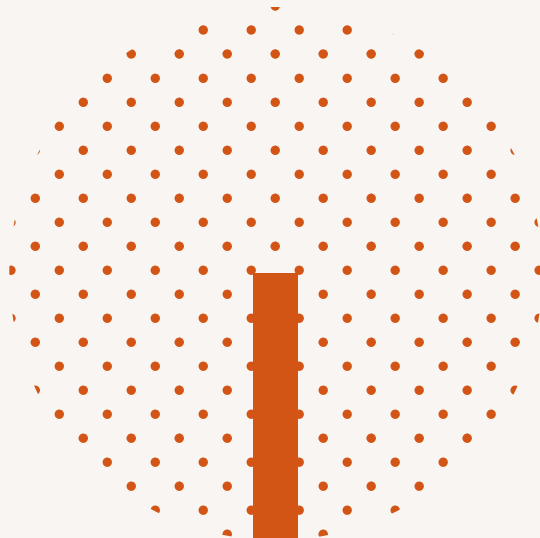




IMPROVING SUPPORT FOR MENTAL HEALTH

WESTMINSTER HALL DEBATE
THURSDAY 10 OCTOBER 2024



IMPROVING SUPPORT FOR MENTAL HEALTH



Overview

Association of Mental Health Providers is the national voice of mental health charities providing services in England and Wales, representing the full spectrum and diversity of third sector service provision. Within our alliance, we have over 300 members delivering over 3000 services locally, regionally, and nationally, with a significant reach of over 8 million people affected by poor mental health and illness.

These organisations, as part of the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, play a critical and often irreplaceable role in providing long-term, community-led mental health care. They serve people and communities who face barriers or experience poor outcomes when accessing statutory services. Despite their indispensable work, VCSE mental health service providers are grappling with severe financial pressures, workforce shortages, and insufficient support that jeopardise their ability to continue delivering essential care.

The UK continues to be in the grip of a mental health crisis worsened by the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, and broader economic instability. These issues have deepened health inequalities, particularly within marginalised and minoritised communities, creating further obstacles to accessing mental health care. The VCSE mental health provider sector is vital in providing personalised, culturally competent care and support, but it needs sustained investment and resources to ensure the ongoing delivery of these services, which is both effective and safe. Investing in, listening to, and collaborating with the VCSE sector is critical to fostering an equitable, preventative, and impactful mental health system in the UK.

This briefing highlights the urgent need for equitable funding and a collaborative approach to mental health care, emphasising the key role of the VCSE sector in supporting people's mental health through their life, preventing mental ill health before it escalates and delivering life-saving crisis services.

Key Recommendations for the Debate

1. Investment in the VCSE sector to sustain mental health support
2. Addressing the impact of socioeconomic and traumatic experiences on mental health
3. Equitable funding and support for the VCSE workforce
4. Addressing the impact of cuts to public services and the cost-of-living crisis

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1. Investment in the VCSE Sector to Sustain Mental Health Support

VCSE organisations are often the first point of contact for people seeking mental health support, particularly those from racially minoritised communities or those dealing with multiple conditions, mental and physical. These organisations provide culturally appropriate, long-term care that statutory services often cannot due to high demand and limited resources. However, despite their crucial work, the sector faces chronic underfunding, with 1 in 5 charities having reduced their services due to financial strain and staffing shortages. This financial instability threatens the sustainability of services that communities depend on, especially as waiting times and demand for statutory services increase.

Key points to uplift:

- The VCSE mental health sector is integral in addressing barriers to mental health care, including long waiting times, oversubscribed services, and a lack of culturally sensitive care.
- The pandemic, cost-of-living crisis, and rise in far-right rhetoric have disproportionately affected the mental health of marginalised communities, which VCSE organisations are best positioned to support with tailored interventions.
- 1 in 5 charities report having reduced services, and 72% of NHS providers note an increase in cases linked to stress, debt, and poverty. This escalating demand is straining both NHS services and the VCSE sector, exacerbating the crisis further.

Why this matters:

VCSE organisations provide preventative care and support that reduces the need for more intensive and costly interventions. Preventative care and support is essential to addressing the growing demand for mental health services and can help to mitigate the strain on statutory services. However, without adequate investment, these organisations face closure, leading to worsening disparities in access to timely and culturally appropriate mental health care and positive mental health outcomes.



2. Addressing the Impact of Socioeconomic and Traumatic Experiences on Mental Health

Mental health cannot be fully understood without considering the social and economic conditions in which individuals live. Issues like poverty, unemployment, housing insecurity, and racial trauma significantly impact mental health outcomes. The rise of far-right movements, spurred by cuts to public services and increasing inequality, has further deepened the mental health challenges faced by marginalised communities.

