

# BPS Policy Statement

April 2021

## BPS Wales

### Covid-19

The Society believes that the outbreak of Covid-19 will have a significant impact on our health and social care services for years to come. The Society also believes that the pandemic has had a significant impact on older people and children and young people in particular.

### Older Adult Population

Older adults are likely to be disproportionately impacted by loss, ill-health and the effects of the lock-down. This is also a group within society who have the least access to psychological therapies.

It is undoubtedly the case that COVID-19 will affect all of society and life may not quite be the same ever again. Although older adults will be mentioned in the context of dementia; it is likely that there will be little mention of the psychological needs of people aged over 65 years of age. Older adults are a forgotten group because referral rates do not match prevalence rates of mental health challenges.

- **The Society calls on the Welsh Government to consider the impact of COVID-19 across the lifespan and the existing disparities in access to psychological therapies.**

## People with Learning Disabilities

People with learning and intellectual disabilities will have experienced the pandemic in many ways. Services may be closed; carers, friends and family may have to self-isolate, become ill, or even die. As everyone is well aware, people who live in care homes are at particular risk.

Some people may also experience positive benefits with reduced demands, and more time with their household or family. The Society believes that we need to take account of each person's individual situation and remember that the psychological distress due to trauma may take some time to appear.

- **The Society calls on the Welsh Government to support the Society's work in promoting awareness of the appropriate adjustments that are required for people with intellectual disabilities at this exceptional time.**

## Remote Consultations & Assessments

Many practitioner psychologists have undertaken remote client assessments for the first time due to Covid-19 restrictions, and as a Society, we produced guidance to support them through the process.

The restrictions over the last 12 months have naturally resulted in limited face-to-face meetings and this has had an impact on both the psychologists and their clients. The insurance companies' insistence of sessions being face-to-face prevents the application of choice and has also limited access to services by carers (parents, those who care for an older adults or have other carer responsibilities). As a result of the insurance issue and the pressure to hold face to face sessions, practitioners have been required to be in a closed, confidential space for at least an hour, and have had to wear PPE – and this will have had an impact on the psychological process and potentially the quality of service. It would be beneficial to be able to continue to offer remote sessions as the lockdown eases without being penalised and restricted by the insurance companies.

- **With many people anxious about accessing healthcare services, the Society calls on the Welsh Government to support the further adoption of remote consultation and diagnosis.**
- **The Society calls on the Welsh Government to offer guidance on offering remote services as the country moves out of lockdown so that practitioners are not to be at the mercy of what health insurance companies are wanting.**

## BAME Community

It has been well documented that the BAME community has been impacted at a higher rate than others by Covid-19 and as a result, many will be suffering from anxiety. People from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups are more likely to be in jobs that has greater exposure to risk of infection, more likely to be in poorer health, in more precarious employment and sufferer more serious consequences including death.

There is also the likelihood that people from BAME communities are experiencing a psychological and emotional response in relation to issues being addressed by the recent Black Lives Matter movement. BPS Wales stands in solidarity with all those who are feeling pain and expressing righteous anger about racial injustice and recommit to valuing diversity and fighting inequity.

- **The Society calls on the Welsh Government to commit its support for the BAME communities in Wales as we move out of lockdown and actively work to address issues of inequality across all social characteristics.**

## Other High-Risk Groups

We must not forget about the real and potential impact of Covid-19 on other individuals in the 'high- risk' groups with pre-existing medical conditions, disabilities, or life-limiting illnesses. Many of these individuals were underserved and underacknowledged before this crisis, and this has been confounded by poor guidance during isolation, poor information around support, and restriction of routine medical procedures. Most of these individuals are still shielding and dealing with increased anxieties around the very real increased risk of transmission of Covid-19, and additional uncertainties around the management of their care.

As lockdown eases, poor adherence with social distancing is likely to have a lasting impact on their behaviour and mental health in the long term, and a 'new normal' will not emerge for these individuals for a long time. Initiatives that target older people and/or people with learning disabilities, deafness, autism, will not reach individuals with physical disabilities. Even if they do, they will not address many of the topics that are important for individuals with pre-existing medical conditions, physical disabilities, or life-limiting illnesses.

- **The Society calls on the Welsh Government to ensure increased support and initiatives for high- risk individuals as we slowly come out of lockdown.**

## Young People

The current crisis has and still is affecting many young people in ways that will risk long-term consequences for their mental health. Many children and young people already have a diagnosable mental health conditions, and research suggests that the majority of those believe that the pressures created by the crisis are exacerbating their needs.

