

# THE WELL-BEING OF YOUNG PEOPLE

## MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

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# ABOUT THIS REPORT

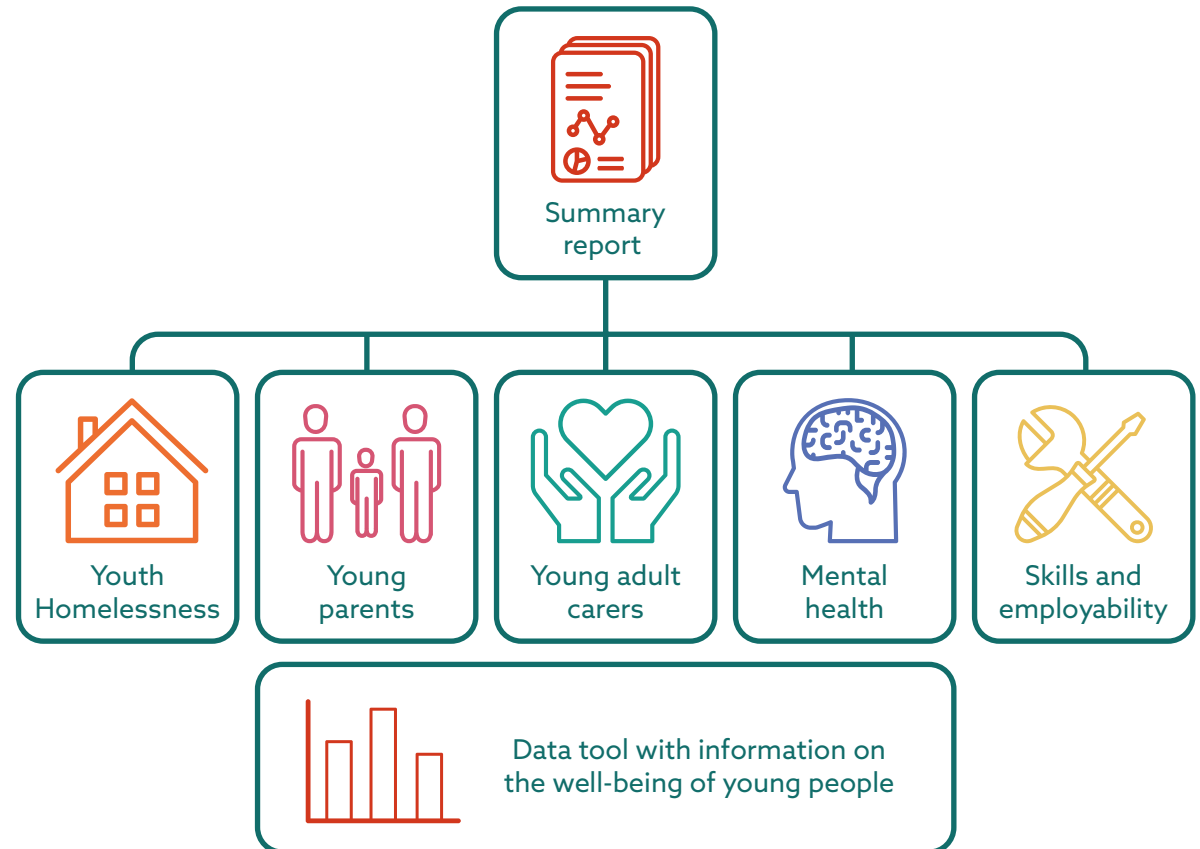
About our wider work on the well-being of young people

## Joint-working

We have been working with other organisations to examine a common theme of 'Youth'. The education inspectorate Estyn published its report on **youth support services** in July 2018. Healthcare Inspectorate Wales published its **review of healthcare services for young people** in March 2019. Care Inspectorate Wales published its **report on care experienced by children and young people** in June 2019.

## Our work

We looked at the Welsh Government's work to support the well-being of young people in Wales. Well-being is a broad concept, so we have focussed our work on five topics: youth homelessness; young adult carers; young parents; mental health; and skills and employability. We are publishing seven products based on our work, including this report. The diagram provides a link to each product.



