

Cross Party Group on Mental Health

20 May 2020

11.00 – 12.00

Via Zoom video conferencing

In attendance

David Rees MS
David Melding MS
Lynne Neagle MS
Ruth Coombes EHRC
Sarah Thomas – Women’s Institute
Linda Newton – CAVAMH
Rhianydd Williams – Wales TUC
Danny Atebi – Practice Solutions
Sarah Rees – Office of Bethan Sayeed MS
Vallerie Billingham – Office of Older People’s Commissioner
Shari McDaid – Mental Health Foundation
Suzanne Duval – Diverse Cymru
Lindey Imms – Wales TUC
Shana Thomas – Sport Wales
Ewan Hilton - Platform
Jo Whitfield – BEAT Cymru
Liz Williams – Samaritans Cymru
Lowri Wyn Jones – Time to Change Wales
June Jones – Time to Change Wales
Louis Mertens – RCPsych
Ollie John – RCPsych
Josh James – Diabetes Cymru
Jack Martin – Hafal
Ryland Doyle – Office of Mike Hedges MS
Sarah Whitcombe Hayes – NSPCC Cymru
Richard Jones – Mental Health Matters
Peter Williams – Mental Health Forum
George Watkins – Office of Jenny Rathbone MS
Simon Jones – Mind Cymru
Sara Moseley – Mind Cymru
Ian Johnson – Mind Cymru
Glenn Page – Mind Cymru

1. Welcome

David Rees MS welcomed everyone to the Cross-Party Group meeting on Mental Health. He noted today’s focus as being an opportunity to look specifically at the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on mental health in Wales, through hearing about

the information gathered by a number of organisations which are part of the Wales Alliance of Mental Health in Wales (Mind Cymru, Mental Health Foundation, Diverse Cymru, Platfform, Hafal and Samaritans).

2. Presentation

Sara Moseley (Director, Mind Cymru) gave a short presentation, highlighting some of the general themes which emerged across the work. Presentation is attached with the minutes.

She made reference to concerns regarding specific groups such as BAME communities, given reports that the virus is having an increased effect on people within these communities for a number of reasons. This he said is causing further stress and anxiety for groups of people who have historically struggled to access services even before the pandemic. She also highlighted the increased calls to NSPCC's ChildLine service and the importance in considering a whole school approach to mental health as well as potentially an increase in school based counselling.

Furthermore, she drew attention to the links well made between poorer mental health and poverty and underlined the need to be particularly conscious of this group of people given that the pandemic is likely to have caused an increased anxiety for them. She also discussed frontline staff and the consideration to put mechanisms in place to support staff who will likely need support beyond this intense period, who may currently be pushing through on adrenaline.

Finally, Sara alluded to the pressure which GP surgeries may be under post pandemic, when people are feeling more able and comfortable to seek help, and how voluntary sector providers can work to be more prepared to fill the gap and reduce pressures on GPs.

3. Discussion

David Rees MS thanked Sara for presenting the overall findings from the surveys and asked whether anyone had any questions or comments.

There was a discussion on perinatal mental health and a number of attendees highlighted the successful shift to online services. Sarah Rees drew attention to new mums who may be feeling particularly isolated and pregnant women who are unclear about where to get valuable information. Ruth Coombes noted that the EHRC issues guidance for employers around pregnant women.

Sarah Whitcombe Hayes of NSPCC Cymru noted that in addition to an increase in calls to ChildLine from children who are feeling under pressure, there is also heightened anxiety on parents who are struggling with their emotional wellbeing. Sarah Rees added that a recent survey revealed that 93/100 parents are feeling fragile and do not know where to get help. Danny Atebi highlighted the need to

consider those people who have experienced Covid and the impact on their families, and any specific support they might need during this time.

Shari McDaid of the Mental Health Foundation moved the discussion to think about preventative measures for mental health problems. She suggested that it could be worth exploring schools guidance on trauma for children and young people and free psychological intervention for unemployed young people in particular. Ewan Hilton of Platform added that the ACEs Hubs do not seem to be making much progress in adult services.

David Melding AM was keen to discuss housing issues and mental health, suggesting the need for sustainable accommodation for homeless and the importance of suspension of eviction to ease the pressure on those affected.

Peter Williams highlighted the recent news reports on mental health patients being discharged from services in North Wales and whether this was happening across Wales. Contributors suggested that this was a one off situation in terms of the scale, although there had been discharge from inpatient wards at the start of the pandemic.

Lowri Wyn Jones highlighted that Time to Change Wales had been speaking to their champions and initial indications were there had been an increase in self stigma that was leading to people being reluctant to seek help.

There was a focus on suicide and a question as to whether there has been an increase in suicide rates since lockdown. Liz Williams from the Samaritans said she has seen no evidence of this and there was a need to be careful in drawing any quick conclusions in relation to this topic.

Lynne Neagle MS agreed with this point and stated that it was important that any new investment for young children needs to be spent appropriately and include how the whole family can be supported.

David Rees MS thanked everyone for their contributions and suggested a further CPG meeting in July where we could collectively review progress and any emerging issues.

The meeting closed at 12.20