COVID-19: impact on mental health

March 2021

**Title:** Suicide prevention in England: fifth progress report

Department of Health & Social Care | 27th March 2021

The fifth progress report of the Suicide Prevention Strategy for England details the steps taken to reduce deaths by suicide since January 2019. The report sets out:

* the data and evidence we have on suicide and self-harm
* the progress made against existing commitments designed to prevent suicides and self-harm
* further actions for government and its agencies, particularly in the context of COVID-19

This report also sets out a refreshed cross-government suicide prevention workplan, which updates the commitments outlined in the [suicide prevention: cross-government workplan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-cross-government-plan), published in January 2019.

Full detail: [Suicide prevention in England: fifth progress report](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973935/fifth-suicide-prevention-strategy-progress-report.pdf)

**Title:** COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing recovery action plan

Department of Health and Social Care | 27th March 2021

The COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing recovery action plan sets out an ambitious, cross-government, whole-person approach to promoting positive mental health and supporting people living with mental illness to recover and live well.

While this plan sets out what government will do in the coming year, it is also a call to action for the whole of society, for local communities, families and for individuals, who can take simple steps to look after their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of those around them – and can reach out for support, including from mental health services when necessary.

Full detail: [COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing recovery action plan. Our plan to prevent, mitigate and respond to the mental health impacts of the pandemic during 2021 to 2022](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973936/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-recovery-action-plan.pdf)

**Title:** A connected recovery. Findings of the APPG on Loneliness Inquiry

All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Loneliness | 24th March 2021

This inquiry report makes the case for a ‘connected recovery’ from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Key inquiry findings:

* There are too many barriers preventing people from connecting – such as a lack of safe, welcoming and accessible green spaces, parks and gardens, public toilets, playing areas, local bus services, and ramps for people with disabilities.
* Too many people face barriers to digital connection as a result of lack of access to mobile technology and the internet, as well as a lack of digital skills and confidence.
* Poorly designed or unsuitable housing and neighbourhoods can make it hard for people to meet each other, maintain social connections and develop a sense of belonging.
* Some communities and groups were highlighted as facing particular disadvantage in relation to transport and mobility.

The APPG sets out a roadmap, calling on the government to adopt 15 recommendations, designed to:

* Tackle loneliness through national leadership
* Translate national policy into local action
* Invest in the community and social infrastructure needed to connect, particularly in areas with higher levels of deprivation.
* Loneliness proof all new transport and housing developments, and close the digital divide by increasing digital skills and confidence.

Full report: [A connected recovery. Findings of the APPG on Loneliness Inquiry](https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/documents/about-us/what-we-do/a-connected-recovery-findings-of-the-appg-on-loneliness-inquiry.pdf)

**Title:** State of health and care: The NHS Long Term Plan after Covid-19

Institute for Public Policy Research | 16th March 2021

After a decade of austerity, The NHS Long Term Plan was meant to be a turning point for healthcare. However, those plans have been severely disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic. This analysis shows the scale of the damage done by the pandemic across several major health conditions.

It recommends a package of six ambitious changes to ‘build back better’. These policies are designed to do three things.

* First, they intend to ensure the pandemic does not cause lasting damage to healthcare services for future generations.
* Second, they look to bring in areas – like social care and public health – that are not covered in The NHS Long Term Plan, but which Covid-19 has harshly reminded us are integral to healthcare.
* Third, they look to capture the innovations that occurred during the pandemic.

Together, the recommendations form a £12 billion blueprint to ‘build back better’ health and care.

Full detail: [State of health and care: The NHS Long Term Plan after Covid-19](https://www.ippr.org/files/2021-03/state-of-health-and-care-mar21.pdf)

**Title:** Maternal mental health during a pandemic: A rapid evidence review of Covid-19’s impact

Maternal Mental Health Alliance | Centre for Mental Health | 16th March 2021

Maternal mental health during a pandemic is a rapid evidence review of the impact of Covid-19 on the mental health of women during pregnancy and after they’ve given birth, and the support that’s been available during the pandemic.

The report finds that women and their families have faced extra pressures on their mental health, including anxiety about giving birth during lockdown or about becoming unwell, fears about losing employment, and increasing levels of domestic violence. It finds that some groups of women face a higher than average risk of poor mental health, including women from racialised communities and women experiencing economic deprivation.

These findings call for the Government to review what is needed to fully support women’s mental health during the perinatal period and to commit to provide this both in the aftermath of the pandemic and in any future crisis situation.

