

Consensus on Counselling

We are calling on the Minister for Health Mr. Robin Swann MLA, to include the following text in the Mental Health Strategy:

Ensure that mental health counselling is available to all, regardless of where they live.

All counselling provision will be quality assured, adequately resourced and of sufficient duration to meet individual needs.

If counselling is the agreed best form of support for a person, they should have to wait no longer than 28 days for a first appointment and no more than 2 days for an urgent appointment.

The role of local community-based providers in providing timely and accessible counselling will be fully recognised and resourced.

Delivery options will include face-to-face, telephone and online provision through an adequately resourced, in-house GP counselling service and/or recognised community-based provision.

Rationale:

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted significantly on the mental health of our entire population.

Pre-Covid inequalities means that these impacts are being disproportionately experienced by certain groups of people.

As the work of rebuilding health services begins, GP practices continue to be the first port of call for people struggling with their mental health.

It is vital therefore that all GP practices are adequately resourced and equipped to provide people with timely and appropriate support.

Getting the right help at the right time in the right place can make a critical difference.

Early intervention can help prevent the escalation of problems and can prevent people from spiralling downwards or from ending up in secondary mental health services.

Counselling is one, effective, non-pathologising treatment option for problems such as anxiety and depression. It can be effective alongside medication, other therapies including alternative therapies, or on its own.

This is particularly important in our society, where prescribing rates for anti-depressants have increased exponentially in the past ten years.

Unfortunately, the evidence shows that timely access to counselling is not as it should be.

While many GP practices do provide in-house counselling, access continues to be a postcode lottery, almost entirely dependent on where you live. This is clearly unfair.

The Talking Therapy Hubs, another referral route for GPs, are not available in significant parts of the population. Again, this is inequitable.

The draft 10-year Mental Health strategy sets out a vision that ensures consistency and equity of access to services, regardless of where a person lives, and that offers real choice.

We acknowledge that the Strategy includes plans to transfer Talking Therapy Hubs into primary care and to integrate them within Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs), aligned to GP Federation areas.

With only 6 of the 17 GP Federation areas currently equipped with MDTs this clearly will involve a longer-term re-organisation of services.

People however, do not have the luxury of waiting another 6 months, a year or even longer.

This Strategy must address and fix the problems with access to counselling in the immediate term. People need to know that the postcode lottery will end and that everybody who needs to, will be seen in a timely manner.

Thankfully, solutions exist that can be readily implemented.

We have a model of provision, GP practice-based counselling, that is already working and that can be further developed.

We have a sufficient supply of trained counsellors to meet the increased need as a result of Covid-19.

Local community-based counselling services have historically been under-funded and undervalued. They are trusted by local people and have excellent capability, capacity and know-how, built up over many years. They are well placed to respond quickly and professionally to local people's needs.

The pandemic has opened up solutions to barriers, including physical space, through the options of telephone and online provision.

Counselling Works. Let's end the postcode lottery and ensure that counselling is available to all, in a timely manner, regardless of where they live.

Endorsed by:

Political Parties

Alliance Party (Paula Bradshaw MLA)

DUP (Pam Cameron MLA)

Green Party NI (Clare Bailey MLA)

People Before Profit (Gerry Carroll MLA)

SDLP (Mark H Durkan MLA)

Sinn Féin (Órlaithí Flynn MLA)

Counselling Organisations & Bodies

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

Care-Well Counselling

Compass Counselling

Connect 2 Counselling

Emerge Counselling Services

Holy Trinity Counselling

Lenadoon Community Counselling

National Counselling Society

Nexus NI

NI Counselling Forum

Relate NI

Mental Health Charities

Action Mental Health

Aware

CAUSE Foyle Group

Crisis Café

Have You Seen That Girl?

Mental Health Movement Ltd

Metal for Life NI

Mind skills Training Coaching and Wellbeing

Pure Mental NI

West Belfast Sports Wellbeing Forum

Suicide Awareness and Prevention Charities

Families Voices Forum

Lighthouse

Limavady Initiative for the Prevention of Suicide

PIPS Suicide Prevention Ireland

Suicide Awareness and Support Group

Suicide Down to Zero

Suicide. Talking. Education. Prevention. Support.

Community and Voluntary Sector Organisations

Action for Children

Belfast Feminist Network

Children's Law Centre

East Belfast Independent Advice Centre

Falls Women's Centre

Focus the Identity Trust

Forthspring

Glen Parent and Youth Group

Greater North Belfast Women's Network

Here NI

Include Youth

Lenadoon Community Forum

NI Rural Women's Network

Pat Finucane Centre

Quaker Service

Rural Community Network

Springboard Opportunities

Stronger Together

Stronger Together 1+1 Bi-lingual Mental Health Project

The Rainbow Project

Turas na nDaoine

Upper Springfield Development Trust

Women's Resource and Development Agency

Women's Support Network

Workforce Training Services

Youth Action Northern Ireland

Unions

Derry Trades Council

NUS-USI

QUB Students Union

Ulster Teachers Union

UNISON Community and Voluntary Branch

Unite

Others

Committee on the Administration of Justice

Equality Coalition

The Mac