Royal College of Psychiatrists: House of Commons, House of Commons, Second Reading of Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment Bill – 1st July 2025

About the Royal College of Psychiatrists:

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is the professional medical body responsible for supporting psychiatrists throughout their career from training through to retirement, and in setting and raising standards of psychiatry in the United Kingdom. We work to secure the best outcomes for people with mental illness, learning difficulties and developmental disorders by promoting excellent mental health services, training outstanding psychiatrists, promoting quality and research, setting standards and being the voice of psychiatry. For more information about the College click here.

College Response to the Bill:

The purpose of this briefing for MPs ahead of the Second Reading debate and vote on the Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment Bill is to highlight those areas of the Government's proposal as having a negative impact – particularly on those with a mental illness.

The College welcomes the recent movements by the Government to improve some of the proposals in the Bill - as the College has consistently made clear, good, and rewarding employment along-side effective treatment can play an important part in supporting people to live better and healthier lives. For example, we have been a strong advocate for the Government's IPS Scheme – whereby a person-centered approach is taken which optimises the opportunity for the best outcomes. It is important we always remember that where there is a positive outcome for the individual, there are also going to be positive advantages for the State at the same time.

Impact on Parity of Esteem

There are a range of existing issues on Government policy whereby parity of esteem between physical and mental health remains a long way off and the proposals on welfare only make this worse as they make assumptions around access to treatment which are simply not accurate when it comes to treatment for mental illness.

The most relevant proposals that are detrimental to those with mental illness are set out below along with areas where the lack of parity of esteem in the NHS will feed into further discrimination against those with mental illness through these proposals:

<u>4 Point rule on PIP</u>

We know that the design of descriptors never really took account of people with what are often fluctuating mental illnesses. Therefore, we strongly suggest that this proposal is put on hold until at least Sir Stephen Timms has finished the PIP review which the Government have commissioned and we very much support. This would allow for the Review's outcome which we hope will have considered descriptors in the context of mental illness without pre-emptive changes as currently proposed.

<u>Under 22 access to health-related benefits</u>

Many people who get ill at these younger ages are experiencing mental rather than physical illnesses, because mental illness disproportionately arises in youth. The College has

highlighted that the increases in this age group are real and there have been a few additional factors that have contributed to it. The Government has placed great store on the proposals being based on need, yet this proposal runs totally contrary to this principle and for the wider programme of measures and initiatives to have real credibility, withdrawing this proposal is important.

Impact of differential funding between physical and mental illness in the NHS on these proposals – Negative impact on those with mental illness

Waiting Lists

The assumption made in the government proposals as reflected in the original Green Paper was that the £26 Billion made available to the NHS in England – for reducing waiting lists and thereby improving people's opportunities to get back into work, or enter the job market - specifically excludes using this resource to provide quicker access to treatment for those who are on waiting lists for treatment for their Mental illness.

This reflects a longer-term disparity of priority in funding for Mental illness compared to what has been made available for physical health also drives many people with mental illness into the status of being disabled.

Access to early interventions

We know that access to early interventions for treatment for those with depression or psychosis can significantly increase the chance of better outcomes, with evidence showing that there are significant rates of recovery and stabilisation, with 3 to 9 months often enough to make a big difference– However this opportunity is lost when an individual is not able to access appropriate treatment and support Early enough, often meaning they end up reaching the status of disabled with all that means for barriers to working and a need to access benefits.

Overmedicalisation

We believe that this debate, fuelled by those who believe there is over diagnosis of mental illness is too simplistic and has misrepresented important reasons for the rise in sickness and disability benefit costs. We know that self-reported distress has risen in the British population in recent years and the findings of the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey for England, 2023/24 confirm a significant rise in adults experiencing diagnosable anxiety and depression since 2014. This rise has been especially steep in 16- to 24-year-olds (from 18.9% in 2014, to 25.8% in 2023/4). This growth in poor mental health is likely to be an important driver of the rise in claimants for sickness and disability benefits.

Furthermore, a policy that does not take these rises in mental ill-health and the reality of this for the working age population in England seriously is likely to fail in its purpose to reduce welfare and increase engage in employment for people with health conditions. Indeed, despite the increase in the prevalence of Common Mental Disorders (CMHCs), less than 50% of these people have accessed treatment.

Conclusion

There is a lot we can get behind in terms of the ambitions of the Government and we would very much welcome the opportunity to work with them in getting this right for everyone.

More information:

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