

The future of mental health services

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A report, published today by the Mental Health Foundation sets out some key messages as to what mental health services need to do in order to ensure that they are ready to address the mental health needs of the UK population in 20-30 years' time.

The year-long Inquiry into the future of [mental health services](#) was co-chaired by Professor Dinesh Bhugra from the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London.

Mental [health services](#) are currently straining at the seams. Yet they face even greater pressures in the future, including a growing, and ageing, population; persistently high prevalence rates of mental disorders among adults and children; increasing levels of co-morbid mental and physical health problems; and funding constraints that are likely to last for many years.

- Mental illness causes immense distress to millions of people across the UK and their families, with an annual cost of over £100 billion to the economy.
- If prevalence rates for mental disorders do not fall, by 2030 there will be 2 million more adults and 100,000 more children with [mental health problems](#) in the UK than there are today.
- Mental Health Foundation inquiry identifies the significant [challenges](#) that mental health services must address in order to be fit for purpose for 21st century.

Professor Dinesh Bhugra, from the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London and co-chair of the Inquiry Advisory Panel for the Mental Health Foundation, said: "A range of factors will undoubtedly impact on future mental health services such as a larger population with more people reaching later life and increased expectations of care and support.

"We need to start taking action today to address future challenges. We cannot expect mental health services simply to muddle along with no clear sense of what is required, and sleepwalk into the future. If we do so, we will be failing all those who in the future need [mental health care](#) and their families, as well as the staff who work in mental health services.

"Our Inquiry found that the case for more preventative work is undeniable. Lacking a 'cure' for [mental illness](#), a reduction in the number of people across the UK developing [mental disorders](#) appears to us to be the only way that mental health services will adequately cope with demand in 20-30 years' time.

"We need fresh ways of working in mental health, ensuring the best use of available resources and working in truly integrated fashion. New technology will no doubt bring about more changes as well as challenges.

But much of what in our view needs to be done is simply implementing known good practice that already exists. Failure to provide good, integrated mental health care is not a failure of understanding what needs to be done, it is a failure of actually implementing good practice in organisational strategies and the day to day business of providing people with the care and treatment that they want. We need to start today to rectify that."

Key findings:

The Inquiry looked at certain key demographic and societal factors which will impact on future mental health services and identified six key themes that mental health services will need to address to become fit for purpose for the 21st century:

1. Personalising services

Greater personalisation of services and the engagement of patients and their carers and families as equal partners in decisions about care and service provision.

2. Integrated care

Increased integration driven by committed local leaders between different parts of mental health services; between physical and mental health care; and between health and social care. This will need a new approach to training health and social care staff, and a change in culture and attitudes.

3. Life span issues

Services that are designed to address an individual's mental health, and

mental health needs, across the life span from infancy to old age.

4. Workforce development

Shared training across disciplines from the start of people's careers and in continuing professional development, moving psychiatry into community and primary care settings, and flexibility for staff to develop and move careers across disciplines.

5. Research and new technologies

Better funded research, into both clinical and social interventions to support people with mental health problems, alongside a commitment to ensure equality of access to the benefits of new technologies.

6. Public mental health

A need for mental health to be treated as a core public health issue, so that it will be as normal for everyone to look after their mental health as it is to look after their physical health and a public health workforce that sees [mental health](#) as one of its core responsibilities.

More information: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/public ... tal-health-services/](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/public...tal-health-services/)

Provided by King's College London

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