Full publication: [Maternal mental health during a pandemic: A rapid evidence review of Covid-19’s impact](https://maternalmentalhealthalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/CentreforMH_MaternalMHPandemic_FullReport.pdf)

Executive summary: [Maternal mental health during a pandemic: A rapid evidence review of Covid-19’s impact](https://maternalmentalhealthalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/CentreforMH_MaternalMHPandemic_ExecutiveSummary.pdf)

**Title:** The Other Pandemic: The Impact Of Covid-19 On Britain’s Mental Health

Public First | 7th March 2021

The findings in this report lay bare the genuine, wide and profound mental health crisis in Britain today. 15 percent of the public have lost a close friend or relative to the virus. And 40 per cent say their mental health has been negatively affected in the last 12 months.

The key findings of the report show that:

* Young people have endured much worse mental health than older people. 50 per cent of 18–24-year-olds say their mental health has been negatively impacted by the pandemic – compared to just 25 per cent of those aged over 65 who say the same. 34 per cent of 18–24-year-olds rate their mental health as very or quite poor, up from 21 per cent who say they would have said the same before the pandemic.
* Women have carried a particularly heavy burden. 42 per cent of women say they have been more worried about their own mental health because of Covid, compared to 32 per cent of men. 49 per cent of women say they have been worried about their mental health in the last year, compared to 34 per cent of men. They are also more likely to say they have struggled generally, but also more likely to name specific ways they have struggled – for example, with concentration and sleep.
* Women were more likely to say they found homeschooling “stressful”, with 62 per cent of women reporting that, compared to 41 per cent of men. But 38 per cent of men are finding it easier to talk about poor mental health since the start of the pandemic, a potential sign that stigma around mental health is being broken down.
* Those with children have worried terribly about a “lost year” of childhood. 32 per cent of those with children under 18 say they have been worried about their children’s mental health in the last week. And well over half of all parents – 61 per cent – say that lockdown has had a negative impact on their children’s mental health
* The better off have coped much better financially. By 31 per cent to 23 per cent those in the richest AB social groups say their personal financial situation has got better rather than got worse as a result of Covid. In the poorest DE group, by 27 per cent to 15 per cent people say their financial situation has got worse compared to getting better.
* Furlough has not shielded people from extreme worry about their financial situation. The poll found that 45 per cent of those who have been furloughed at some point during the pandemic say they have worried about financial problems or worries in the last week, compared to 26 per cent of those who have not been furloughed.

Full report: [The Other Pandemic: The Impact Of Covid-19 On Britain’s Mental Health](http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/The-Other-Pandemic.pdf)

**Title:** Middle aged women face greater risk of debilitating long term symptoms

BMJ | 2021; 372: n829 | 25th March 2021

Middle aged women have a higher risk of experiencing a range of debilitating ongoing symptoms, such as fatigue, breathlessness, muscle pain, anxiety, depression, and “brain fog” after hospital treatment for covid-19, suggest the findings of two unpublished studies available as preprints.

Seven in 10 patients admitted to hospital with covid-19 reported “long covid” symptoms an average of five months after discharge in the larger PHOSP-COVID study, and symptoms were more prevalent in women aged 40-60.  Only 29% of the 1077 patients studied felt fully recovered when followed up, on average five months after discharge. Over a quarter had clinically significant symptoms of anxiety and depression, 12% had symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, 17% had at least mild cognitive impairment, 46% had lower physical performance than age and sex matched controls, and 20% had a new disability.

Before hospital admission 68% of patients had worked full time, but 18% of these had not returned to work and 19% had had to change their way of working because of longlasting effects.

A smaller second study, from the International Severe Acute Respiratory and emerging Infections Consortium (ISARIC), found that women under 50 were five times less likely to report feeling recovered, twice as likely to report worse fatigue, seven times more likely to become more breathless, and more likely to have greater disability than men of the same age who had been admitted to hospital with covid-19.

Further detail: [Middle aged women face greater risk of debilitating long term symptoms](https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n829)

Research papers:

[Physical, cognitive and mental health impacts of COVID-19 following hospitalisation: a multi-centre prospective cohort study](https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.03.22.21254057v2.full.pdf)

[Long covid in adults discharged from UK hospitals after covid-19: a prospective, multicentre cohort study using the ISARIC WHO Clinical Characterisation Protocol](https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.03.18.21253888v3.full.pdf)

**Title:** What has been the effect of covid-19 on suicide rates?

BMJ | 2021; 372: n834 | 29th March 2021

A year into the pandemic this article looks at the evidence about the impact of covid-19 on suicide, and states that whilst suicide rates haven’t risen, we should be cautious.

Full detail: [What has been the effect of covid-19 on suicide rates?](https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n834)

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