



The All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood

NEWS RELEASE

Chair: Steve McCabe MP Co-Chair: Baroness Floella Benjamin OBE. Vice-Chairs: Julie Elliott MP, Dame Diana Johnson MP, Lord McColl of Dulwich, Adam Holloway MP

Formal details of the Group on the Parliamentary website are available

at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmallparty/210310/fit-and-healthy-childhood.htm>

NEW REPORT CLAIMS THAT THE PANDEMIC HAS EXPOSED 'SHOCKING DISPARITIES' IN THE QUALITY AND PROVISION OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR THE UK'S CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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The All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood's 19th Report has been published as the vaccine roll-out fuels hopes for an end to the COVID nightmare. But the Report claims that unless the mental health crisis for children and young people exposed by the pandemic is addressed urgently by Government, it may become entrenched long after lockdowns are history.

Introducing the Report, APPG Chair, **Steve McCabe MP** said:

'The Government has talked a lot about a post-pandemic need to 'level-up' so Ministers should subject the mental health provision and services that we are offering our children and young people to some serious scrutiny.

Far from 'levelling up', the pandemic has exposed the UK as a patchwork of mental health disparity, with a fluctuating standard of provision, courtesy of factors ranging from individual family circumstance and socioeconomic status to deep-rooted and stubborn funding failings; both at service and research levels – and even dependent upon which UK country you happen to live in!

What the best available research shows, is that mental illness is common in even our youngest children; that one child in every seven in primary school class will have a diagnosable mental illness and that a shocking 75% of mental illnesses begin before the age of eighteen. According to the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the greatest challenge facing children in 20 years time will be mental health problems.

*Unless the Government uses **all** the information thrown up by the pandemic about the state of children and young people's mental health and then discerns, learns and acts – we will be walking, 'eyes wide-shut' into the type of long-lasting communal health disaster that will not be capable of a fix via 'two jabs in the arm,' a mask and a booster.'*



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41 academics, charity sector and children's play specialists have developed the Report. It was sponsored by **MQ Mental Health Research** and **Chief Executive, Lea Milligan** added:

'The most vulnerable in our society are the ones who will be carrying the heaviest burden post-pandemic. The increase in mental illness in the UK was already an alarming trend before COVID struck. Now it is an emergency.

The Government has a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity. By implementing this Report's recommendations, they can help create a resilient generation, able to cope with the uncertainties of the future. Without action, many of our children could face a lifetime of depression, anxiety and other mental illnesses.

Our response to this crisis our children face must be proportional; we must work together, across all nations in the UK and across sectors. Most importantly, we must invest.

It is vital that we get our response right to protect our children's futures. It is up to us to give the COVID generation a voice.'

Key recommendations from the Report include:

- A radical expansion of the research base; what interventions work best for whom and why? What are the barriers to effective care? How best to identify and support vulnerable sub-groups and research into the ways in which COVID-19 affects children and young people?
- Improved access of regularly collected and survey data, including the collection of high-quality data about all children and young people including key demographics
- Cross-national strategy, prioritising the best initiatives of a devolved UK including a Joint Policy Statement by the four Children's Commissioners, a collegiate approach on behalf of the four Home Nations and a permanent global standing Post Covid Forum with membership across the international spectrum; possibly convened by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations



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(UN) in the first instance. The Forum would work collectively to draw lessons from this pandemic and to deter another. The mental health and wellbeing of children and young people would be paramount in all strategies.

- New and substantial Government funding, ring-fenced for children and young people's mental health; marrying resourcing with need and levelling up historic under-funding
- Effective economic support for disadvantaged families to include a Strategic Review of benefit systems and school meal provision as a recognised vital component in children's mental health and wellbeing
- Integration of the third sector and lived experience into statutory support, schools and health services with the voices of children (regardless of their chronological age or developmental ability) their parents and carers empowered and placed at the centre of all strategies designed to improve their welfare
- Root and branch revision of CAMHS to include consideration of other methods of approach to wellbeing and mental health before embarking on the clinical waiting list, referral and hospital procedure
- Universal support for all children to include public health and education services working together and adopting a 'whole school ethos' in the promotion of mental health with the best of current provision within schools rolled out to all the UK's devolved nations. Integral aspects of a healthy childhood to be available to all including outdoor play and access to outdoor spaces. The reduction in the number of playgrounds should be halted and reversed and outdoor play included in the National Curriculum
- A shift in national strategy towards positive policies to support mental wellness and enhance psychological wellbeing and resilience throughout the life course.



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Lead Author **Helen Clark** said that now was the time to ensure that mental health is understood to be integral to a thriving and productive society:

'I hope that the Government will find this work useful in helping to prevent what Dr Adrian James, President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists said on the 28th December 2020 could be 'The greatest threat to mental health since the second world war' with '1.5 million children predicted to need new or additional mental health support as a result of this crisis.'

All the mainstream media outlets have sung from the same hymn sheet for months now, with headlines presaging a forthcoming mental health catastrophe that should have alerted even Government in its most 'boosterish' vein to take action.

Yet, in the face of evidence from the most authoritative academic and scientific sources, the UK Government has adopted a 'laid-back' approach to children and young people's mental health. The Children's Commissioner has never been invited to speak at the regular national press conferences and despite multiple requests from MPs on all sides of the House, the Government has yet to make a Ministerial Statement on a Mental Health Recovery Strategy, preferring to let ad hoc 'announcements' trickle out via Written Parliamentary Question responses.

This mental health crisis is a ticking time bomb and yet the UK has some of the best scientists, academics, and health, education and childcare experts in the world today!

*Working **with** them, our Government could avert what is gathering momentum in front of us and really 'build back better' by creating mental health services for children and young people for the benefit of a UK that is the sum of its parts – not just part of the whole.'*

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