

GENERAL ELECTION 2015

# PRIORITISING MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH





# WHY MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH MATTERS

We all know someone with a mental health problem and can see how lives would be improved with better treatments and support and less stigma. Mental health research saves lives, relieves significant distress and improves quality of life. It also benefits the whole of our society by generating social and economic benefits that contribute to thriving communities built upon resilience, reduced levels of mental ill-health and less stigma and discrimination.

Yet mental health research is underfunded and under-prioritised by government. We are missing opportunities to achieve breakthroughs seen in other areas of healthcare that could transform people's lives and enhance wellbeing.

The 2015 General Election is a landmark opportunity for political parties to build on growing public awareness of mental health and the value of all health and social care research.

We believe there is a vital role for government leadership in championing mental health research. We can build on public awareness of the gains that have been made in cancer and dementia to make the UK a global leader in mental health research.

## **Gill Grimshaw, carer:**



I cannot make my son better but boosting mental health research would give us both some hope for the future. My son has had severe mental health problems for over ten years and spends several months in hospital most years.

We can see that his disease impacts on his physical as well as his mental health. We can also see how much it costs to treat his disease. Since he became ill we have met so many people who have been pushed to the margins of society by mental ill health, trapped at home unable to be economically active, ending up in the criminal justice system or on the streets.

Not only are the services my son uses under-resourced but precious little new knowledge and data is being developed to help us understand how money could be best spent on him. How soon can I expect priority to be given to mental health research?

# WHAT POLITICAL PARTIES CAN DO

## We call on all UK political parties to:

- 1.** Champion mental health research funding in General Election manifestos. The government can redress the current imbalance in publicly funded health research, influence other funders and lead the way in tackling the stigma that hinders mental health research funding.
- 2.** Seek to remove current blockages to mental health research. We cannot improve mental health and wellbeing without better quality data and information. To unblock research we need better access to high quality data about mental and physical health, improved coordination of data sharing between government departments (for example between Health, Justice and Education) and more mental health knowledge among the wider public service workforce.
- 3.** Give priority to research that will make the biggest difference to people's lives. The biggest gaps include research into children's mental health, prevention and promotion of mental wellbeing and the links between mental and physical health. Setting research priorities should begin with the knowledge and experience of people with mental health problems.

### **Dr Roxanne Keynejad, Core Trainee and Academic Clinical Fellow in General Adult Psychiatry:**



As a junior doctor starting my training in mental healthcare, I have been impressed by the current government's leadership in supporting dementia research.

However, this commitment has not been matched in funding to transform our understanding, treatment and prevention of other psychiatric disorders, despite exciting developments in genetics and genomics which stand to revolutionise the field.

I have chosen to dedicate my career to the healthcare of people living with psychiatric disorders, but without parity of investment in mental health research, the vision of supporting my patients to achieve good health in its truest sense cannot be a reality

# THE CURRENT SITUATION

- › Mental health problems account for a quarter of all ill health yet they receive less than 6% of all health research funding.<sup>1</sup>
- › Three-quarters of people with a mental health problem receive no treatment or support.<sup>2</sup>
- › The economic and social cost of mental health problems in England is £105 billion. British business loses £26 billion a year to untreated mental health problems in the workforce.<sup>3</sup>
- › 4.6 million people in England live with both a mental health problem and a long-term physical illness, costing the NHS an extra £10 billion a year. Yet public giving to mental health research is virtually non-existent in comparison to cancer, heart and circulatory problems.<sup>4</sup>
- › We do not yet understand enough about all of the causes of mental health problems, how we might prevent them, and how and why treatments and interventions work.

## Sarah Markham, mental health service user:



I have been an inpatient service user for the last 7 years of my life. This experience and my service user involvement work for the NIHR Mental Health Biomedical Research Centre at King's College, University of London has shown me the urgent need to develop more precise pharmacological treatments for mental illness.

More research is required in determining the biological mechanisms that lead to mental disorder and identifying biomarkers that can identify which medications would be most effective and safe when treating an individual's specific symptoms.

The BRC at King's does incredible work as do other research centres nationwide. More funding is required to ensure that their work is continued and extended.

# WHAT MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH CAN DELIVER

Through research we have already been able to develop psychological therapies that offer low cost, highly effective treatments for a range of mental health problems. We have been able to show the importance of early life experiences on every child's future wellbeing and discover ways to support positive parenting. And we have demonstrated the importance of paid work to recovery from mental health problems as well as the wider economic benefits of supporting the wellbeing of the UK workforce.

Mental health research can carry on making a difference to people's lives. We have a lot still to do, for example:

- To find new and better treatments for a wide range of mental health problems
- To find new and better ways to diagnose, respond to and prevent mental health problems
- To understand better how to improve resilience and the life chances of children at risk of mental health problems
- To enable people with mental health problems to build better lives.
- To enable communities and organisations to respond more appropriately to people with mental health problems – creating a mentally healthy society.

Mental health research offers huge social and economic benefits. By improving people's lives and promoting wellbeing we can make better use of health and social care funding, we can make business more efficient and we can create healthier communities that benefit us all.

**Cllr Paulette Hamilton, mental health member champion, Birmingham City Council:**



As an elected councillor and member champion for mental health, research is vital for me to know how prevalent mental health problems are in my community and what we can do locally to help promote wellbeing and resilience and to support people with mental health problems to recover.

Research translated into policy and practice can help councils to use scarce resources wisely, to tackle inequalities in mental health and to protect the most vulnerable from a lifetime of poor health and reduced life chances.



The Alliance of Mental Health Research Funders is a national coalition of charities working to further research into mental health.

For information about the alliance please visit [www.amhrf.org.uk](http://www.amhrf.org.uk) or email the chair [vanessapinfold@mcpin.org](mailto:vanessapinfold@mcpin.org)

#### References

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# AMHRF

Alliance of Mental Health  
Research Funders