## About our work on mental health services

We looked at mental health because improving mental health services is a priority for the Welsh Government. Poor mental health and well-being can have a negative impact on all aspects of a person's life.

This report is not a comprehensive audit of mental health services for young people. Schools, higher and further education, youth workers, community groups, third-sector organisations, and other public sector organisations can all support young people's mental health and well-being. GPs and local primary mental health services can help people of all ages who have mild to moderate mental health conditions. Specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) can help young people under 18 years old with a complex mental illness. Young people aged 18 and over with a complex mental illness can get specialist help from adult mental health services. Our focus is what the Welsh Government does to support organisations to improve young people's mental health and well-being. We give our observations based on interviews with Welsh Government officials and organisations working with young people. We also reviewed Welsh Government strategies, plans, research evidence and statistics. The diagram provides an overview of this report and you can use it to move to the different sections that explain what we found.



### A picture of young people's mental health

One in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem in their lifetime. Half of all mental health problems begin by age 14.



### What is the Welsh Government trying to achieve

The general aim is that children and young people have good mental well-being and have access to appropriate support when they need it.



### Who else is involved

Lots of different organisations have a role to play in supporting young people to maintain and improve their mental health and well-being.



### How much is being spent?

It is not entirely clear how much is being spent on mental health for all ages or young people in particular as support is given in different ways within different organisations.



### Opportunities for improvement in the Welsh Government's approach

As the Welsh Government develops its approach to improving young people's mental health it could keep checking whether the changes it is introducing are enabling joined-up support across public services.

# A PICTURE YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH

## Around one in four children in the UK show some signs of mental ill health.

Half of all mental health problems begin by the age of 14. Three quarters start by the time people reach their mid-20s.

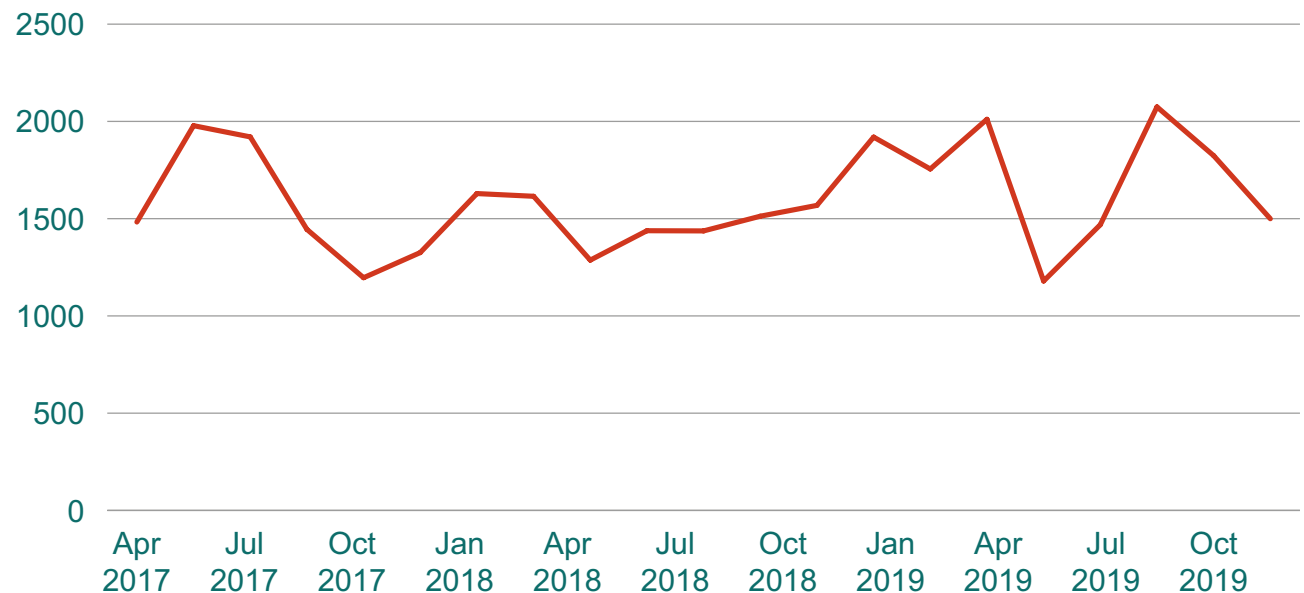
**A recent UK report** found that girls' happiness relating to their physical appearance and life as a whole has decreased over time. They were generally less happy and twice as likely to self-harm than boys. In 2019, the **Prince's Trust Youth Index**<sup>1</sup> showed that young people's happiness and confidence across all areas of their lives was the lowest since the index began in 2009. Around three quarters of respondents from Wales said they feel stressed or anxious 'often' or 'always'. Young people in Wales were more likely to feel anxious when comparing themselves to others on social media and to say it creates an 'overwhelming pressure' to succeed<sup>2</sup>.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 Based on a national survey of 2,162 young people aged 16-25 years living in the UK. 205 respondents were living in Wales.
- 2 The 2018 Princes Trust Youth Index showed that young people in Wales were more likely than those in England to worry about: their future, finances, not being 'good enough' in general, not knowing what they want in life, and the economic climate. The 2019 Index did not ask the same question about what young people worry about'.
- 3 Data prior to 2017 is not comparable.

