Children and Young People Version

Still Waiting- Mental Health Review

NICCY Progress Update Monitoring Report Feb 2021

Introduction

The job of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) is to promote and safeguard children and young people’s rights and best interests. The Commissioner also makes to make sure Government does the same.

It is important for the Commissioner and her team to know when children and young people are being treated differently to others based on their age or other characteristics. The Commissioner also wants to understand children and young people’s thoughts and concerns so she can tell Government what they need to do to improve services to make sure all children and young people can fully enjoy their rights.

Article 24 of the UNCRC says that all children and young people have a right to the best possible health and access to services that promote and maintain good health. This applies to both physical and mental health.

In September 2018, NICCY published a Rights Based Review of Mental Health Services and Support for Children and Young People - ***‘Still Waiting’****[[1]](#footnote-1)* A big focus of this report was to give young people who have faced mental health problems a chance to share their experiences of mental health support and services. We then used this information to help Government understand what changes need to be made to make services better.

The ‘Still Waiting’ report included recommendations across 8 different areas where improvement to children and young people’s services were needed. A working group, known as an Interdepartmental Group (IDG), was set up by Government to be responsible for making these changes. Each year, this group publishes a report to show what it is doing to improve services and support. NICCY monitors this report to show how they are progressing the recommendations in the ‘Still Waiting’ Report.

Progress Against Actions

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| **Progress Rating - Colour Key** | |
| Green | Clear progress |
| Yellow | Some progress or potential |
| Red | No progress |

We want to keep young people up to date on the progress government is making on the ‘Still Waiting’ recommendations. The table below uses a colour code to show how government is progressing against key recommendations.

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| **Key Area** | **Action** | **Progress rating** |
| **1. Working Effectively** | Set up a project board that includes all of the key organisations that work on children and young people’s mental health. This board should create an action plan to address all of these recommendations | Clear progress |
| Allocate additional money to promote children and young people’s mental health, and support them when they have poor mental health | Some progress or potential |
| Collect better information about levels of need, the services provided and the difference services are making, so that the right services are in place | Some progress or potential |
| Make sure all services, including health, education and youth and community organisations can work together to create a mental health support system for children and young people that best meets their needs | Some progress or potential |
| Gather regular information on mental health need, and information on young people using services. | Clear progress |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  The Government working group set up to take NICCYs recommendations forward are very organised and committed, but we need to see more funding and more people working in this area to see a difference.  It needs to be much easier to get access to information about mental health services and  how they are operating. On a positive, the first youth mental health survey was published this year. Government has said they will use this information to plan and deliver mental health services. | | |

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| **Key Area** | **Action** | **Progress rating** |
| **2. Accessing help**  Removing barriers that stop young people accessing services | Make sure young people can access the right service as quickly as possible, by removing barriers and making sure professionals have clear instructions about the services that are available and how young people can access them. | No progress |
| Give young people more options about how to make an appointment with Community CAMHS and greater control and choice of appointment times. | No progress |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  Data shows that the number of young people waiting and the length of time young people are waiting are both increasing for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Psychological Therapies.  There are also too many young people who do not attend their first or second appointments with CAMHS (approximately 15-20%) and it is important that the people in charge of these services do more to understand why. CAMHS has been more flexible around when, where and how appointments take place during COVID-19, and this is something we want to continue if young people want that. | | |

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| **Key Area** | **Action** | **Progress rating** |
| **3. Supporting Adults working with Children and Young People** | Give mental health training to all professionals in contact with young people with mental health problems (eg GPs, Teachers, Social Workers, youth workers). The training should focus on making sure they respond in a sensitive, knowledgeable and age appropriate way to young people. | Some progress or potential |
| Mental health practitioners who are trained to work with young people should be attached to every GP surgery in Northern Ireland and should also be available to every primary and post primary school in Northern Ireland. | Some progress or potential |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  There is evidence that mental health awareness training is being given to some adults who work with children and young people, but this needs to be given to many more professionals.  The Government understands the benefit of having mental health practitioners in GP surgeries and schools. Work is underway to do this but it needs to happen more quickly. Further investigation should take place to show if and how these changes are helping young people. | | |