Many others, including those who have experienced bereavement, abuse or domestic violence – are also likely to require additional support. The fear of becoming ill or seeing a loved one become ill, the loss of routines, the difficulties of social connection, the impact of loneliness, the disruption to education and the challenges of living in difficult or dangerous situations are creating additional pressure for young people across the country. Young people who belong to groups that are already marginalised or disadvantaged may be particularly at risk.

While mental health professionals deserve enormous credit for responding to the challenges the pandemic brings, many young people who were receiving some form of mental health treatment before the crisis are now receiving reduced support or no support at all. Other young people who would not previously have met the threshold for mental health support are likely to require it. Without preventative action, their needs are likely to escalate. Whilst the Society welcome the steps that the Welsh Government has already taken to prioritise mental health this falls well short of meeting the scale of need. While many voluntary sector providers have been quick to adapt to the changing landscape – moving support online and using innovative approaches to safe service delivery - there remain gaps in infrastructure and funding which threaten the long-term sustainability of these efforts.

- **The Society calls on the Welsh Government to work with the voluntary sector to launch a national campaign to reach children and young people, and their families, to promote positive approaches for maintaining mental wellbeing.**
- **The Society also calls on the Welsh Government to commit to introducing additional support for young people’s mental health as we move out of the pandemic to meet rising demand.**

## Education

The Society advocates whole school approaches to address mental health and emotional wellbeing and issued guidance for [children, parents, carers and the wider public](#) on steps to protect their psychological wellbeing during and after the coronavirus outbreak.

School staff have a crucial role to play to ensure that the physical, cognitive and emotional needs of children are appropriately supported. Schools will need to create a learning environment that helps the whole school community understand the many factors affecting their future mental health and wellbeing.

- **The Society recommends that the Welsh Government prioritises children’s social, emotional and psychological wellbeing when schools in Wales do reopen.**
- **The Society calls on the Welsh Government to deliver a wellbeing support package for schools, enabling them to prioritise wellbeing now and over the next academic year, and providing guidance and resources on how to manage transitions when it is safe for students to return to school.**
- **The Society calls for a comprehensive plan to attend to children’s mental health needs, including the needs of under-fives.**

## E-Learning

The Society believes that the need for an overarching approach to help support those most in need has never been starker – especially for those children and young people living in poverty. Many children and young people have been without access to laptops and key resources such as internet connections – leading to stigma and discrimination.

- **As part of the Child Poverty Strategy, the Society calls on the Welsh Government to ensure that it does everything in its power to make resources available to help those children and families most in need through these difficult times.**

## Wellbeing

Many children and young people will be facing a major disruption in their routine, education and social lives – and will need support and encouragement more than ever. The Society believes that interruptions to children and young people’s basic needs will have a big impact on their emotions and behaviour. Older children are likely to be more concerned with social, moral and emotional aspects of the pandemic – which could lead to more distress and sadness than in younger children.

The Society notes that some families will be finding life easier under lockdown. For some children and young people, the lockdown has removed the large areas of difficulties – particularly for those who struggle in a school environment due to bullying or other challenges.

- **The Society calls on the Welsh Government to take this opportunity to re-think ways of learning following this pandemic as part of its implementation of the new curriculum in schools across Wales.**

## Child Psychology Referrals

It is important to note that there has also been a reduction in child psychology referral rates due to the pandemic, as many of the usual referral routes and services have stopped. There is a struggle to reach those children and young people in need, and psychologists are having to think and work more creatively to make sure those children are not left behind.

While mental health professionals deserve enormous credit for responding to the challenges the pandemic brings, many children and young people who were receiving some form of mental health treatment before the crisis are now receiving reduced support or no support at all. Other young people who would not previously have met the threshold for mental health support are likely to require it. Without preventative action, their needs are likely to escalate.

With the restrictions on access to schools, universities and primary care, there is often uncertainty or reticence about how and when to access mental health support. In many cases, young people have also lost the coping mechanisms that could help them to manage their mental health. When it is safe for restrictions to change, there needs to be a clear plan about how to grow and develop services, how to enable social re-integration and how to support groups who are disproportionately affected by the crisis.

- **The Society calls on the Welsh Government to launch a national campaign to reach children and young people, and their families across Wales, to promote positive approaches for maintaining mental wellbeing, working alongside the voluntary sector to do so.**

## Post-Covid Recovery

The Society recognises the scale of the challenge that we're all facing, but by taking bold action now, we can reduce the impact of the pandemic and give hope to thousands of people across the country.

- **The Society urges the Welsh Government to consider how psychological evidence and expertise will be a vital part of Wales' post-covid recovery plan.**