

27th April 2017

Dear Health Spokesperson

Mental Health Research and the General Election – Achieving Parity of Esteem

Over the last year we have seen the issue of mental health rise up the public agenda like never before. The Heads Together initiative led by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry is just the latest and most high-profile expression of a growing social movement. It is clear that the public is increasingly unwilling to tolerate a situation where three quarters of people affected by mental health problems do not receive support; that over 6,000 people die by suicide every year and it is now the biggest killer of young people; and that people with serious mental health conditions die 15 to 20 years earlier than they should.

The Alliance of Mental Health Research Funders is a group of charities committed to supporting the research that will create change in the lives of people affected by mental health problems and build a healthy and successful society.

As the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health in England recognised in 2016 it is only through research and innovation that the NHS and other public services will be able to deliver the aspiration of parity of esteem between mental and physical health. Currently less than 6% of UK health research funding is directed toward mental health despite it accounting for a quarter of ill-health. Only 2% of the people who use mental health services benefit from participating in research studies, compared to nearly 20% of cancer patients.

We want to work with the next Government to change this. The UK is well placed to be a world leader in mental health research and to reap the economic and social benefits. There is more for us to do as charities to increase public support for mental health research. But strong leadership from Government is essential. Without it the private sector will not invest in mental health research and health and other public services will continue to neglect it.

We welcomed the Five Year Forward View's recommendation of a ten year Mental Health Research Strategy and a five year Data Development plan. Both are still urgently needed. Their completion should be a priority for the next Government. The Mental Health Research Strategy needs to set out how the Government will work with people affected by mental health problems, charities, researchers, the private sector, and the NHS as well as other public services such as social care, education, criminal justice and housing that effect mental wellbeing, to ensure research is properly funded and targeted on the most important questions.

It is vital that the incoming Government prioritise the improvement of mental health of our population and particularly those communities most at risk of mental health problems. This will need a robust evidence base. Therefore the next Government will have to address the historic underfunding of mental health research and the lack of parity of investment between mental health and physical health research.

We are therefore calling on each political party to commit in their manifesto to taking the action on mental health research that is required. We would invite you to pledge to:

1. Redress the current and historic imbalance in public sector research funding that undermine commitments to parity of esteem for mental health problems; and to work with the charity sector to catalyse charitable giving for mental health research.

2. Invest in a broad vision of mental health research that is transdisciplinary and promotes the voices of people affected by mental health problems and the communities at greatest risk.
3. Commit to unblocking the barriers to research. Mental health affects all aspects of public policy. Without better data sharing between different parts of the public sector it will not be possible to address the role of physical health services, social care, housing, education and the justice system in promoting good mental health and understand the costs of poor mental health to them.
4. Give priority to the research that will make the biggest difference to people's lives, and that the people affected by mental health problems will be at the heart of deciding those priorities. We know that the biggest current gaps include children and young people's mental health, and the most effective ways to prevent mental health problems developing and how to promote positive mental well-being.

We look forward to talking to you further about the positive changes to mental health that the next Government can deliver through supporting research.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Vanessa Pinfold,
Chair of the Alliance of Mental Health Research Funders

Members

Autistica	www.autistica.org.uk
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Centre for Mental Health	www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk
The Charlie Waller Memorial Trust	www.cwmt.org.uk
The James Wentworth-Stanley Memorial Fund	www.jwsmf.org
The Matthew Elvidge Trust	www.themattthewelvidgetrust.com
Maudesley Charity	www.maudsleycharity.org
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Mind	www.mind.org.uk
Mental Health Foundation	www.mentalhealth.org.uk
Mental Health Research UK	www.mentalhealthresearchuk.org.uk
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