

Mental health social care:

Supporting recovery, promoting independence, changing lives

Rethink
Mental
Illness.

With the Prime Minister's promise in July 2019 to "fix social care, once and for all", there is a new interest in social care, who uses it and what difference it makes. The important role that social care plays in supporting the nation's mental health is not always understood, so here we explain some key elements. As explained in our [blueprint for Communities That Care](#), we must assess and address clinical, practical, social and financial needs for people severely affected by mental illness to thrive. Social care delivers many elements of this person-centred approach.

What is mental health social care?

Mental health social care services support people of all ages who live with severe mental illness, and their carers. The skilled and dedicated mental health social care workforce help people get appropriate aftercare after a stay in a mental health hospital, to stay well, to live independently and participate in or contribute to community life, and to prevent their mental health getting worse.



£1 in every £12
spent by local authorities on social care goes towards funding mental health support.

Local Authorities also have a range of legal responsibilities for the care and support of local people under the Care Act, Mental Health Act, Equality Act and Mental Capacity Act.

It includes a variety of services, such as:

Community support helps people to stay well and prevents their mental health from getting worse again. Community services can include things like personalised support under the Care Act, where individuals can benefit from Personal Budgets to choose the type of care they would like based on their needs (as assessed by their local council).

Mental health social workers can assess the support someone needs, and help them to plan, navigate and access that support. Building relationships with individuals and their carers, they encourage those living with severe mental illness to develop their independence and achieve their goals in life. They often have specific responsibilities and expertise in supporting people's legal rights.

Specialist employment services support people with mental health issues to find the right job for them and stay in that role. They help people to gain interview skills, access training and manage mental health at work.

Advice and support: Under the Care Act, Local Authorities have to provide advice and support for people about the services they might wish to access. They also commission debt advice and financial support specifically for people with mental health issues.

Supported living and housing services offer a safe environment in which people can recover and build their confidence, helping them to feel more able to live independently in their local community. These services are especially important in making sure people can leave hospital when they feel well enough and to avoid future readmission.

Mental health advocates empower people living with severe mental illness to share their opinions and feelings, stand up for their rights and get the support they need. If someone still doesn't feel able to do this themselves or are too unwell to do so, advocates speak up for their interests on their behalf to make sure the person's voice is heard.

Social care-based crisis services can provide support when someone's mental health deteriorates significantly. For example, Crisis houses offer intensive, short-term support through crisis in a community-based setting, rather than a hospital. Approved Mental Health Professionals assess people and protect their legal rights under the Mental Health Act and emergency duty teams provide 24hr support overnight and at the weekends.

Mental health carers support: Caring for people experiencing severe mental illness can present unique challenges. Under the Care Act, carers have a right to an assessment of their needs and appropriate follow-up support. Specialist carers' support understands how debilitating severe mental illness can be, and provides friends and family members with emotional and practical assistance to help them cope with caring and have the knowledge and skills required to support the person they care for.

What does good mental health social care mean to...

...people living with severe mental illness?

“It is hard to get out of the system if you have been sectioned – it’s difficult to get the things like relationships, employment and education that are just a part of normal life for your peers. Social care levels the playing field. Mental health support can help people to the point that they can do things for themselves – it can build autonomy and resilience. People just want a good ordinary life and social care helps make that possible.”

Isaac Samuels, someone with lived experience of adult social care and mental ill health

...their carers?

“Good social care has made a massive difference to her life. She has been sectioned three times and spent over three years in hospital. She had no life. All she was doing was sitting in the house. She wouldn’t have been able to do all the things she does now if she didn’t have the sense her life was under control. She has a personal assistant, who helps her manage her home, to keep things tidy, check bank statements, socialise, go outside, take part in activities and get out into the community. Such effective input from social care gives her a sense of self-worth. Before, if her house went to pieces, she would get depressed and withdraw. It enables her to do the things she wants to do, increases her independence and lets her flourish.”

Janet (not real name), a carer whose daughter has a severe and enduring mental illness

What are the next steps for government on mental health social care?

While we are pleased the government is taking long-awaited action on social care, the changes presented so far – namely a spending cap and changes to means-testing – are far from the detailed plans required. Mental health social care is a cornerstone of the support that allows those severely affected by mental illness to get better and stay well. No plans for reform can be effective without it.

- The upcoming social care white papers are an opportunity to outline reforms addressing the broader challenges facing social care, and how these will meet the needs of those severely affected by mental illness.
- The government must also provide dedicated additional funding now and moving forward, so that local councils and mental health social care providers have the stability and resources they need to implement reforms and provide proper care alongside their NHS partners.



For more information

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