

Mental Health and Smoking Partnership key asks May 2023

This document provides a brief overview of key asks to address high rates of smoking among people with a mental health condition. For further detail on the positions outlined below please email: john.waldron@ash.org.uk

Why it matters

Smoking is undermining government goals to improve physical health of people with mental health conditions:

- **High smoking rates among people with mental health condition is a leading cause of premature death and disease:** Smoking accounts for [two-thirds](#) of the reduced life expectancy of people with a serious mental illness (SMI).
- **Smoking rates are high in most groups with poor mental health:** The highest rates of smoking are among people with substance use issues e.g. 70% of those receiving treatment for opiates smoke. People with SMI have more than three times the smoking rate of the general population (41% verses 14%). The rate among people with depression and anxiety is just under twice that of the general population (26% verses 14%) but they account for around 1.6 million smokers.

Increasing quitting can improve population level mental health, reduce burden on the NHS and improve the wealth and employment prospects of people with mental health conditions:

- **Stopping smoking improves mental health:** There is now [good evidence](#) that stopping smoking improves mental health of all smokers. The effect has been compared to the impact of anti-depressants.
- **Smoking exacerbates levels of poor mental health:** Growing evidence that smoking contributes to development of some mental health conditions (including [schizophrenia and depression](#)), smoking damages people's wealth, health and employability further contributing to the burden of poor mental health

Without targeted action people with mental health conditions will be left behind:

- **Securing the Government's goal of a smokefree country by 2030** will be at least [a decade later](#) for people with mental health conditions making a major contribution to inequality.
- **Barriers to quitting:** People with a mental health condition are similarly [motivated to quit](#) compared to the general population and with the right support can be equally successful, but higher levels of addiction and other barriers undermine quit success.

Our key policy asks

1. A new Tobacco Control Plan for England with a commitment to secure smokefree 2030 for people with a mental health condition. Including:
 - a. A target for reducing rates in this population
 - b. Scaled up support for smokers outside secondary MH services e.g. IAPT
 - c. Connecting smokers to quitting aids such as e-cigarettes
2. That the 10 Year Mental Health Strategy includes a clear commitment to reduce smoking as part of a strategy to improve physical health for this population.
3. Commitments made through the NHS Long Term Plan to provide smoking cessation support to smokers with long term mental health conditions must be fully implemented and sustained

Supporting information

- In April 2023, the Public Health Minister Neil O'Brien announced a series of measures on [Achieving Smokefree 2030: Cutting Smoking and Stopping Kids Vaping](#). The announcement included:
 - A national "Swap to Stop" scheme to support 1 million adult smokers to quit smoking by switching to vaping. This scheme will initially target at-risk and high smoking prevalence groups
 - An offer of financial incentives to all pregnant women who smoke by the end of 2024
 - £3m investment in a comprehensive enforcement package to tackle underage vape sales and illicit tobacco
 - A call for evidence on youth vaping
 - **As a minimum, all mental health practitioners will be able to signpost to specially developed digital resources to support people with mental health problems to quit smoking**
 - The government will be backing joined-up working between the NHS and local authorities to support smokers to quit, facilitated by Integrated Care Boards
 - A government consultation on the introduction of mandatory pack inserts with messages and information to help smokers quit, later this year
- The [2017 Tobacco Control Plan for England](#) included high level commitment on mental health but little detail. The policy focus since has been on people with SMI with a missed opportunity for action across wider population of people with MH conditions.
- In July 2022 the Government-commissioned independent [Khan Review of tobacco policy](#) recommended that the Government: *Tackle the issue of smoking and mental health. Disseminate accurate information that smoking does not reduce stress and anxiety, through public health campaigns and staff training. And make stopping smoking a key part of mental health treatment in acute and community mental health services and in primary care.*
- NHSE is investing in new support to help smokers in secondary MH to stop through the NHS Long Term Plan. Implementation has been slowed by the pandemic and MH services are lagging behind implementation of similar support in maternity and acute settings. Commitment must be maintained and NHS needs to ensure that new services are sustained for the long term.