired by the chief executive of the mental health charity Mind and highlighted what it described as the 'chronic underfunding' of mental health services. It examined the scale of challenges including staff shortages, access to services and issues faced by children requiring support in England. Many of these concerns are faced by staff and service users UK wide too.

UNISON recognises that although funding is a core element of the success of mental health service delivery, multiple factors are at play in this complex field. The union welcomes the approach outlined in NHS England's Five Year Forward View for Mental Health, detailing three areas of focus, allowing for a triple approach. The three areas are providing: '*equal status to mental and physical health, equal status to mental health staff and equal funding for mental health services*'.

UNISON welcomes plans by the government to implement the Taskforce proposals with extra funding. But the key now is to ensure that this money gets to where it is needed.

UNISON survey

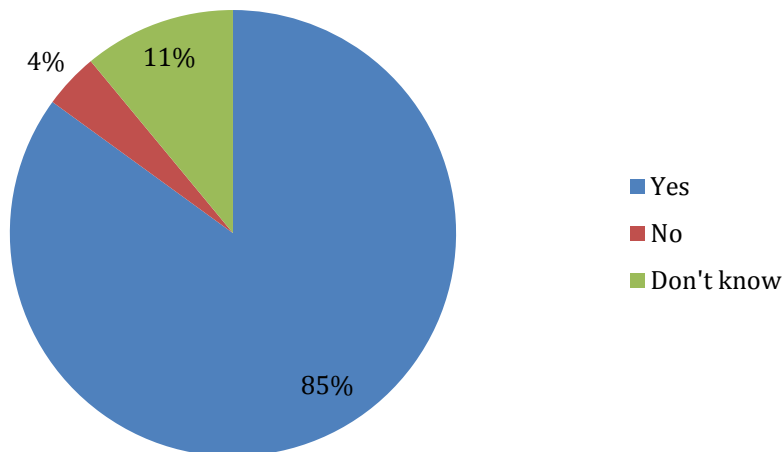
In May 2016, UNISON undertook a survey of staff working in mental health. The survey received almost 1,200 responses from individuals including mental health nurses, psychotherapists and social workers. It sought to capture staff views and experiences about their current roles as well as gain insight into how they thought mental health services could be improved in the UK. The majority of respondents – over four-fifths – (81%) worked for the NHS, followed by one in ten (11%) for a local authority. A small minority (3%) worked for a private company, with the remaining respondents employed by various organisations including charities and social enterprises.

Key findings

Over four out of five (85%) said that their organisation or service had faced cuts. These cuts had caused an increased workload for staff, increased difficulty in providing effective services and staff spending more time on paperwork.

² <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mental-Health-Taskforce-FYFV-final.pdf>

Do you feel that your organisation/service has faced cuts?



Staff working in mental health said there were fewer members of staff and increased workloads. This meant they were often stretched beyond their capability, although they continued to work to support the recovery of clients. When asked how the effect of cuts had affected service users, seven in ten (70%) said an increase in waiting times for services was the largest impact.

Two thirds (68%) stated that there was less access to services. The average mental health bed occupancy rate has risen steadily for the last few years, with a rate of 88.9% recorded for 2014-15, up from 88.5% in 2013-14. In October the Mental Health Network – a membership organisation promoting excellence in services – called the shortage of acute beds for crisis care a national scandal. It is important that services are well-equipped to manage demand, and provide the necessary support at the right time.

Over two thirds (68%) reported that there was no training around mental health stigma provided for staff by their organisation. UNISON recognises that improvements have been made in recent years in attitudes towards mental health. However, these are only likely to continue if organisations invest in providing a good standard of training to their workers. It is important that NHS staff supporting those who are often vulnerable, are well-informed, and well-equipped with the latest training.

Mental health workers are in the front line of service delivery with first hand experience of the difficulties placed on them and service users. Some of the difficulties reported include long waiting times, reduced services, or out-of-area placements. Almost nine in ten (89%) participants told us that they did not think mental health services were adequately funded in the UK, and this issue was raised throughout the survey.

What staff say:

When asked what people loved most about their job, many mental health workers said it was the ability to make a difference to the lives of service users. Witnessing recovery, helping others, and working with colleagues were among the responses and highlight the passion many staff have for working in mental health. This is despite the difficult climate they continue to work in.

Whilst it was made clear in responses that many were passionate about their work and the rewarding nature of their role (for example, *“being able to make positive decisions”*), frustrations were also evident when respondents provided reasons for what they disliked most about their job. Comments included large amounts of paperwork to complete, increasing pressure on staff, and red tape.

Conclusion

UNISON is campaigning for mental health services to be prioritised and properly funded. Proposals to invest in services are welcome, but these need to deliver real change and improvement. NHS workers are asking for support to help those in need, and more effort must be made by the government to prioritise mental health services.

What we are asking for

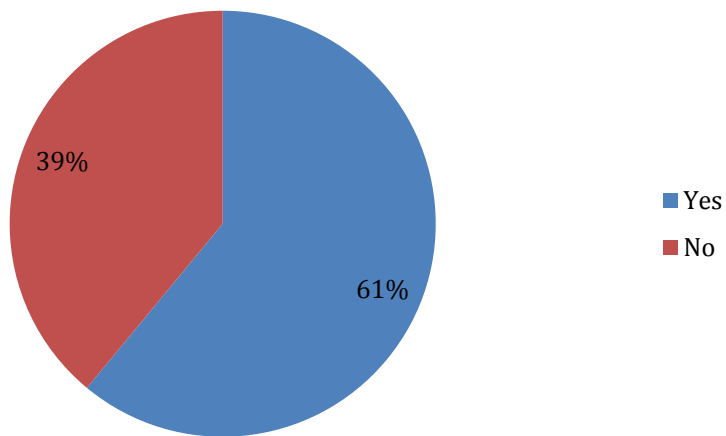
UNISON is calling for fair funding from the government, with a guarantee that money is made available and reaches the people it is intended for and not redirected for use in other areas.

The government must also do more to prioritise mental health services by recognising the links to physical health. Without clear commitment from government to achieve parity of esteem – giving mental health the same priority as physical health, mental health services will fail to support individuals in the best way.

The mental health survey highlights the passion that workers have. Mental health staff need to feel confident that they are well informed and best able to deliver the highest standards of care. UNISON is therefore calling for improved training of mental health workers along with a commitment to support the mental health and wellbeing of staff.

We know that mental health workers support clients on their journey to recovery, however there is often no one looking after the mental health of workers. A workforce that feels supported is more able to aid the recovery of those experiencing mental health issues, yet a quarter (26%) reported that there are no effective workplace interventions – such as counselling – offered to staff by their employer.

In your opinion does your organisation look after the well being of its staff?



UNISON believes that a greater commitment is needed to help the NHS tackle the stigma that continues to exist around mental health. *The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health* recognises that those experiencing mental health issues often still experience stigma, and that the human cost is unacceptable.