



the british
psychological society
promoting excellence in psychology

A psychological manifesto for the next government

As the UK gears up to go to the polls this December, the BPS is calling for all political parties to consider how psychological evidence and expertise can improve policy making and to commit to including psychologically informed policies in their manifestos. Any government serious about improving the lives of the public and understanding why intractable social problems persist must ensure that their policies and interventions are based on an in-depth understanding of human behaviour. Here we outline three overarching priorities for government, alongside evidence-based recommendations for many departments that should form part of the new government's domestic agenda. These policy recommendations have been developed in collaboration with BPS members.

The BPS Priorities for Government

1. A cross government strategy for the youngest children

Children under the age of five are often overlooked in terms of policy response, despite the psychological evidence that this is a vital time for child development and to protect and promote good mental health. We call on all political parties to include a commitment to develop a holistic health and wellbeing strategy for children from conception to age five, so that every child has the best start in life.

2. Truly transformational prevention

Families and individuals in our poorest communities will only see a significant improvement in their health and wellbeing when all government departments and sectors commit to addressing the underlying determinants of ill-health and inequalities. This requires a sea-change in government spending and budget allocations for preventative services, alongside longer planning horizons that allow the longer term impact of prevention spending, activity and research to be realised. This will ultimately deliver interventions that can both reduce demand on the NHS and other relevant sectors and improve people's lives.

3. Action to take communities from poverty to flourishing

Poverty and poor health are inextricably linked. Reducing poverty and social inequality must be a top priority for a new government. A cross-government strategy must consider the social determinants of poverty, as well as the underlying psychology of poverty and its consequences. Best practice examples of local investment can help governments at national, regional and local levels to develop sustainable place-based strategies for reducing poverty. This should include urgent action to tackle housing insecurity. Investment is needed to build inclusive, connected communities and encourage them to flourish.

Health and Social Care

Developing psychological professions as an integral part of the future workforce

Psychologists and other psychological professionals play a central role in meeting the needs of many of the most vulnerable individuals and communities in our society. They are integral to the delivery of the NHS Long Term Plan. The new government must commit to growing the psychological workforce to deliver for patients, ensure a shift towards

multidisciplinary working and deliver more community-centred models of care. These actions would contribute to closing the workforce gap.

Establish strong leadership for psychological professions

To indicate support for these professions and make further progress towards parity of esteem between mental and physical health, the new government should support the establishment of a national role of Chief Psychological Professions Officer, to bring the psychological professions on a par with other health professions.

Protect the public through smarter regulation

Patients and the public are at risk from a loophole in the Health Care Professions Council registration system that allows people without appropriate qualifications to use the title 'psychologist' without the risk of sanctions. The new government should commit to reviewing all Practitioner Psychologists titles to close the loophole, support the profession and protect the public from potential harm.

Harness the power of evidence-based behaviour change interventions to save lives

Around 60 per cent of premature mortality can be attributed to causes linked to behaviours, for example smoking or physical inactivity. Public health interventions hold the key to tackling many of these health challenges, but to be most effective these interventions need to fully consider the lives people live. Government should ensure that interventions are evidence-based, commissioned with an understanding of the science of behaviour change, are fully resourced, and designed and delivered by people with appropriate psychological knowledge, skills and training.

Education

100% mental health coverage for schools

In 2017, the government launched a new policy to create Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) to work with children and staff in education settings. This is a positive step, but the commitment to only reach 'at least a fifth to a quarter' of areas by 2022/2023 is inadequate. The new government must commit to evaluating the policy and ensuring that this additional support reaches 100 per cent of children during its term.

School inspections that measure health and wellbeing

To ensure that psychological wellbeing is embedded into schools' culture and recognised by their leaders, the Department for Education should introduce mental health and wellbeing measures into the school inspection regime. This should be accompanied by the provision of additional psychological support and guidance for schools.

Better support for students

To respond to the growing mental health crisis in our universities and colleges, the government should support institutions to implement a whole institution approach to mental health that focuses not only on supporting students and staff struggling with their mental health but also seeks to create a physical, cultural and learning environment that promotes wellbeing.

BEIS

A diverse research portfolio

Research funding in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should enable internationally excellent research while also encouraging smaller pockets of excellence to emerge – whether individual researchers or newly established research teams. A commitment from government to recognise and support these smaller units would increase the potential for additional international reach and impact from UK HEIs and allow the evolution of innovative research that would bring social and economic benefits.

Deliver a vision for healthy ageing

The Industrial Strategy made meeting the needs of an ageing society one of its central priorities, but the recent NHS Long Term Plan paid scant attention to older people. The government should ensure equality of access to psychological therapies for older people, ensure they have access to age appropriate care, and enable them age well at home, at work, and in the community.

DWP

An end-to-end reform of the benefits system

The benefits system isn't working or providing support to those who most need it and is causing undue psychological harm for many more. The system should be set up to alleviate poverty and treat people with dignity and respect, through positive support. To that end, the new government, as an urgent priority, should conduct a thorough review of the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessment criteria. An independent commission should be established to develop options for replacement of the work capability and PIP assessments.

A payment system that does not cause psychological harm

The majority of people who engage with the benefits system report that it causes anxiety. To address this the new government should remove benefit sanctions and conditionality for people with disabilities or mental health problems and introduce high-quality, impairment-specific employment support. The benefits inflation freeze and the five-week wait for the first payment under Universal Credit should be abolished. At the same time, the disability elements of Universal Credit must be restored.

Support employers to prioritise workforce wellbeing

Good work is good for your health, good for business and good for society. The government must commit to nurturing psychologically healthy workplaces that support workers to thrive mentally and physically. Sadly, some employers fail to look after their employees' psychological health, at great cost to the UK economy; in 2018/2019 12.8 million working days were lost to stress, anxiety and depression. The government must support employers to reduce this figure, introducing preventative measures to ensure a psychologically healthy workforce.

Equalities Office

Bring forward a policy solution to end conversion therapy

Conversion therapy is the term for therapy that assumes certain sexual orientations or gender identities are inferior to others and seeks to change or suppress them. It is unethical, potentially harmful and is not based on any reputable evidence. The new government should introduce, consult on and implement comprehensive policy solutions to end this harmful practice.

Justice

Co-ordinated action on brain injuries

Brain injuries, caused by traumatic injury, stroke or virus, are an 'invisible' public health epidemic with almost 350,000 hospital admissions each year. Despite these high numbers, there has been little in terms of government action to improve patient outcomes and prevent unnecessary hospital admissions. The new government must address this by establishing strong pathways for diagnosis, assessment, treatment and after care support.

A holistic drug policy that intervenes early

Evidence shows that the age at which a young person starts to use illicit substances predicts the severity of their use later in life and that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health conditions can factor in drug related offences. The new government should invest in prevention and early intervention programmes, and ensure that psychological services are provided alongside drug-related rehabilitation as part of an integrated care plan.

DCMS

Protecting children and young people from online harm

The rights of children in a digital environment must be protected. Government should implement a statutory duty of care which shifts the balance of responsibility away from the individual and towards the companies who host harmful content. This should be accompanied by evidence-based resources on online harms for schools, children and parents. Children's ability to benefit from technology must also be protected. Support should be provided for young people from deprived backgrounds and those with disabilities and special educational needs to access safe and appropriate technology.



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