The chart shows that the number of referrals to specialist CAMHS varies considerably from month to month<sup>3</sup>. [Click here to see an interactive version of the charts in this section.](#)

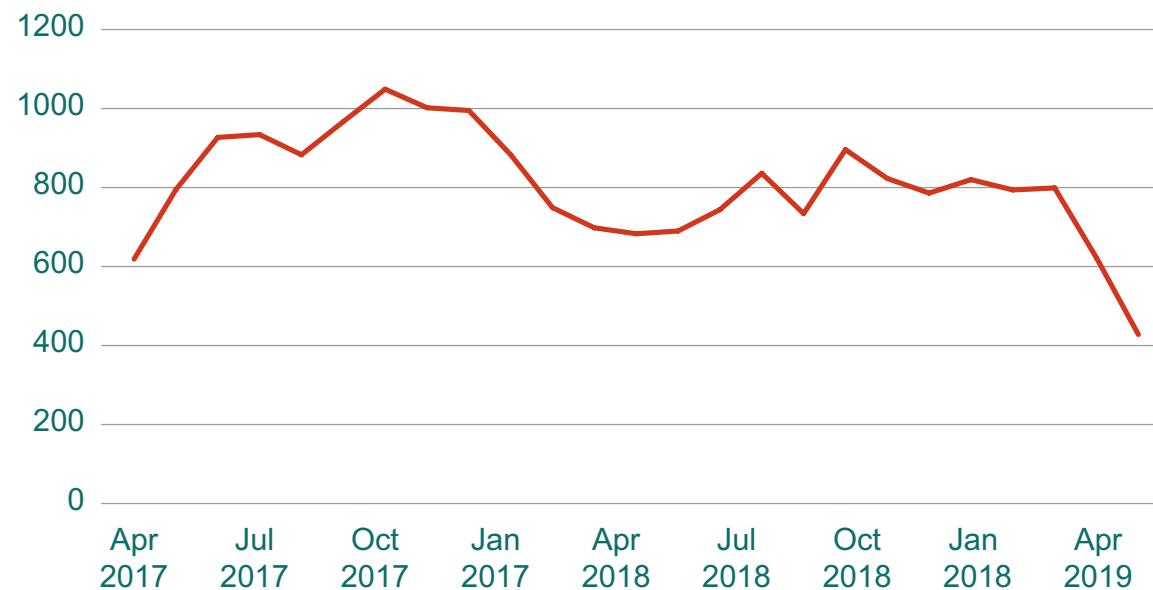
## Number of CAHMS referrals



Source: Outpatient Referral Dataset, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, NHS Wales Informatics Service

The chart shows that the total number of people waiting for specialist CAMHS treatment increased from March 2017<sup>4</sup> to just over 1,000 in October 2017. Numbers fell to just under 428 in April 2019.

