

GE 2019 - Manifesto submission Northern Ireland

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) is the leading and largest professional body for counselling and psychotherapy in the UK. Representing 49,000 practitioner members working across the United Kingdom, and almost 2,000 in Northern Ireland, we set and maintain high standards of ethical practice. Our members are a registered, flexible and under-utilised workforce who make a vital contribution to improving the mental health of people across the country.

We are pleased to present the following core mental health policy priorities for inclusion in all party manifestos for Northern Ireland.

Urgent investment to tackle Northern Ireland's mental health crisis

Northern Ireland is recognised as having higher levels of poor mental health than the rest of the United Kingdom, with prevalence rates estimated to be around 25% higher than in England. Despite this, Northern Ireland receives less funding than its UK counterparts to tackle what has become a mental health crisis.

The political conflict alone has inflicted extremely painful and enduring psychological and physical wounds. Studies have found that the 12-month and lifetime prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was found to be 4.7% and 8.5% respectively, placing it at the upper end of the range of estimates from other international epidemiological studies. It is estimated that over half a million people in Northern Ireland are suffering from the effects of trauma.

With the absence of a functioning executive and assembly we believe the UK Government needs to step in to provide increased funding to urgently tackle the mental health crisis in Northern Ireland.

BACP recommends:

A full range of evidence-based psychological therapies should be offered and available to all clients accessing mental health services; bringing to an end the postcode lottery and ensuring a comprehensive choice of interventions and opportunities to access appropriate services.

All people in Northern Ireland should have fair access to a counsellor through their General Practitioner; currently access is limited to only two thirds of practices and the low levels of current funding means waiting times can often exceed six months.

All people referred to NHS psychological therapy services should begin treatment within 28 days of referral and assessment.

Protecting funding for mental health

Evidence from BACP members highlights a proportion of funding for vital third sector counselling services is currently obtained through our membership of the European Union. Life-changing mental health support must not be put at risk through Britain's exit from the European Union.

BACP recommends:

The level of funding for mental health projects currently obtained through the European Union and European Commission should be matched by the UK Government in the event of Brexit.

Greater psychological support for older people

Older people in Northern Ireland suffer high levels of treatable depression but don't receive the help and support they need. This is a growing problem as the number of people aged 65 in the province is increasing by almost two per cent per annum. Shockingly, the majority (85%) of older people with depression receive no help or support from the NHS.

BACP recommends:

A greater emphasis on the mental health of older people and a push to ensure increased access to counselling for our ageing population, including those with dementia.

Recognition of the psychological impact of the onset of later life physical conditions such as sight-loss and action to ensure all those affected are provided with accessible and regular information and a choice of psychological therapies.

Supporting relationships and families

Adults in poor-quality and distressed relationships are much more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and other mental health problems, and from poor physical health. There is also clear evidence that poor-quality parental relationships and inter-parental conflict in particular have a negative impact on children's mental health and long-term life chances across many areas.

Studies have found relationship counselling and couples therapy results in a significant change in relationship satisfaction. A government-backed evaluation of UK relationship support found that for every £1 invested the state could see £11.40 of savings.

BACP recommends:

That relationship counselling is accessible to anyone who needs it, regardless of income, and calls on a future Government to invest in relationships.

Workplace mental health

Typically, a third of our lives are spent at work, and at least three in ten employees suffer from mental health problems (ranging from short-term depression to chronic conditions), costing businesses up to £1,000 per employee each year.

Each year in the UK, 140 million working days are lost through sickness absence, costing employers £9 billion in sick pay and associated costs. Stress at work, a key driver of long-term absence, has more than doubled since the 1990s, with one in five workers having taken a day off sick for stress (of which 90% gave a different reason for their absence). Absenteeism and presenteeism together cost the UK economy £73 billion per year, with 27 days of productive time per employee lost each year due to presenteeism.

Preventing and treating poor mental health in the workplace helps reduce these losses, enabling people to return to and stay in work. Moreover, workplace counselling boosts outputs, increases motivation and reduces the burden on other services.

BACP recommends:

All employees should have access to workplace counselling, giving both support to employees and reducing costs to businesses.

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