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| **Key Area** | **Action** | **Progress rating** |
| **4. Specialist Support** | Set up a dedicated telephone advice line for statutory CAMHS so that young people, parents / carers can easily access support and information while they are waiting for an appointment or between appointments; | Clear progress |
| A range of community based mental health support must be available to young people after they leave hospital, or once they are no longer seeing Community CAMHS; | Some progress or potential |
| Children and young people requiring inpatient mental healthcare should never be treated on an adult mental health ward; | Some progress or potential |
| Children and young people who are having a mental health crisis and are in need of urgent specialist help should be able to access it at any time, all year round; | Some progress or potential |
| Urgently address the role and response of A&E to children and young people who come in with mental health needs. Basic standards need to be met and monitored; and | No progress |
| The care young people receive in a mental health hospital should always be the best form of support and tailored to their needs. | No progress |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  We need to see a lot more support for young people in the community which will reduce the numbers needing crisis or in-patient care. New mental health legislation, which affects children and young people’s rights when needing hospital care, needs to reviewed to make sure it offers all children and young people the same protections as adults.  NICCY is really disappointed that more work has not been done to make support better for children and young people in in a mental health emergency. Data shows a big increase in the number of young people being referred to CAMHS from Accident & Emergency; this rose from 27% in 2018/19 to 42% in 2019/20. | | |

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| **Key Area** | **Action** | **Progress rating** |
| **5. Moving from Child to Adult Services** | Make sure young people are properly prepared and supported to move from child to adult mental health services. Specific attention should be given to the support needs of young people who are not accepted for adult mental health services. | Some progress or potential |
| Develop a mental health ‘bridging service’ for young people aged 16–25 years old that allows for a smoother, flexible and young person centred transition between services. | Some progress or potential |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  The Government have told us that they are working hard to improve the way young people transfer between child and adult mental health services. This includes making sure professionals working in different services plan how the transfer happens and that they communicate clearly to make this happen smoothly. We will continue to ask them about progress and how they are involving young people in planning their own transfer and evaluating the process. | | | |

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| **Key Area** | **Action** | **Progress rating** |
| **6. Flexible Treatment Options** | Give young people a greater choice of treatment and support for their mental health problems. This should include a range of evidence based, self-help supports, psychological treatments and alternative therapies. | No progress |
| Medication should only be prescribed when all other non-drug based interventions have been considered. | No progress |
| Make sure young people are involved in decisions being made about their care and have a range of ways of giving their views on how services are delivered. | No progress |
| Make sure young people and parents / carers are clear about the standard of service they should expect and know how to make a complaint or provide feedback. | No progress |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  A lot of improvements are still needed to make sure children and young people have enough choice and flexibility in the support they get for their mental health problems.  Government needs to find out if and how mental health services are helping children and young people (this is sometimes called ‘outcomes’ or ‘outcomes data’). Data shows that approximately 40% of children and young people discharged from CAMHS do so without their goals being achieved.Government needs to look closely at treatments and services to make sure they are helping children and young people. | | |

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| **Key Area** | **Action** | **Progress rating** |
| **7. Mental Health Awareness and Understanding** | Make sure children and young people are educated about their emotional well-being and mental health. Children and young people’s well-being should be as important to the education system as their academic achievement. | Clear progress |
| Schools, colleges and alternative education should work more closely with mental health services to make sure young people get all the support that they need. | Clear progress |
| Provide information and training for parents, carers and young people at key stages and transition points across childhood. This should include how to talk about their mental health, how to recognise mental ill health, what types of supports are available and how to access them. | Clear progress |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  Lots of good planning work and investment is now in place to make sure young people get  support in school for their emotional wellbeing and mental health. It is also clear that education and health services are working together better so children and young people feel supported. | | |

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| **Key Area** | **Action** | **Progress rating** |
| **8. Young People with Additional Needs** | Make sure that young people with a learning disability can access the same range of mental health services and support as young people without a learning disability. | No progress |
| Children and Young People with drug and/or alcohol problems should have access to services that can support them with their mental health and substance use at the same time. This must include specialist intensive community support and inpatient care. | No progress |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  Not enough is being done by Government to make sure young people with a learning disability or drug/alcohol problems are getting mental health support and services that are tailored well enough to their needs.  Government has said it will focus on making improvements in the services for children and young people with additional needs this year. | | |

Conclusion

We are very worried about the impact the pandemic is having on the emotional wellbeing and mental health of all children and young people. NICCY will publish a report later this year, which looks at the impact of COVID-19 on children’s rights. Increased mental health need due to COVID-19 means that it is even more important services get better. NICCY welcomes the IDG’s progress update report, however we are disappointed that more progress has not been made against actions. NICCY understands the difficulties that COVID-19 has created for making progress in some areas. In the year ahead we look forward to working with Government and the NICCY Youth Panel to make the changes needed to improve the experience of children and young people accessing mantal health services and support.

1. A children and young people of the report is available from [www.niccy.org/StillWaiting](http://www.niccy.org/StillWaiting) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)