Children and Young People Version

Still Waiting- Mental Health Review

NICCY Progress Update Monitoring Report Feb 2022

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’***. 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. NICCY puts all of this information on the [Still Waiting Webpage](https://www.niccy.org/about-us/our-current-work/mental-health-review-still-waiting/still-waiting-a-rights-based-review-of-mental-health-services-and-support-for-children-and-young-people-in-northern-ireland/) of the NICCY Website.

Progress Against Actions

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| **Progress Rating - Colour Key** | |
| Green | Action Achieved |
| Yellow | Action not complete- work ongoing |
| Red | Action not yet achieved |

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 if actions are achieved, ongoing or not started.

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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 | Action Achieved |
| Allocate additional money to promote children and young people’s mental health, and support them when they have poor mental health | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| Collect better information about levels of need, the services provided and the difference services are making, so that the right services are in place | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| 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 | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| Gather regular information on mental health need, and information on young people using services. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  The Government working group set up to take NICCYs recommendations forward are very committed. Since last year, the working group have changed the action plan to make sure the actions are clearer. NICCY has also recommended that they make a child and young person friendly version of the mental health action plan so young people can understand how Government plan to improve supports, and so young people are in a better position to provide advice.  Extra funding has been given to mental health services for children, but it is still not clear how much is needed overall to make sure every child or young person has access to all the support they need.  It is still not easy to get information about how many young people are using mental health services, what services they are using and how long they are waiting. The Government  needs to provide this information on their website so anyone can find it. | | |

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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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| Give young people more options about how to make an appointment with Community CAMHS and greater control and choice of appointment times. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  The number of young people waiting, and the length of time young people are waiting for CAMHS is still too high. There is not enough people trained in psychological therapies to ensure all young people can get suitable support when they need it, and the number of prescriptions being given to under 18’s is not coming down.  Data is showing a fall in the number of young people that are missing their first or review appointments for Step 3 (core) CAMHS. The move to CAMHS services doing more clinical appointments online or by telephone may be a reason for the decrease in non-attendance. The pandemic has meant that CAMHS has been more flexible around when, where and how appointments take place during COVID-19, and this is something we want to see 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 (e.g., 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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| 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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  GPs and child health services have been given training on when and how to refer young people to CAMHS- this is positive, but Government needs to review whether this training is making it easier for adults to signpost / refer young people to the support they need.  The Government understands the benefit of having mental health trained staff in GP surgeries and this is underway. The government also has plans to attach a CAMHS worker to secondary schools and is already taking steps to put therapy / counselling programmes in all primary schools. All these changes need to happen more quickly, and it is important to monitor if they are helping young people to get the right support more quickly. | | |

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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. | Action not  complete-  work ongoing |
| 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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| Children and young people requiring inpatient mental healthcare should never be treated on an adult mental health ward. | Action not yet  achieved |
| 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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| 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. | Action not  complete-  work ongoing |
| The care young people receive in a mental health hospital should always be the best form of support and tailored to their needs. | Action not  complete-  work ongoing |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  We need to see a lot more support for young people in the community which will reduce the number needing crisis or in-patient care.  The Government is setting up a regional mental health crisis service, to offer specialist help for those experiencing a mental health crisis, but NICCY is really concerned about the increasing numbers of children and young people being referred to CAMHS from Emergency Departments (ED) because these are often not the best place for young people to get support. In 2020/21, there was 949 occasions when young people were referred to CAMHS from ED departments. | | |

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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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| 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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  The Government are continuing to develop plans to improve the way young people move between child and adult mental health services, and we have been told that this work will be done as part of the mental health strategy.  We are concerned that nothing has happened yet that would make a visible difference to how young people experience the move between child and adult services. We have also asked government to think about the type of support that needs to be in place for young people that don’t move to adult services. | | | |

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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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| Medication should only be prescribed when all other non-drug based interventions have been considered. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| 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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| 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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| **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. There aren’t enough psychological therapies, if young people were given other options it may lead to less need for prescribing medication.  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 the goals in their care plan being fully achieved.Government needs to look closely at treatments and services to make sure they are helping children and young people.  Government have also told us that they are looking at ways to increase young people’s involvement in improving services and when decisions need to be made about their own care. We have told them that this is really important and needs to be prioritised. | | |

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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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| 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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| 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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  Education and health services are committed to working together better so children and young people feel supported. 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.  Government should make sure all schools measure and support the well-being of pupils and we need to see more evidence of this through embedding wellbeing throughout the school day and including wellbeing education in pupils day to day schoolwork.  Government also needs to make sure that school inspectors look at how well schools are including wellbeing in children’s education and school life, and to provide them with support if they could do better. Our government also needs to find a way of measuring wellbeing. | | |

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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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| 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. | Action not  complete- work ongoing |
| **Reason(s) for Rating**  Not enough is being done by Government to make sure young people with a learning disability or those with drug and / or alcohol problems are getting mental health support and services that are tailored to their needs. We have been told that this work will be taken forward as part of the mental health strategy and the substance misuse strategy, it is really important that this happens quickly. | | |

Conclusion

We are pleased that the actions from the Still Waiting Action Plan are being linked to the Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031, as this is the roadmap for improving the mental health of the whole population. There have been some new roles developed across Government, this includes a Director of Mental Health and a Child and Adolescent Mental Unit in the Department of Health, we hope this will help to ensure children’s needs are part of all decision making.

We are disappointed that more has not been done to achieve actions in the Still Waiting Action Plan. Although there has been a lot of planning work, there is less evidence of things being done that would make a difference to the support children and young people receive. The pandemic continues to have a big impact on children’s lives that has knock on effects to their emotional wellbeing and mental health. The need to make children’s mental health a top priority is more important than ever.