

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

- ⊕ Even before the pandemic, waiting lists were a growing problem which affected children and young people's access to healthcare.
- ⊕ 41% of Primary 7 pupils and 52% of 16-year-olds felt their mental and emotional health had worsened during the pandemic. 30% of children and young people's felt their physical health had worsened during lockdown.
- ⊕ The pandemic has affected infants, children and young people's health and access to health care in many ways. Mental health has been one of the most discussed impacts of the pandemic and particularly so for children and young people.
- ⊕ The stress, anxiety and disruption experienced by children and young people with health needs or living with family members who are vulnerable to the virus must be recognised.
- ⊕ The closure of schools has had a big impact on children and young people because they are much more than a place of learning - they also have a key role in the health and learning of children and young people with special educational needs or disability. Access to early years services have been a big loss for pre-school children.

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“My mental health had worsened and my physical appearance had changed, so I was mostly concerned about others perceiving me in negative ways after not seeing them for over 6 months.”

(Young person, Young Life and Times Survey)

WHAT GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO DO

- ⊕ Work across departments and services to make sure children and young people's health is prioritised.
- ⊕ Take a child rights approach to planning services for all children and young people and when designing services for children with additional support needs.
- ⊕ Have a particular focus on children and young people when tackling waiting lists.
- ⊕ Make sure the NI Executive Covid Recovery Plan includes a range of emotional wellbeing and mental health services to meet the needs of infants, children, and young people, and their parents/carers.
- ⊕ Evaluate changes made to child health services in response to COVID-19, keeping those which delivered better for children and young people.

