

# Act for Mental Health - Meeting your MP

Rethink  
Mental  
Illness.

**Thank you for agreeing to meet with your MP to discuss the Mental Health Act. This guide sets out key issues to discuss and offers tips for how to have a successful meeting with your MP.**

## Background

After campaigning by Rethink Mental Illness and others, the Prime Minister announced an Independent Review of the Mental Health Act (in late 2017) to look at how it is used and how it can be improved.

The Review heard from thousands of people who have been detained under the Act, including carers and loved ones.



In December 2018, the Independent Review published its [final report](#) with around 150 recommendations for change. The Government welcomed the final report and planned to bring forward a new mental health bill. During summer 2019, a parliamentary debate saw MPs discussing the Act, led by Neil Coyle MP (whose mother has been detained). You can read his powerful story [here](#).

During the debate, the story of our campaigner Georgi, who was previously detained under the Act, was shared by Johnny Mercer MP, who spoke about how life-changing good care and treatment can be. We now await a Government White Paper to be published by the end of this year.

While the response from the Government has been positive... there is still a long way to go before we get the law changed and funding committed, so we need to keep the pressure up and that's why it's very important that you meet your MP.

## What is the Mental Health Act?

The Mental Health Act 1983 is the law which sets out when a person can be detained and treated in hospital against their wishes (also known as being 'sectioned'). For this to happen, health professionals must agree that:

- a person has a mental illness which requires them to stay in hospital
- their mental illness puts their safety, or the safety of others, at risk

The law and guidance around it are complicated, covering how and why people can be detained, rights to appeal, safeguards such as advocacy, tribunals and second opinion doctors. In 2017/18 there were 49,551 detentions under the Act<sup>1</sup> - an increase of 47% in the last decade, with people from black African and black Caribbean backgrounds disproportionately affected.<sup>2</sup>

Different sections of the Act are designed to do different things, and the rights of a person detained under the Act depend on which section they are detained under. Most people detained have the right to appeal, and most people have the right to get help from an Independent Mental Health Advocate (IMHA), someone that helps them to tell staff about their concerns and finds out what their rights are.

<sup>1</sup> NHS Digital (2018) [Mental Health Act Statistics, Annual Figures 2017-18](#)

<sup>2</sup> Independent Review of the Mental Health Act (2018) [Steps to tackle the disproportionate number of people from ethnic minority communities detained under the Act](#), page 56

## Why meet your MP?

The Review of the Mental Health Act is the best opportunity in a generation to modernise the Mental Health Act. But however good its recommendations are, it is far from guaranteed that all the changes needed will end up being made. With limited parliamentary time available and a minority government, we need MPs across the House of Commons ready to champion this issue.

The reality is that many MPs – like most people - know relatively little about the Mental Health Act, the impact that it has on people's lives or why it should be improved. The more politicians that we can help to understand and care about reforming the Act, the better chance we have of achieving change that make a difference to people's lives.

## Discussion points for your meeting

### Make it personal

- If you have any experience with the Mental Health Act - either as someone that has been detained or if you know someone that has - share this with your MP to the extent that you feel comfortable. You may want to think through before the meeting which elements of your experience you want to share.
- Talking about your own experience helps to bring the issue to life and enables your MP to understand how the Mental Health Act directly impacts people's lives.
- You can help to keep your meeting on track by relating all of the points you make to the need for reforming the Act.

### Key concerns regarding the Mental Health Act

- **Patients' involvement in their own care**
  - The Act is the only piece of healthcare legislation which assumes that people cannot make meaningful choices about their care and treatment.
  - While compulsory treatment may sometimes be necessary, too often understanding the views of people being treated is seen as an optional extra – which, legally, it currently is.
  - Evidence shows that being involved in the care and treatment you receive can lead to a faster recovery and discharge from hospital, which can help people to lead an independent life back in their community.
- **Rights and dignity**
  - Serious concerns about the Act are widespread among those with direct experience of it.
  - [Research conducted by Rethink Mental Illness for the Mental Health Alliance](#) found that 61% of previously-detained people, and 41% of professionals involved in treating them, felt that people are not currently treated with dignity when detained under the Mental Health Act.
- **Roles and rights of carers/loved ones**
  - The way that the Act involves carers, family and friends in supporting their loved ones needs to change. Currently the “Nearest Relative”, who has some rights to be informed and involved, is selected from a hierarchical list of relatives.
  - As family relationships can be complicated, this often results in inappropriate people being involved in decisions about the person detained.
  - Both those who have been detained and carers tell us that the way families are involved could be substantially improved. Rethink Mental Illness is involved in a sub group in the Review that is looking at these issues.

You may have experience of other issues related to the Act that you wish to talk about.

## Ask your MP to:

We want MPs to make a public commitment to support reform of the Mental Health Act. They can do that in several ways:

1. Post on social media about the meeting, saying they support our Act for Mental Health campaign. You can use the hashtag **#ActForMentalHealth**. Our twitter handle is [@Rethink](https://twitter.com/Rethink).
2. Take a photo with you at the end of your meeting (which you could email us to share - our contact details are below.



## 7 Tips for an effective meeting with your MP

1. **Be well prepared** - do some background reading and have your most important questions and key points ready. You could read the following:
  - a. [This page](#) on website about our work on the Mental Health Act
  - b. The Review's [final report](#) to get a grasp of the issues
  - c. Our [No Voice No Choice](#) report
2. **Keep the meeting on track** - confirm how much time your MP has before your meeting starts
3. **Share your own story** - explain why you care about the Mental Health Act
4. **Remember you are not expected to be an expert.** If your MP asks a question you cannot answer, say so and tell them you will get back to them
5. **Aim for a friendly discussion** – it will help you achieve results
6. **Arrange a way of following up** with your MP after the meeting

## If you want to meet your MP about the Mental Health Act, here's what to do next:

1. Arrange your meeting by finding your MP's contact details [here](#)
2. Email your MP briefing explaining why you would like to meet him/her. Keep your email to two or three short paragraphs.
3. Tell us by email that your meeting has been booked at [campaigns@rethink.org](mailto:campaigns@rethink.org) and let us know if you need any support or further information
4. After your meeting let us know how it went and don't forget to send us a photo of you with your MP.

**Contact us:** please get in touch if you have any questions on meeting with your MP by emailing [campaigns@rethink.org](mailto:campaigns@rethink.org) or call the campaigns team on 0207 840 3103.