

8 June 2021

By email

The Rt Hon Nadine Dorries, MP
Minister of State
Department of Health and Social Care

Dear Nadine

We were delighted to see a commitment in the NHS Long Term Plan to create a comprehensive mental health offer for 0-25-year olds, and references in the Best Start for Life Plan Vision to achieving this important goal.

Ensuring high-quality mental health services for our youngest children is critically important because mental wellbeing during the earliest years of life lays the foundations for later health and wellbeing. By supporting mental health early in life we can reduce the need for services across the life course.

This week we are publishing new research that shows the scale of the change required to achieve the Long Term Plan goal. Our survey of nearly 300 children and young people's mental health professionals from across the country found significant gaps in both training and provision for babies and toddlers. Key findings include:

- Only 36% of respondents reported that, within children and young people's mental health services in their area, there are mental health services that can work effectively with babies and toddlers aged 0-2
- Only 52% of respondents said their local NHS children and young people's mental health service took referrals for children aged two and under. Many of these respondents told us that, while this was the referral criteria on paper, in reality, the service was not working with young children
- Only 9% of respondents felt there was "sufficient provision available for babies and toddlers whose mental health was at risk" in their area
- During their pre-qualification training, 26% of respondents had not been trained to work with 0-2-year-olds.

It is clear that concerted action is required to ensure all our children can access mental health services, and that there is a sufficiently skilled workforce to meet the needs of the youngest children. We would appreciate the opportunity to meet you to discuss how we can support your Department and NHS England to accelerate progress towards your goal.

There is a compelling case for action: failing to cater for the needs of the youngest children not only lets them down, but also enables problems to develop and accumulate, leading to greater demands on services in years to come.

We look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Yours sincerely



Justin Irwin
Chief Executive