

MENTAL HEALTH AND SMOKING PARTNERSHIP

Co-Chairs:
Professor Ann McNeill
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Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria St
Westminster
SW1H 0EU

12 January 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

RE: Ending the significant inequalities caused by high rates of smoking among people with a mental health condition

On behalf of the Mental Health and Smoking Partnership and mental health leaders from across the sector, we are writing to ask for a meeting to raise our concerns about the continuing inequalities in healthy life expectancy experienced by people with mental health conditions. Inequalities which are caused predominantly by smoking and need to be tackled by a new Tobacco Control Plan with clear commitments to address the high smoking rates among this population.

Smoking is undermining the Government's goal to improve the physical health of people with mental health conditions and the much higher rates of smoking in people with mental health conditions threatens to prevent the Government delivering on its manifesto commitment of increasing healthy life expectancy by five years by 2035. Rates are higher in almost all groups of people with a mental health condition and smoking accounts for two-thirds of the reduced life expectancy of people with a severe mental illness (SMI). In addition, it is estimated that around 1.6 million people with depression and anxiety smoke, contributing to their poor physical and mental health and increasing under- and unemployment so reducing their incomes.

While the last Tobacco Control Plan for England made a welcome acknowledgement of this inequality, partially through acknowledging the work of the Mental Health and Smoking Partnership, actions to address it have been inadequate. Without further action people with mental health conditions will be left behind. It is estimated that it will take at least a decade longer for smoking prevalence to fall to a rate of less than 5% amongst people with long term mental health conditions than it will for the rest of the population. We support the recommendation in the Khan Review that the Government: "*Tackle the issue of smoking and mental health.*"

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The Mental Health and Smoking Partnership recommends:

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 as we progress to a smokefree 2030
 - b. Scaled up support for smokers outside secondary mental health services e.g. IAPT and connecting smokers to quitting aids such as e-cigarettes
 - c. A clear message about the improvements seen in mental health when smokers stop
2. A 10 Year Mental Health Strategy with a clear commitment to reduce smoking as part of a strategy to improve physical health for this population.
3. Full implementation of commitments made in the NHS Long Term Plan to provide tailored smoking cessation support to smokers with long term mental health conditions.

Efforts to tackle smoking and poor mental health have often fallen between two stools, with no single responsible minister, which is why we are writing to you. We look forward to meeting with you to discuss the issues set out in our letter and how they may best be addressed.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of the Mental Health and Smoking Partnership and the following mental health sector leaders:

Professor Ann McNeill, Professor of Tobacco Addiction, King's College London, Co-Chair, Mental Health and Smoking Partnership

Mark Rowland, Chief Executive, Mental Health Foundation, Co-Chair, Mental Health and Smoking Partnership

Sarah Hughes, Chief Executive, Centre for Mental Health

Tom Madders, Co-CEO, YoungMinds

Simon Blake OBE, Chief Executive, Mental Health First Aid England

Kathy Roberts, Chief Executive, Association of Mental Health Providers

Sophie Corlett, Interim Chief Executive, Mind

Paula Ojok, Chief Executive, Helplines Partnership

Dr Adrian James, President, Royal College of Psychiatrists

Mark Winstanley, Chief Executive, Rethink Mental Illness