### Total number of people waiting for CAHMS treatment



Source: Referral to Treatment Times, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, NHS Wales Informatics Service

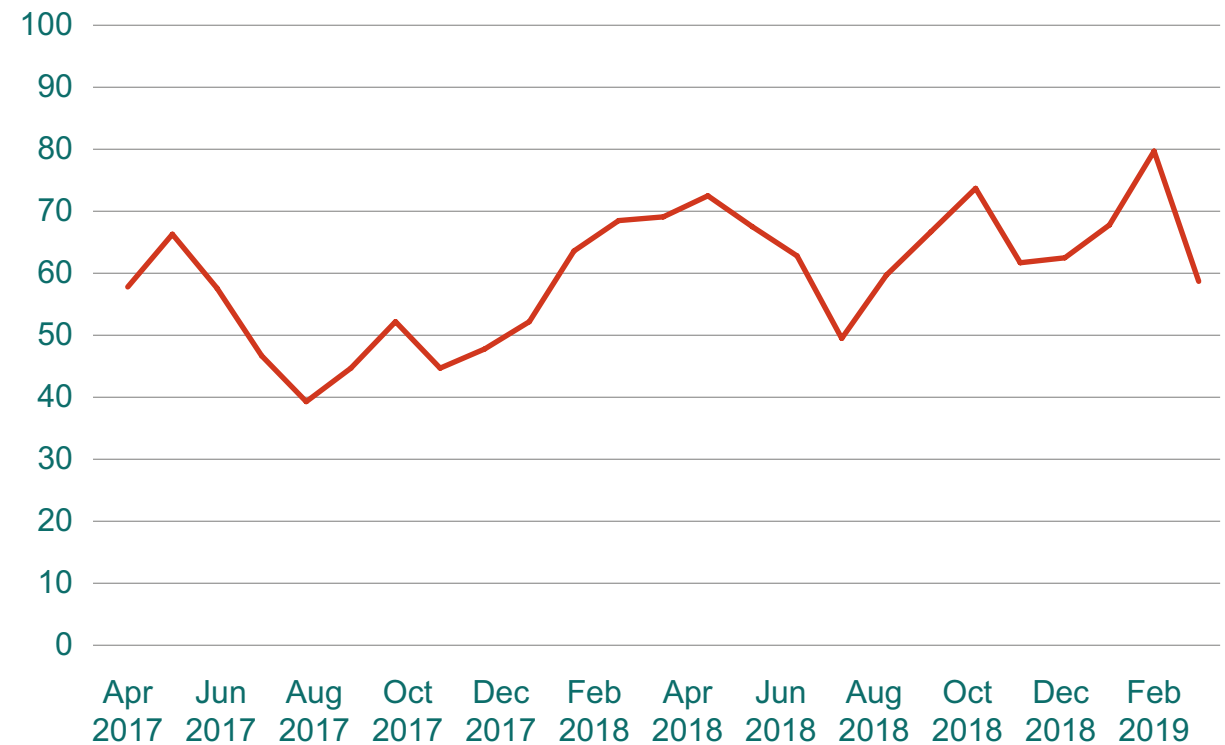
#### FOOTNOTES

4 The Welsh Government's website warns that CAMHS waiting times data before March 2017 is not accurate.

The Welsh Government’s target for specialist CAMHS is that 80% of people should have their first outpatient appointment within four weeks of being referred for treatment. The target has not been met since March 2017<sup>5</sup>. Fifty-nine per cent of patients had their first appointment within four weeks in April 2019. From March 2017 at least 99% of patients had their first appointment within 26 weeks.

[Our data tool](#)<sup>6</sup> gives more information.

### Percentage of people waiting less than 4 weeks from referral to initial outpatient appointment



Source: Referral to Treatment Times, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, NHS Wales Informatics Service

#### FOOTNOTES

5 See footnote 3.

6 Data in this report may differ slightly from our data tool which includes live data updates.

# WHAT IS THE WELSH GOVERNMENT TRYING TO ACHIEVE



The **Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010** introduced new requirements for the way public services support people with mental health problems including more support and easier ways to access support.



The Welsh Government sets out its approach to helping people with mental health problems in its strategy, **Together for Mental Health**. The strategy is about helping people of all ages, so that children's and adults' services work together to better support young people when they reach 18. It includes two specific priorities for young people.



