

Project scope

Children and young people's mental health



ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

AUDITOR GENERAL 

Prepared by Audit Scotland
October 2017

Background

Improving mental health and wellbeing is a major public health challenge for Scotland. The social and economic costs of mental ill health are high. In 2009/10, the Scottish Association for Mental Health estimated that the total cost of mental ill health in Scotland was £10.7 billion per year. The life expectancy of people with serious mental health problems is ten to 20 years lower than the general population.¹

Supporting children and young people's health and wellbeing is at the core of a number of Scottish Government policies, including GIRFEC (Getting it Right For Every Child) and the Curriculum for Excellence. The importance of giving children the best start in life and enabling them to achieve their full potential is also embedded in the National Performance Framework. The Scottish Government's Mental Health Strategy, published in March 2017, emphasises the need to improve early intervention and prevention in order to achieve improved outcomes for children and young people.²

Children and young people can have a range of emotional, behavioural and hyperactivity disorders which affect their mental wellbeing. Mental health problems include depression, anxiety, eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder and self-harm. One in eight children aged ten to 15 report symptoms of mental ill health,³ with most adult mental health problems first occurring in adolescence.⁴ Mental health problems in childhood and adolescence are also associated with poorer outcomes in later life, such as an increased likelihood of leaving school with no qualifications, unemployment and substance misuse. Evidence suggests that early intervention may help reduce the severity and persistence of mental disorders.⁵

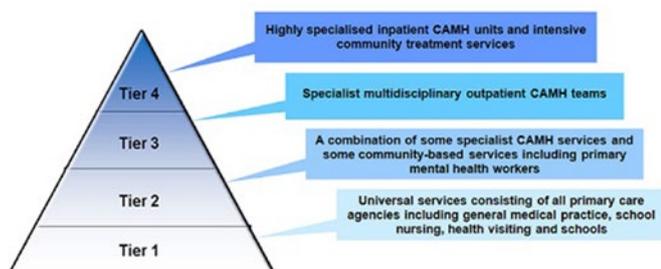
Some groups of children and young people are more at risk of suffering from poor mental health. Forty-five per cent of looked-after children in Scotland have mental health problems.⁶ Young people in the most deprived areas are also more likely to experience mental health problems than those in the least deprived.⁷

Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) in Scotland are delivered in a four tier model (**Exhibit 1**). Services are delivered by NHS boards, councils, the third sector and the private sector. Tier one support includes promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing, general advice and support for less severe mental health problems, early identification of problems and referral to specialist services. This is provided by practitioners working in universal services who are not

Exhibit 1

Structure of child and adolescent mental health services

There are four different levels of treatment depending on the severity of the mental health problem.



Source: Integrated care pathways for mental health, Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

mental health specialists, such as GPs, teachers, social workers and health visitors. Children and young people with an identified need can be referred to specialist CAMH services, which fall within tiers two to four.

Why are we doing this audit?

Audit Scotland published An Overview of Mental Health Services in 2009. This report looked at mental health services for children and adults across Scotland. The audit found that provision of specialist child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) varied considerably across Scotland, and that there was a lack of early intervention and prevention services. It also found evidence of children and young people waiting a long time to access services.

There is evidence of increasing pressure on children and young people's mental health services and a rising demand.⁸ The Scottish Government has set a standard that 90 per cent of children and young people should wait no longer than 18 weeks between being referred to specialist CAMH services and receiving treatment. This standard has been in place since December 2014. At 31 March 2017, this target was not being met nationally, with 83.6 per cent of children and young people receiving treatment within 18 weeks.⁹

What will the scope of the audit be?

The overall aim of the audit is to answer the question: how effectively are children and young people's mental health services delivered and funded in Scotland? The audit will look at provision of services across all four tiers of CAMHS and consider children and young people from birth up to the age of 18 years old, except where CAMHS services extend to the age of 25. This will include both the voluntary sector and the private sector where relevant. The audit will seek to answer the following questions:

- How effective are the delivery and funding of mental health and wellbeing services across Scotland in meeting the needs of children and young people?
- What are the main factors supporting and impeding the delivery of children and young people's mental health and wellbeing services, at both a national and local level?

- How effectively is the Scottish Government providing strategic direction to support the improvement of outcomes for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing?

Given the large number and scale of services that could fall within the remit of this audit, we will use case studies to allow us to look in detail at different examples of service delivery at a local level. This will allow us to assess the extent and effectiveness of joint working between NHS boards, integration authorities, councils and other agencies.

How will we carry out the audit?

We will gather evidence using a range of methods, including:

- analysis of national and local data, for example, the number of children and young people being referred to CAMHS, the time children and young people wait for a CAMH service to be provided and the workforce employed to deliver this service
- reviewing documents (plans, strategies and reports) from the Scottish Government, NHS boards, councils, integration authorities and other organisations
- interviews with stakeholders, including the Scottish Government, COSLA, NHS boards, councils, integration authorities and third sector organisations

- focus groups and interviews with frontline staff, including educational and clinical psychologists, school counsellors, teachers, nurses and GPs.

Throughout the audit, we will engage with children and young people, as well as their parents and carers, using a range of methods, including focus groups and surveys, to collect their views and experiences.

What impact will the audit have?

The audit will help support the improvement of services to better meet the needs of children and young people by identifying examples of good practice. It will also identify barriers and challenges to effective service delivery, and what can be done to address them. The audit will highlight the views, experiences and needs of children and young people. It will improve public understanding of children and young people's mental health services in Scotland and identify areas for future audit work. The audit will also make a series of recommendations to help improve the delivery of children and young people's mental health services.

Audit timing and contacts

We plan to publish in the autumn of 2018. We are carrying out the audit on behalf of the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland. For further information, please contact Dharshi Santhakumaran, Audit Manager, on 0131 625 1729 or email: dsanthakumaran@audit-scotland.gov.uk 

Notes:

1. Risks of all-cause and suicide mortality in mental disorders: a meta-review, E. Chesney, G.M. Goodwin and S. Fazel, *World Psychiatry*, 2014 (13): 153–160.
2. *Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027*, Scottish Government, March 2017.
3. *Insights into children's mental health and wellbeing*, Office of National Statistics, October 2015.
4. Adult mental health disorders and their age at onset, P.B. Jones, *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, Jan 2013, 202 (s54) s5-s10.
5. Age of onset and timing of treatment for mental disorders, P. McGorry, R. Purcell, S. Goldstone and G.P. Amminger, *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, 2011;24(4):301-306.
6. *The mental health of young people looked after by local authorities in Scotland*, Office of National Statistics, 2004.
7. *Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey (SALSUS) 2015: Mental Wellbeing Summary Report*, Scottish Government, May 2017.
8. SPICe briefing, *Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services – Trends and Key Issues*, September 2016.
9. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Waiting Times in NHS Scotland*, Quarter ending 31 March 2017, June 2017.



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