

Act for Mental Health - Have a virtual chat with your MP



Thank you for agreeing to have a virtual chat with your MP to discuss improvements to the Mental Health Act. This is a great way to lobby your elected representative in the current climate.

MPs can do a lot to influence their Party and the government, from asking a parliamentary question to speaking to a minister - so meeting them is a great way to make change happen.

This guide sets out key issues to discuss and offers some tips for how to have a successful chat 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. Since then the government has promised a new mental health bill to usher in reform, however we are still waiting for implementation plans and timings to be published.

We appreciate that Covid-19 has caused delays but as lockdown lifts, publishing these plans – the White Paper to reform the Mental Health Act – must be a top priority for Government.

We were really pleased to see the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock, confirm earlier this year that work on implementing the Review's recommendations has been continuing throughout the Covid-19 crisis. The response from the Government has been positive...but there is still a long way to go before we get the law changed and funding committed.

As we approach two years since the Independent Review was published, we are renewing our calls on the Government and MPs across parliament to accept the Review's recommendations. #NoMoreDelay

For more on this campaign [click here](#). To read the final report of the Independent Review of the Mental Health Act [click here](#)

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.

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.

Why meet with your MP now?

In December 2020 it will be the two-year anniversary of when the Review of the Mental Health Act was published – yet we are still waiting for White Paper that we have been promised. We need MPs across the House of Commons to champion this issue now and as we approach December.

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 we can help politicians 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 doing so*. 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.
- **Treatment of Black and minority ethnic people**
 - Black people are four times more likely to be detained than White people and eight times as likely to face restrictions in the community under the Act.

- The Review recognises the role that bias and racism play and proposes changes to deliver greater equality and accountability for ethnic minority communities.
- **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.

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. [Sign the declaration](#) - we’re asking MPs to sign up to our declaration to support reform of the Mental Health Act. Send them the link during your virtual chat: <https://bit.ly/2Yc6ArZ>
2. Post on social media about the meeting, saying they support our Act for Mental Health campaign. They can use the hashtag **#ActForMentalHealth** or **#NoMoreDelay**. Our twitter handle is [@Rethink](#). They can also share/tag us on Facebook or Instagram too.
3. Ask for their permission to take a screenshot/photo during the call (which you could email us to share - our contact details are below.)



6 Tips for an effective meeting with your MP

1. **Be well prepared** – you don’t have to be an expert but it’s good to read the over the discussion points in this guide so you have a grasp on what the main issues are beforehand. It’s also useful to make some notes of the key things you want to say to help you remember during the meeting
2. **Share your own story** - explain why you care about the Mental Health Act
3. **Keep the meeting on track** - confirm how much time your MP has before your meeting starts
4. **Don’t worry if your MP asks a question you cannot answer** - tell them you’re not an expert but you will find out and 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

Next steps

1. Find out who your MP is and what their email address and phone number is [here](#)
2. Email your MP briefly explaining why you would like to meet them - you could use our template below. Ask them if they are able to send you a Zoom link (or another video call platform). If you need any support on how to set up a video call on Zoom or another platform, please contact campaigns@rethink.org
3. Tell your MP if you’d be happy to join a group call if others in your constituency get in touch
4. Chase your MP – if you don’t hear back from them try calling their office and flagging your email with them

5. Tell us by email that your meeting has been booked at campaigns@rethink.org and let us know if you need any support or further information
6. Send us your feedback - let us know how the meeting went and don't forget to send us a photo of you with your MP if you took one. You can also share this on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram and tag your MP.

Emailing your MP to request a meeting

We've saved you some time by writing an email (below) which you can copy and paste. Feel free to change it but remember to edit the text in red:

- the week that you are free to meet
- the name of your MP/constituency
- your name, postcode and phone number

Suggesting a week that you are free will speed up the process of getting a date confirmed. (If you are only free on certain days of a week feel free to suggest a date instead.)

Suggested email:

Subject line: A virtual meeting about reforming the Mental Health Act

Dear **[Jo Bloggs MP]**,

My name is **[your name]**, I live in **[insert your town]** and am one of your constituents. Thank you for your continued hard work representing **[your constituency]**, especially during such a challenging time.

I would like to invite you to meet me for a virtual chat to discuss reforming the Mental Health Act as part of Rethink Mental Illness's campaign [Act for Mental Health](#). The Mental Health Act can save lives, but it is out of step with how a modern society thinks about mental illness so I'm campaigning for the Government to implement the recommendations of the Independent Review of the Mental Health Act, which was published back in December 2018.

[If you have any experience of the Act please briefly mention it here – you can expand on your experience when you meet your MP].

I appreciate that the pandemic has caused delays – but as lockdown lifts, publishing the White Paper to reform the Mental Health Act must be a top priority. I would really like to discuss this with you (via Skype or Zoom) – would you be available the week of **[insert a week that you are free]?**

If you receive similar requests from other constituents, I would be happy to join them in the same virtual meeting if that is more convenient for you? I know you're very busy, so even 20 minutes of your time would be appreciated.

Please let me know which date you're available so we can confirm our call as soon as is convenient.

Best wishes,

[Your name, postcode, phone number]

Contact us: please get in touch if you have any questions on meeting with your MP by emailing campaigns@rethink.org