

Maria Caulfield, Minister for Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Patient Safety

Dear Ms Caulfield,

A new government vision for young mental health

I am writing firstly to congratulate you on your new appointment, and secondly to strongly suggest you mark your term in office by properly addressing the very serious and urgent subject of young people's mental health.

In the UK, the charity Young Minds estimates that one in six under 16s have a mental health problem and that of these, less than one in three get treated. Eighty per cent of young people with mental health disorders say the Covid 19 pandemic made their problems worse. About 7% of children have attempted suicide by the age of 17 and almost one in four say they have self-harmed in the past year, according to the British Journal of Psychiatry. At university level, almost two-thirds (63%) of students reported a worsening of their wellbeing and mental health since the start of the autumn term last year, according to the ONS.

Right now, under 25s need more medical professionals, better treatments, more community support, including suicide prevention initiatives - and less school stress. In the past year, the government has made disparate promises to recruit NHS staff, address waiting lists and fund young people's charities. And although these commitments are welcome, they are not enough. Post-Covid, real investment and an expanded vision are needed to produce effective NHS mental health care for our young people today and for the next generation.

As Minister for Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Patient Safety, and in the context of an ongoing government inquiry on this subject it is in your gift to work with other ministers to bring forward a major, fully government-funded NHS action plan for the future of young people's mental health. I would urge you to make this your first priority now.

Ms Caulfield, I am sure you are aware that globally, mental illness¹ is among the biggest diseases, ahead of diabetes, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, according to the UN. High levels of mental illness have negative repercussions not just for families and communities but for the economy. Research has shown that the earlier in life mental illness is addressed, the better individual outcomes. These are compelling practical reasons to focus on the situation for the under 25s, and to do that now.

(If writing a letter) I am enclosing a paper crow as symbol of hope that we will improve the mental health of young people - and prevent suicide.

I would be grateful to hear your comments on this matter

Yours, etc.

¹ Including substance abuse