

STATEMENT ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND 2

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S RESOURCE PACK



MENTAL HEALTH

What does the UNCR say?

Article 24: Health, water, food, environment

Children have the right to the best health care possible, clean water to drink, healthy food and a clean and safe environment to live in. All adults and children should have information about how to stay safe and healthy.

This right also looks at the responsibility of governments to make sure that children receive a full spectrum of health care from prevention and health promotion to treatment and recovery.

Article 25: Review of a child's placement (e.g., when in hospital or another healthcare setting)

Every child who has been placed somewhere away from home - for their care, protection or health - should have their situation checked regularly to see if everything is going well and if this is still the best place for the child to be.

Article 23: Children with disabilities

Every child with a disability should enjoy the best possible life in society. Governments should remove all obstacles for children with disabilities to become independent and to participate actively in the community.

What does the UNCR Committee say?

The Government should:

- Gather information on the mental health of children of all ages. This is important so they can find out who is more likely to be vulnerable and what the root cause is.
- Develop detailed plans to provide mental health services to children and young people, and provide enough money for these services. The plans should make sure you can always get help when you need it and should focus on groups who are more likely to have poor mental health, for example children in poverty, children in care, and children in contact with the criminal justice system.
- Make sure that children with mental ill-health are never looked after in adult mental health wards or in police stations. Instead, child and young person friendly mental health services, which focus on your needs, should be available.
- Provide more support for children with mental health problems in their community.
- Look over the current laws on child mental health and be sure that the best interests and the views of the child are properly taken



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into account when treating children and young people under 16. This is particularly important when thinking about taking a child into hospital for treatment, or when they don't want the treatment to happen.

The government should also:

- Carefully collect information on how much, and how often certain types of drugs called 'psychotropic drugs' are prescribed to children. This information should be available to everyone.
- Make sure that medicine is given to children and young people only as a last resort for mental health issues. This should happen only after careful consideration of the

child's needs and their best interests. If affected, you and your parents should be told about possible side effects, and other types of treatments.

- Keep a close check to see when Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and similar disorders are being diagnosed and find out why they are being diagnosed more now than in the past, this should include the possible causes of ADHD. This should also help to make sure it isn't being diagnosed incorrectly.

What are Psychotropic Drugs?

These are medications that can affect the mind, emotions and behaviour, for example Ritalin and Concerta.

What's the situation in NI?

Mental ill health is one of the main health issues for teenagers in Northern Ireland but services are currently underfunded and until recently there has not been enough research to show the full scale of the problem. We know that the number of anti-depressant prescriptions, hospital visits for self-harm and primary school children with emotional behavioural problems have all been increasing over the past number of years. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) receives less than 8% of the budget for mental health services in Northern Ireland even though Government has said it should receive 10%. Waiting times for children and young people to get the help they need have also increased over recent years.



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In 2018 we asked the government to:

1. Make sure that all young people are able to access support when and where they need it - this requires increased mental health spending for under 18s;
2. Collect better information about levels of need and the difference services are making so that the right services are in place; and
3. All Government Departments should be doing more to promote good mental health in young people, including addressing stigma.

So how is NI doing at meeting children's right to effective mental health care?

In 2018 NICCY produced a review of children and young people's experiences of mental health services called 'Still Waiting'. This made 50 recommendations on how to improve services- and covered things like working more effectively, improving access to help, supporting adults who work with children and young people, making improvements to specialist support/ flexible treatment options, providing better support for young people moving from child to adult services, improving mental health awareness and understanding, and supporting young people with additional needs. NICCY has been watching government progress on these recommendations and is pleased that government departments have been working together to make an action plan to improve services, however funding to make all these changes is still not in place.

One positive step is that a youth wellbeing study has been carried out to help us to better understand mental health problems among children and young people in Northern Ireland.ⁱⁱ This study shows that mental health problems are common in children and young people in Northern Ireland with 1 in 8 experiencing anxiety or depression – this is 25% higher than other areas in the UK. Now that more is known, NICCY will keep an eye on how Government makes improvements to mental health services for children and young people.

Covid-19 has had a negative impact on some children and young people's mental health and has changed the way in which they access support / services. Services are using a lot more technology to support young people, some people will like this, but it is important for services to ask young people about these changes to make sure they are working well. As pressure on all areas of the health service increases it is important to keep children and young people's mental health and well-being a priority and continue to plan long term for effective mental health services that uphold the rights of all children and young people.



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Our recommendations to Government:

1. Use the findings and recommendations from NICCY's 'Still Waiting' review to develop children and young people's mental health services. Funding must be distributed to make sure services continue to improve in the long term.
2. Prioritise improvements in the areas where we see the worst breaches of children's rights. Government must also make sure they show how they spend money effectively to make improvements to children and young people's mental health and well-being.
3. Make sure that support is in place to deal with the impact of Covid-19 on mental health and well-being. This has to include groups of children who are at particular risk including; those who already have mental health problems or disability and children and young people affected by domestic violence, abuse or poverty.

Further Reading

[Still Waiting](#) – A Rights Based Review of Mental Health Services and Support for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland

[Mental Health of Children and People in NI](#) – Results of the prevalence survey of mental health and well-being