



Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru

Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Mental Health Workforce Plan for Health and Social Care in Wales
Social Care Wales & Health Education and Improvement Wales

By Email: heiw.mentalhealth@wales.nhs.uk

31 March 2022

Dear consultation team,

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the mental health workforce plan for health and social care in Wales.

Maintaining good mental health and being able to receive support for mental health issues in later life are essential parts of ageing well. Older people have been at the highest risk during the Covid-19 pandemic, and subject to its most stringent restrictions. This has exacerbated long-standing inequalities in older people's mental health. Older people should be seen as a vital part of society in recovery planning and should be able to have more opportunities to participate in and contribute to our economy and our communities as we build back better. This will mean, among other things, ensuring that the mental health workforce is equipped to support those older people who need its help to live the best possible later life.

Representatives from my office met with lead officials from Social Care Wales and Health Education and Improvement Wales to discuss the workforce plan on 28 February 2022. I was pleased to hear that the plan will include bringing mental health care closer to home, upskilling the workforce, mental health literacy for everyone and broadening access to Third Sector mental health services, and that equality and diversity are themes running throughout. At this meeting, my team raised concerns about ageism and age discrimination in mental health services and will be looking carefully for evidence that they have been addressed throughout the strategy when it appears.

In order to meet the needs of our ageing population, the mental health workforce plan will need to include:

- Recognition of the diversity that exists within the older population;
- Identification of the current gaps in older people's specialisms, such as in old age psychiatry, and a strategy for how they will be filled;

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

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Rydym yn croesawu galwadau yn Gymraeg

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- Actions to strengthen the awareness of issues that affect us as we age across all roles in the mental health workforce;
- Plans to increase older people's access to community-based mental health services;
- Commitments to eliminate ageism and age discrimination as factors limiting older people's access to services, which will help everyone regardless of their age; and
- Assurances that appropriate attention and level of service delivery for older people will be prioritised as part of the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Mental Health Workforce Plan should also remove any barriers that arise because of ageism and age discrimination for older workers within the workforce itself. The workforce is ageing, and needs the same support with mental health as anyone else as we all grow older. The strategy should recognise and put in place plans to address ageism and age discrimination within the workforce, ensuring older people joining or already in the workforce do not face barriers because of ageism. There is a range of practical resources that can help with this, including Wales TUC's "Supporting older workers: A toolkit for trade unionists".¹ I am also developing ageism training for professionals and stakeholders, including the mental health workforce, which will be available later this year.

You may also be interested in my recent submission to the Health and Social Care Committee's inquiry into inequalities in mental health services. A copy of my response is attached and sets out my views in greater detail.

I hope this contribution will be helpful as you consider the workforce plan, and my team would be happy to meet HEIW and SCW again to discuss any of these matters in further detail.

Yours sincerely,



Heléna Herklots CBE
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

¹ Wales TUC. (2020). *Supporting older workers: A toolkit for trade unionists*. Available at: https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-08/olderworkers11_3.pdf