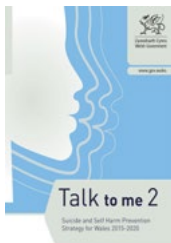
The Welsh Government set up the **Together for Children and Young People** programme in 2015 after a **National Assembly Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry** concluded that CAMHS were not meeting young people's needs. The programme is chaired by an NHS Chief Executive.

The Committee did another inquiry into the emotional and mental health of children and young people and published a report, **Mind over Matter** in April 2018. The Welsh Government has accepted or accepted in principle most of the Committee's recommendations. The Committee has welcomed developments to date but wants to see improvements happening more quickly. In August 2019, **the Committee set out in a letter a further 15 recommendations**.





The Welsh Government wants to make sure mental health problems do not stop people from achieving their potential. Its **national strategy** says that people who need support should get it as early as possible, before they reach crisis point. It wants to support schools and teachers to help children and young people by making sure services are joined up and including mental resilience in the new curriculum.



The **Welsh Government's Suicide and Self Harm Strategy 2015-2020** says some young people are particularly vulnerable to suicide and self-harm. The strategy includes six objectives to prevent suicide and self-harm for people of all ages. It says schools and colleges are 'priority places' for prevention efforts.



The **Welsh Government's Extending Entitlement Guidance 2002** sets out what support all young people are entitled to under the Learning and Skills Act 2000. **The Welsh Government commissioned a review of its guidance** in 2018 but has not decided whether to update it.

The Welsh Government has written other documents relevant to mental health services for young people.

**Good transition guidance**

**Neurodevelopment Diagnostic Assessment Pathway**

# WHO ELSE IS INVOLVED?

## Who else is involved in supporting young people's mental health?



The Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010 says that health boards and councils must decide together what services they are going to provide and who will deliver them.



Many third-sector organisations offer mental health support.



Many schools, colleges, universities<sup>7</sup> and services for young people offer counselling services for students.



GPs can refer young people of any age to Local Primary Mental Health Support Services (LPMHSS). Services can be offered by councils or health boards. For the most unwell young people, there is specialist CAMHS. At 18 years of age, young people can be treated by adult mental health services. The [Welsh Government's transition guidance](#) says health boards should support young people as they move between CAMHS and adult services.

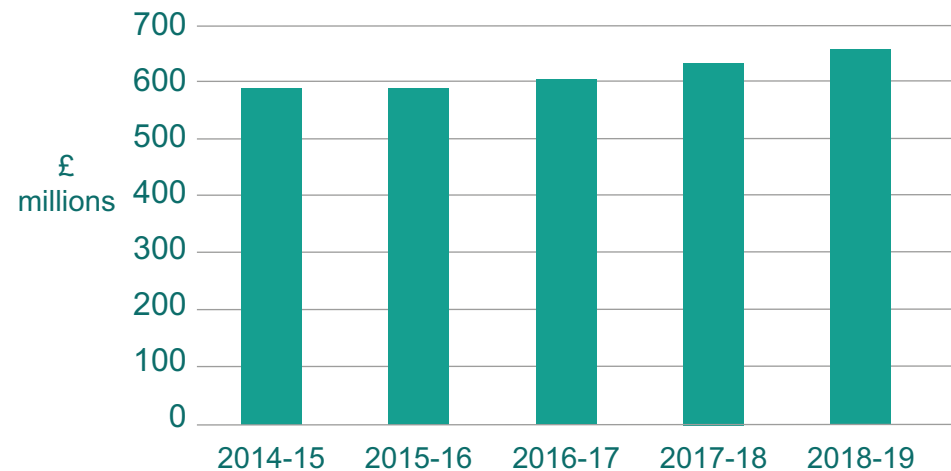
### FOOTNOTES

- <sup>7</sup> With Welsh Government financial support, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales has been working to develop a plan for well-being and health in higher education, including tackling the issue of students' mental health. HEFCW has highlighted a 54% increase in students declaring mental health conditions between 2014-15 and 2016-17.

# HOW MUCH IS BEING SPENT?

The chart below shows that the amount of money the Welsh Government gives health boards to spend on mental health services (for all ages) has increased since 2015-16.

