

TOWARDS A MENTALLY FLOURISHING SCOTLAND: THE FUTURE OF MENTAL HEALTH IMPROVEMENT IN SCOTLAND UNISON RESPONSE

1. UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the discussion paper 'Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland: The Future of Mental Health Improvement in Scotland'. UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union representing 150,000 members delivering public services. We represent the majority of service providers in the National Health Service in Scotland representing senior managers, nursing staff at all levels, Allied Health Professionals, administrative and clerical, ancillary staff, laboratory staff, technicians and paramedics. Our members and their families as users of NHS services have a key interest in the development of this strategy.

General Statement

2. UNISON Scotland agrees generally with the general direction of travel of paper as on-going work fleshes out the skeleton of the strategy. UNISON supports the shift away from the 'medicalisation' of mental health issues and the emphasis on promoting mental health and well being, rather than reactively responding to mental illness. There is a need to support and develop mental health programmes that are shown to improve well being. A common failure, however, are schemes that attract short term funding and appear to provide beneficial results but which do not succeed in attracting recurring funding.

Action Point 1

3. Promoting mental health well being needs to be a core component of community planning and there requires to be an identification of priorities both nationally and at a local level. The promotion of pro-social behaviour is vital to the encouragement of mental well being. Individuals need to feel part of their community and to participate in community activities. This can only be done by ensuring that community facilities are available and affordable. We must promote a sense of optimism amongst members of our community. While there are various causes of poor mental health, the incidence is reduced and the effects limited, when people feel autonomous and have control of their lives and a sense of purpose. Undoubtedly however, the most significant factors that have an affect on mental well being are income and health. We need to target areas of economic deprivation and poor physical health if , as a community, we wish to have any effective strategy to improve mental wellbeing.

Action Point 2

4. People with mental health problems also run a greater risk of developing a number of serious physical health problems such as heart disease, respiratory problems and diabetes. Life expectancy is also reduced. There is a need both to address individuals' mental health needs when suffering from certain physical conditions, especially those of a chronic nature which can lead to social isolation.

5. Further work also requires to be done around the links between alcohol and substance misuse and mental health problems. One of the main factors leading to alcohol and substance misuse is peer pressure. It is vitally important that national education programmes continue to emphasise the validity of being able to withstand such pressures. Linked to this is the need to offer those particularly in the 14 to 25 years age group social alternatives to alcohol and other substances. This means ensuring adequate funding in work, educational and leisure activities.

Action Point 3

6. There is a need to encourage open and free discussion of the issues of suicide and self harm. At times it appears that to discuss such matters is to encourage and promote them. This needs to be challenged. There needs to be improved training and multi-agency training of health and social care in identifying and managing the risk of suicidal and self harming behaviour. There appeared to be benefits from the national media campaign around the 'Choose Life' strategy and this should be continued. Education and development in this area needs to be interlinked with alcohol and drug strategy.

Action Point 4

7. Emphasis required on importance of community groups and need to fund these appropriately. Commitment is required to fund essential programmes such as adult literacy which can otherwise lead to reduction in self esteem and social isolation.

8. It also means that local authorities must provide for the letting of council facilities at rates that are affordable to community groups in order to promote social inclusion. This is one of the main negative consequences of schools being built using **private finance initiative** which makes the letting of community subject to considerations of financial return.

Action Point 5

9. UNISON strongly supports the commitment to health promotion/education in schools, particularly but not exclusively in primary schools. Issues of mental well being could link into Personal/Social Development education and Citizenship in schools. Rolling out of the pilot schemes on free school meals would encourage physical health and the knock on effect on mental health. Also a need to provide good physical education within school curriculum.

10. The importance of promoting healthy living is paramount within schools and the Government should re-consider potential proposals to abolish the role of **School Nurse** and replace with a generic community health nurse. It is vital to maintain the link between named health professionals and schools. Development of a generic nurse will always mean that the health education/promotion role will suffer at the hands of dealing with the needs of immediate clinical care.

Action Point 6

11. A genuine debate is required around the role of Community Health Partnerships (CHPs). Are they there to identify local needs or to implement national plans and targets at a local level? There are also questions of whether CHPs need to use funding universally across their area in providing area wide services or whether they should target funding in specific localities? The same issue arises when a Health Board is not co-terminus with one local authority where individual CHPs may opt for wholly different priorities.

Other Issues

Community Mental Health Teams must be adequately resourced with appropriate skill mix and adequate information systems.

There must continue to be adequate fit-for-purpose in-patient beds, properly staffed, including provision for locally accessible acute receiving provision.

Services for Children and Young Adolescents must be properly resourced and developed across Scotland.

NHS Scotland and requires to act as an exemplar employer in its treatment of staff with mental health or addiction issues, or who support close relatives through its employment policies and practice.