

Audit scope

Adult mental health services

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

AUDITOR GENERAL 

Prepared by Audit Scotland

July 2022

Background

Mental health issues are very common. The Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) has estimated that around one in four people experience a mental health problem in any given year. The Scottish Government's 2017-2027 mental health strategy estimated that only one in every three people who would benefit from treatment for a mental illness was receiving it. It also estimated that people with lifelong mental health issues have a 15–20-year shorter life expectancy.

Covid-19 brought additional pressures on the population's mental health. National lockdowns meant that people were more isolated from family and friends, and access to services was impacted. The Institute for Fiscal Studies reported that mental health across the UK worsened substantially because of the pandemic. It found that the pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities – those with the poorest mental health before the pandemic, experienced the largest deterioration in their mental health.

The Mental Health Foundation reported that in 2019, a conservative estimate of costs to the Scottish economy of poor mental health amounted to £8.8 billion. These costs

include lost productivity of people living with mental health conditions, and costs incurred by unpaid informal carers such as family members.

In 2018, we reported on [children and young people's mental health](#) and made a commitment to further audit work on mental health related issues. This performance audit will focus on mental health services for adults in Scotland.

Why is this audit important?

Supporting and improving the population's mental health is a significant public health challenge that requires a coordinated response from a wide range of organisations. There is an increasing need to focus on prevention and early intervention while maintaining access to specialist services for those with severe mental health issues. This is a difficult balance to achieve.

There have been substantial funding commitments that aim to improve how mental health services are delivered. It is important to understand what impact this additional funding has had, and will have, and how well the Scottish Government, NHS boards, councils, integration authorities and

the third sector, are working together to improve how services are delivered.

What will the audit look at?

This audit will look across the wide range of services that aim to support and improve the mental health and wellbeing of adults in Scotland. We will also consider the impact of Covid-19 throughout the audit. The overall aim of this performance audit is to answer the question: How effectively are adult mental health services across Scotland being delivered? To answer this, we plan to consider the following topics:

- What progress has been made in improving adult mental health services across Scotland since the publication of the mental health strategy 2017-2027? This will include topics such as whether adults have access to timely and appropriate support that improves outcomes, how well partners work together to deliver services, and work to tackle mental health inequalities.
- How well managed are the resources for Scotland's adult mental health services? This will include workforce pressures and how these are being addressed, and how public money is used to support adults' mental health and wellbeing.
- How achievable are plans to address the ongoing and upcoming challenges facing the delivery of adult mental health services?

How will we carry out this audit?

We will use a range of evidence to develop judgements and recommendations. We will review and analyse a range of documentation and data from the Scottish Government, COSLA, NHS boards, councils, integration authorities and third sector organisations.

We will interview representatives from relevant stakeholder groups, including those outlined above. We will also seek to

incorporate the views of people with lived experience of mental health issues as part of our audit work. We will do this with the help of third sector organisations such as Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland.

We plan to use case studies to highlight areas of good practice and innovation that we find. We will also use this approach to highlight areas of particular concern.

What do we want to happen as a result?

The audit will provide an independent assessment of how well adult mental health services in Scotland are being delivered. It aims to provide assurance to the Scottish Parliament, the public and other stakeholders, enabling greater transparency and scrutiny of how adult mental health services are performing and how resources are being used. We will highlight areas of good practice and make recommendations for public bodies to implement that will support improvement.

Timetable and contact

We plan to publish the report on behalf of the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission in June 2023.

If you have any questions or would like further information about this audit please contact Eva Thomas-Tudo, Audit Manager, on 07779 961981 or by email at ethomas-tudo@audit-scotland.gov.uk.

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