## Mental health allocation to health boards in Wales



Source: Welsh Government

The latest Welsh Government figures show that NHS Wales spent just over £52 million on CAMHS in 2017-18. Some of this will have been for young people aged under 16. [Our data tool](#) shows CAMHS spending by health board. The Welsh Government does not break down other areas of mental health spending by age group. It would be difficult for the Welsh Government to work out how much is being spent on mental health and well-being support for 16 to 24 year olds by organisations across Wales because support is given in different ways by different organisations.

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

## Opportunities for improvement in the Welsh Government's approach

### Understanding the scale of mental health problems for young people and what help they need



The Welsh Government considers that increased awareness and reduced stigma associated with mental health are contributing to rising demand for support services. There is a wider recognition that 'mental health' is sometimes used to describe things that are not mental health problems (such as social or domestic issues<sup>8</sup>). Nevertheless, the Welsh Government and the wider public sector do not have a sophisticated understanding of the range of need across Wales. Together for Mental Health recognises there is a spectrum of need – from those who need a small amount of support to those with clinical mental illness. But there is little information about young people who need mental health support but are not classed as 'mentally ill'. The Mind Over Matter report said the Welsh Government needs to assess demand for LPMHSS for children and young people. The Welsh Government is improving its understanding of demand by analysing waiting lists and referrals. It plans to publish LPMHSS data for children under 18 by April 2020.

The Welsh Government has worked with the Together for Children and Young People programme to talk to children and young people about the kind of help they need. The Welsh Government continues to work with young people through a youth stakeholder group to develop future mental health policy. In 2018-19 it also commissioned the NHS Wales Delivery Unit to review demand and capacity of primary care CAMHS to inform future funding decisions.

### FOOTNOTES

8 Although these issues themselves may result in mental health problems.

## Understanding what services exist and gaps



Organisations working with young people consistently told us that there is not enough mental health support available, even for young people in severe distress. Many young people cannot get help from specialist CAMHS because they do not have a diagnosable mental illness. The Welsh Government does not know whether these people get help elsewhere or what other services there are to help them across the spectrum of need. It does not know how big the gaps are or whether part of the issue is because professionals do not know about the services that do exist.

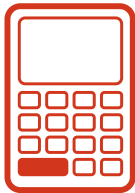
The Mind Over Matter report said that some LPMHSS are focussed on adults and are not suitable for children and young people. As a result, some GPs are 'bouncing' children and young people back to school counselling services that are unable to meet demand. The report said the Welsh Government should make a plan to improve LPMHSS for children and young people.

Many professionals have a role in supporting young people's mental health but some do not feel equipped to give the kind of support young people need. We heard that a range of professionals (including teachers, youth workers, and the police) are providing mental health support to fill in the gaps in services without enough time, expertise or resources. The Welsh Government is funding a pilot in three health boards from 2018-2020 to develop mental health support for schools. Pilots include training on mental health issues, available support and referral pathways for young people.

Organisations are concerned that the Welsh Government's focus on mental health support in schools does not cater for young people who have left or do not want to access help in school.

In January 2019, the Minister for Health and Social Services announced £7 million of Welsh Government funding to improve children and young people's mental health. The Welsh Government will use the money to implement its **response to the recommendations of the Mind Over Matter report**.

## Understanding Costs



The Welsh Government does not know how much the wider public sector is spending on different mental health interventions. It has information on specialist CAMHS spending, but CAMHS is only one of the services that should be available to young people.

The Mind Over Matter report said the information the Welsh Government gets from health boards about CAMHS spending is inconsistent and unclear. It recommended that the Welsh Government require all health boards to provide the same information, about all their emotional and mental health services for children and young people, not just CAMHS.

The Mind Over Matter report also raised concerns about the impact on school budgets of filling gaps in health services.

We do not expect the Welsh Government to break down all of its spending information by age group. However, it could do more with the information it has to understand how well its spending reflects its policy ambitions. For instance, better financial information would help the Welsh Government work out how much it spends on preventing mental health issues getting worse, and how much it spends on people in crisis.

## Joining up policy making



Organisations told us the lack of mental health support has knock-on effects across other areas of young people's lives and hampers work to help young people lead fulfilled and successful lives. The Welsh Government will not be able to achieve its priorities in other policy areas without getting to grips with the mental health problems that young people are facing.

