



Key messages:

Public policy priorities for Scotland

About the British Psychological Society

The British Psychological Society, incorporated by Royal Charter, is the learned and professional body for psychology and psychologists in the United Kingdom. We are a registered charity with a total membership of over 53,000 members, of which over 3000 are in Scotland. Evidence and information from a psychological perspective can support the implementation of the strategic visions set by the Scottish Government across areas of Mental Health, Diet and Obesity, Suicide Prevention, and many other areas of devolved responsibility. This document provides key messages of how evidence-based policy can be enhanced through the application of psychological science, theory and practice.

Mental health

The Scottish Government's 10-year Mental Health strategy set an overall vision of achieving parity between mental and physical health by 2027.

To meet this target, action must centre on:

- Early intervention to support the psycho-social needs of children and young people by providing access to psychological support in all schools and colleges
- Increased efforts to tackle the stigma faced by those with mental health conditions
- Appropriate levels of provision for children and young peoples' mental health services
- Greater efforts to reduce rates of suicide and self-harm
- Psychological and social factors should be at the heart of all high level strategic planning in relation to mental health
- Perinatal Mental Health, which should be recognised as a major public health concern and action should be taken to reduce the impact of mental health problems during the perinatal period for both mother and child
- Improved access to psychological interventions for those experiencing conflict-related post-traumatic stress, and to psychological services which address the transgenerational mental health effects these conflicts have on infants, young children, and parenting

- Improved access to psychological therapies which are informed by evidence and monitored outcomes which contribute to a reduction in prescribing and prescribing costs
- National guidelines should be established for identifying and managing neuro-disabilities, such as Traumatic Brain Injury for those at risk of head injury.
- Psychologists, should where appropriate, fulfil the statutory role of Approved Medical Practitioner or the authority to assess mental capacity – ensuring the best-placed professional makes decisions on patient care.

Behaviour change and public health

Scotland has an ageing population, high levels of obesity and increasing numbers of people living with chronic health conditions. Psychological interventions can be usefully employed to tackle all of these issues by promoting and enabling lifestyle behaviour change and effective self-management. The challenges presented are demonstrated by data from the latest Scottish Health Survey, the National Records of Scotland and Audit Scotland:

- The number of people aged 75 and over is projected to increase by 27 per cent by 2026 and by 79 per cent by 2041

- 40 per cent of the Scottish population, currently have at least one long term health condition, and by the age of 65, nearly two-thirds will have developed one
- 65 per cent of adults aged 16 and over in Scotland are overweight, including 29 per cent who are obese
- Only 22 per cent of women and 17 per cent of men eat the recommended 5-a-day portions of fruit and veg
- 35 per cent of those in the most deprived areas smoke, compared to 11 per cent in the least deprived areas
- Almost a fifth more alcohol is sold per adult in Scotland than in England and Wales, enough alcohol for every adult in Scotland to drink over 20 units each and every week.

To address these public health challenges, the British Psychological Society calls for:

- Greater application of evidence-based psychological interventions to change lifestyle behaviours related to obesity, disability and chronic disease risk – addressing for example, smoking rates, physical inactivity, diet, and excess alcohol consumption
- Recognition of the importance of psychology in illness and self-management – for example, in adherence to medication, medical help seeking, recovery from illness and return to work.
- Greater recognition of the psychological benefits of physical activity for both mental and physical health
- Psychologically informed action within the new Scottish Healthy Weight strategy, including: effective definitions of healthy foods and drinks for the purposes of education and parenting; useful labelling; and reducing the obesogenic environment by increasing the availability and salience of healthier options
- Continued action working with a broad range of interest groups to encourage moderate alcohol consumption
- The creation of more posts for qualified Health Psychologists in Scotland.

Education

- Psychologically informed education should be part of the curriculum so that our children and young people are informed about their mental health and wellbeing
- Greater focus on implementing and revising early intervention and parenting support strategies to support the psycho-social and educational development of children and families
- More support for the training of applied psychologists, allowing statutory requirements and projected workforce shortfalls
- Recognition that psychological interventions can promote other positive behaviours in areas such as school absenteeism, personal debt and energy conservation.

Justice

- Support for the development and retention of qualified Forensic Psychologists in Scotland
- More support for the use of psychological techniques in risk assessment, offender rehabilitation, victim safety planning, psychometric testing by increased access to applied psychologists
- Supporting the development of treatment provision for offenders with personality disorders.
- Supporting interventions to mitigate against the harm caused by Technology Assisted Harmful Sexual Behaviour.

Research, economic and social development

- Greater support for psychology research and use of psychological evidence to inform responses to public policy challenges
- Greater recognition of the importance of workforce wellbeing to underpin effective organisations.

For further information please contact

Nigel Atter (Policy Advisor)
Nigel.atter@bps.org.uk