Key points to uplift:

- Traumatic experiences, including pandemic trauma, racial trauma, genocide, and war, have compounded mental health issues, with VCSE organisations often providing the first response to individuals affected by such experiences.
- 72% of NHS providers report an increase in cases linked to financial stress and poverty, further overwhelming statutory services. At the same time, the cost-of-living crisis has intensified these issues, with marginalised communities bearing the brunt of the impact.
- Lord Darzi's recent NHS review found that public satisfaction with the NHS has fallen to its lowest point since 2009, with waiting times increasing, the allocation of the NHS budget to community care decreasing, and the NHS contribution to national prosperity diminishing. Austerity policies are identified as one of the primary drivers behind the declining quality of NHS services, including mental health care.

Why this matters:

To address the root causes of poor mental health, we must take a holistic approach that considers socioeconomic factors and intersectionality. VCSE organisations are well-positioned to meet the complex needs of communities affected by socioeconomic inequality and trauma. But they need sustainable funding to continue offering this essential support.



3. Equitable Funding and Support for the VCSE Workforce

The workforce in the VCSE mental health sector is highly skilled, with expertise in supporting individuals with complex mental health needs. However, these professionals are often underpaid and under-resourced compared to their NHS counterparts. This wage disparity contributes to high turnover rates and staff burnout, undermining the quality and continuity of care and support provided.

Key points to uplift:

- 27% of small charities have had to reduce their paid workforce due to financial pressures, and 38% expect their financial situation to worsen soon.
- The Employment Rights Bill, which aims to improve conditions for workers across the sector, should be fully supported to ensure workforce parity and enhance the sector's capacity to support individuals facing mental health challenges.
- Workforce equality is essential to maintaining the continuity of care and ensuring that VCSE organisations can meet the increasing demand for mental health support.

Why this matters:

A sustainable workforce in the VCSE sector is crucial for maintaining high-quality mental health services. Wage parity, improved working conditions, and investing in workforce development are essential to ensure that VCSE organisations can continue to meet the growing mental health needs of communities and ensure a safe service is being delivered



4. Addressing the Impact of Cuts to Public Services and the Cost-of-Living Crisis

The cost-of-living crisis and cuts to public services are placing enormous strain on both individuals and VCSE organisations. Financial instability is rampant across the sector, with many organisations relying on dwindling reserves to stay afloat. This has led to a reduction in services and an increased risk of closure for many vital community-based mental health services.

Key points to uplift:

- 35% of small and medium-sized charities report deteriorating financial conditions, with many forced to rely on their reserves to continue operations.
- Rising energy costs, rent increases, and other operational expenses are forcing many organisations to reduce services or close altogether, which directly impacts vulnerable individuals struggling with mental health crises.
- Delayed payments for commissioned services are adding to the financial instability, with some organisations waiting over a year to be paid for services already rendered.

Why this matters:

The social safety net for mental health support is fraying, leaving vulnerable individuals without the support they desperately need. Ensuring timely payments, fair contracts, and adequate resources for the VCSE sector is critical to preserving these vital services during the ongoing crisis.

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Key Messages for MPs

1. Investment in the VCSE sector is critical for ensuring that mental health services remain accessible, effective, and culturally appropriate. Without equitable funding, many organisations face closure, exacerbating the mental health crisis, particularly in marginalised communities.
2. Addressing the social and economic determinants of poor mental health—such as poverty, housing, racial trauma, and the cost-of-living crisis—is essential. The VCSE sector plays a pivotal role in providing tailored, preventative care that can reduce the need for more intensive interventions, and takes a whole-person approach to ensure a person's wider needs are considered in their care and support plan. The sector provides mental health services that considers debt, social care, housing, and employment.
3. Ensuring workforce parity and improving the working conditions of the VCSE sector workforce is vital for staff retention and sustained care delivery in the mental health sector.
4. Cuts to public services and rising inequality are deepening the mental health crisis. Investment in mental health services, particularly in the VCSE sector, is crucial to combat social divisions and ensure effective, equitable support for all communities.

Supporting Evidence

- Lord Darzi's NHS Review (2024): Found that public satisfaction with the NHS is at its lowest point since 2009, with rising waiting times, a decline in community care funding, and growing disparities in access to mental health services.
- NHS Providers Research (September 2022): Reports that 72% of NHS providers have seen a rise in cases linked to stress, debt, and poverty.
- Association of Mental Health Providers Manifesto (August 2024): Calls for long-term investment in the VCSE sector, with a focus on workforce parity and preventative care.
- Pro Bono Economics & Nottingham Trent University (2024): 1 in 5 charities have reduced their services, and 38% of charities are struggling to remain financially sustainable.

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Conclusion

The mental health crisis in the UK demands immediate action. Long-term investment in the VCSE sector is crucial to ensuring the ongoing delivery of equitable, community-driven mental health support. By addressing the socioeconomic and systemic causes of poor mental health and supporting the workforce that delivers this care, we can create a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable mental health system for all communities.

Contact Information

We welcome a further discussion on our work and the pivotal role of the VCSE mental health provider sector within the wider mental health and health and social care system.

For more briefings, questions, and/or to arrange visits to a mental health service provider organisation in your constituency, please get in touch.

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