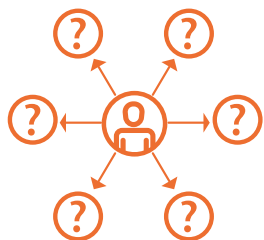
Some public services told us they are feeling the pressure of responding to mental health crises<sup>9</sup>. The police and third-sector organisations told us that the lack of help as young people first start to have mental health problems means that they are spending more of their time on mental health crises. The Mind Over Matter report said young people who are self-harming or have taken an overdose often go to Accident and Emergency because they could not get help early enough.

The Welsh Government is working across its own departments to share information and develop ways to support young people's mental health and well-being. It has set up a joint ministerial task and finish group and a team of policy officials from different departments to support its response to recommendations in the Mind Over matter report. But improved joint working within the Welsh Government has not yet led to joined-up services for young people themselves.

### ■ FOOTNOTES

9 Although some crises might be wrongly described as 'mental health' crises.

## Working out who does what



The [Welsh Government's website](#) content on child and adolescent mental health says that CAMHS offer treatment and assessment for emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties. This description risks creating a misleading impression that CAMHS covers a broad range of mental health problems. In practice, specialist CAMHS will only treat young people with a clinical mental illness but the Welsh Government's website is not clear about whether it describes specialist CAMHS or wider support for children and young people.

The Welsh Government says that referrals to specialist CAMHS of young people with lower level mental health issues are 'inappropriate'. The Mind Over Matter report said the average acceptance rate of referrals into specialist CAMHS was just 59% in 2016. We heard that organisations, GPs and other health professionals are still confused about what specialist CAMHS do, and which services they should be referring young people to. The acceptance rate for referrals has however increased since March 2018.

Some health boards are developing a one-stop-shop approach, where GPs or other professionals will be able to refer a young person to a single point of contact. This point of contact will have up-to-date information to signpost young people to the most appropriate support for them. This approach could make it easier to find out about services, but will not address gaps in services.



## Learning from and improving delivery on the ground



The Welsh Government does not have enough information about the impact or quality of CAMHS or other mental health services. During the last five years, several reports have set out<sup>10</sup> the difficulties that a lack of reliable performance information is causing. The Welsh Government is currently working on ways to improve its understanding of impact.

The Welsh Government has tended to judge success by focusing narrowly on performance information about how long people wait for CAMHS treatment. It has helped reduce long waits for CAMHS. But there is also a risk that its focus on CAMHS waiting times has led health boards to focus on ways to keep young people off their waiting lists rather than develop services to meet their needs. For instance, the Mind Over Matter report raised concerns that health boards are making CAMHS eligibility criteria stricter.

The Welsh Government could do more to understand the impact its strategy and guidance documents have had. For instance, the Mind Over Matter report said the all-age approach in Together for Mental Health led to gaps in some services for young people. It also said health boards have found it difficult to put the transition guidance into practice. The Welsh Government assessed the potential impact of its approach when it developed Together for Mental Health. But it has not reviewed the actual impact on young people of the new approach.

### ■ FOOTNOTES

10 Auditor General for Wales, [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services: Follow-up Review of Safety Issues](#), December 2013

National Assembly for Wales, Children, Young People and Education Committee, Inquiry into Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), November 2014

Hafal, [Making Sense](#), January 2016

National Assembly for Wales, Children, Young People and Education Committee, [Mind Over Matter](#), April 2018

## Providing leadership



Several reports<sup>11</sup> have described the pressure on CAMHS and the need to develop a wider range of services. The Mind Over Matter report said the Welsh Government should have made more progress improving mental health services for children and young people.

Creating a whole system of support for young people requires effective leadership and co-ordination to help different sectors and services work together. When we spoke to organisations supporting young people<sup>12</sup> they told us that services were not joining up to support young people and many were not getting the help they need. Since then, the Welsh Government has started to implement the recommendations in the Mind Over Matter report. The Welsh Government is still developing its approach to improving young people's mental health so it is too early to know whether changes are making a difference to young people themselves.

### ■ FOOTNOTES

11 See footnote 10.

12 We did our research during Spring and Summer 2018.

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