



Building resilient communities

Making every contact count for public mental health

A briefing for public health teams



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Investment in mental capital and wellbeing makes social, economic and political sense; cognitive decline, mental illness and languishing are expensive and miserable for everyone. Fortunately much of this expense and misery is avoidable.

Smith and Corlett, *The Lambeth Wellbeing and Happiness Programme*¹

Mental health should be a key part of every public health strategy. There is a strong moral and economic case for tackling the rising challenge of mental health problems for communities as a whole and for the people who experience them. There are also clear, evidence-based and cost-effective steps that can be taken to build resilience, promote wellbeing and help to prevent mental health problems.

Now is a key moment for public mental health. The economic downturn and subsequent austerity measures are increasing the number of people experiencing low levels of wellbeing and at risk of developing mental health problems. This comes at a time when cuts are limiting the support available from existing community services and restricting capacity for commissioning new ones. However, it's also a moment of opportunity; the transition of public health over to local authorities presents the possibility of embedding public mental health throughout the work of your council, touching a whole community.

This briefing accompanies a report by Mind and the Mental Health Foundation; *Building resilient communities: making every contact count for public mental health*. The report focuses on resilience; setting out the types of services, resources and infrastructure that need to be in place locally to support resilient communities, helping people to 'feel good and function well'. Resilience should be central to any public mental

health strategy but is only one element; it is essential that structural inequalities, like income or access to affordable housing, are also tackled.

What makes resilient people?

"Everyone has mental health and wellbeing... whoever you are, whatever your circumstances."

Adult Services commissioner

Resilience is the capacity of people to confront and cope with life's challenges; to maintain their wellbeing in the face of adversity. Mind and the Mental Health Foundation's report identifies three key factors that affect resilience:

- Activities that promote wellbeing
- Building social capital
- Developing psychological coping strategies.

Public health teams should ensure that your local plans address each of these areas.

Promoting wellbeing

Wellbeing is made up of two key elements; 'feeling good' and 'functioning well'². The New Economics Foundation's report, *Five Ways to Wellbeing*, sets out five actions that promote wellbeing³. Importantly, these are not just a person's individual responsibility, but can be influenced by 'upstream' interventions; shaping existing services or providing new services in such a way that they encourage behaviours that promote the five ways to wellbeing.

Building Resilient Communities sets out the evidence for each of the five ways to wellbeing, as well as examples of upstream interventions that can support people to take part in these activities locally. The five ways to wellbeing are: connect, be active, take notice, keep learning, and give.

Recommendation: Ensure good provision of local facilities, resources and services to support people to take part in activities involving each of the five-ways to wellbeing and reconfigure existing services to encourage engagement in these activities.

Building social capital

Relationships are a key component of social capital and there is strong evidence that they are a major factor in promoting wellbeing and preventing mental health problems. Building social connections is also an area where local public health teams can make a significant impact, particularly by commissioning targeted interventions to build social relationships amongst isolated groups, changing the way existing services are run to facilitate building social connections and commissioning interventions that encourage social connections between people who face similar challenging life circumstances to provide peer support.

“When you are first made unemployed you go to the job centre and they put you on a training course which then provides you with a manual handling certificate. What you need is groups where people can help each other. Where you can meet your peers.”

Focus group participant who is currently unemployed

Recommendation: Reconfigure existing services and commission new ones to build social connections, particularly between people who face similar challenging life circumstances or are socially isolated.

Developing psychological coping skills

There is a growing evidence base around the use of psychological treatments (including cognitive behavioural therapy) and psychological education for the prevention of mental health problems. This is particularly important for people during periods of stress or change, such as following a diagnosis of a long-term health condition, after birth or following a move into a residential home. Simple, cost-effective interventions have been shown to significantly reduce the likelihood of developing depression and reduce stress and anxiety.

Recommendation: Commission targeted interventions that build psychological coping skills, particularly for those at increased risk of poor wellbeing.

What makes resilient communities?

As well as providing the right services, facilities and resources that help to build resilience, local communities must have the capacity and infrastructure to support people to access them. It is essential that there is a good level of mental health awareness amongst all front-line staff and community groups in a local community, so that every contact counts in terms of improving wellbeing and signposting people to support. This briefing is accompanied by a report *Building resilient communities*, a training presentation and information booklet to supplement formal mental health awareness training.

It's also important that comprehensive, accessible and well-promoted information about local services is available to help people access them, and that your public health team supports local organisations to work together, creating an integrated network of support and information.

Finally, public health teams should ensure that services that build resilience or promote wellbeing are accessible to everyone within your community, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, disability or other factors. Active steps should be taken to ensure accessibility and reduce the stigma attached to wellbeing and resilience services.

“The Public Services workforce is very varied, including health visitors, district nurses, school nurses, social workers, teachers, police, and I think ‘what if they all knew how to help someone improve their health?’, then every contact would matter and could lead to a change - that would be impressive!”

Associate Director of Public Health

Recommendations: Provide training on mental health, wellbeing and resilience to all front-line staff as well as community groups, faith groups and service providers.

Provide a comprehensive and accessible information tool covering all wellbeing and resilience activities.

Work with your local community to reduce stigma and assess the accessibility of services, facilities and resources, making any necessary adjustments.

Making it happen

Whilst they are extremely important, it takes more than a dedicated Director of Public Health to implement an effective strategy to build resilience, it takes a whole community. Public health teams should see Health and Wellbeing boards as a way to involve key stakeholders across your community in public mental health, and should strive to embed a wellbeing focus throughout the work of the local authority.

Where possible, wellbeing services should be co-produced with the local community, resulting in better services that are more appropriate for and appealing to your local population, and therefore more effective.

Finally, the wellbeing outcomes of all services across a community should be measured and evaluated robustly so that the impact on wellbeing of commissioning or cutting any service is fully understood.

Recommendations: Co-produce services with your local community to ensure that they are as accessible as possible.

Support local providers to evaluate the wellbeing impacts of their services using the Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment Tool⁴.

Consider wellbeing as part of impact assessment of any new service or proposed service cut.

Conclusion

There is clear evidence and a convincing economic case for investment in public mental health. Every local area should be supporting its community to take part in activities that promote wellbeing, build social connections and improve psychological coping skills – building community resilience and ‘future-proofing’ wellbeing. In particular, a targeted approach is needed to support people living in the most difficult life circumstances.

To be successful, public mental health strategies must touch a whole community and involve the whole community in both their development and delivery.

“We want people to have a better life, a happier life, so there’s more, not just years in your life, but life in your years.”

Director of Public Health

For the additional resources and report accompanying this briefing, please see www.mind.org.uk/publicmentalhealth

These materials are part of a series produced on behalf of the Mental Health Strategic Partnership with funding from the Department of Health.

¹ Smith and Corlett, Social Work and Social Sciences Review, 14(3) (2010/2011) The Lambeth Wellbeing and Happiness Programme

² The New Economics Foundation (2008). Five Ways to Wellbeing, The Evidence

³ ibid

⁴ The New Economics Foundation (2012), Measuring Wellbeing