

Rt Hon Baroness Heather Hallett DBE
Chair of UK Covid-19 Inquiry

7 April 2022

Including Mental Health in the terms of reference of the Covid 19 Public Inquiry

Dear Baroness Hallett,

We are writing as a coalition of 23 organisations, listed below, who came together during the initial Covid-19 national lockdown, in April 2020, to ensure that the four Governments of the UK delivered a comprehensive set of measures to urgently tackle the growing mental health crisis we have seen during the pandemic, including the provision of accessible counselling and psychotherapy services. We are comprised of professional bodies, service providers, trainers and campaign groups from across the Mental Health Sector. Together we represent over 80,000 individual therapists who have played a critical role supporting our most vulnerable people and communities over the past two years.

Our plea to you, in your role as Chair of the Public Inquiry into Covid-19, is to include Mental Health as an additional and separate category within the draft terms of reference, which are currently subject to public consultation. Extensive evidence has demonstrated that the mental health costs of Covid-19 are as profound and as long lasting as the physical health costs and these need to be considered comprehensively by the committee in terms of preparedness, response and recovery.

Our experience is that this was a missing element of the Government's strategy throughout each phase of their response to tackling the disease, despite extensive international evidence of the mental health impacts that health events of this magnitude have on society.

The current draft terms of investigation include a review of the "response of the health and care sector" which very much focuses on the physical impacts of the disease but neglects to examine the impact and response by Government to the vast mental health impact itself and the various response measures put in place to protect the public and those working on the frontline.

As a consequence of the pandemic over 1.6 million adults are on waiting lists for mental health treatment and an estimated 8 million adults can't even get onto a waiting list. The number of children and young people with mental health problems has risen dramatically from one in nine to one in six impacted, this needs serious and separate consideration from the review of physical health impacts.

We know that demand for mental health support is growing and is likely to continue for years ahead. Some 71% of therapists surveyed by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) have seen an increase in the number of inquiries or referrals for their services since the start of the pandemic and more than half (51%) of therapists think we'll continue to see the impact of Covid-19 on people's mental health for up to five years.

Public opinion strongly supports the need for Government to get to grips with the mental health impact of the pandemic. A You Gov survey of GB adults undertaken on behalf of BACP in February 2022 highlighted that 68% of people agree the UK government should invest more in mental health because of the pandemic. Only 14% of people agreed the UK government has done enough to support mental health during the past two years.

As part of a review of the mental health impact of the pandemic this inquiry needs to consider the following critical issues:

- Why a comprehensive mental health response wasn't put in place at the outset, given the extensive international evidence of mental health impacts of pandemics and epidemics that pre-existed the arrival of Covid-19 in the UK.
- What planning or provision was made once there was clear evidence of the trauma impacts of the pandemic on frontline staff, those with Covid-19 or long Covid, or the many thousands of families impacted by loss and bereavement and unable to visit dying relatives in care homes and hospitals or attend funerals. The mental health impacts of isolation, insecurity, changing work and family circumstances and general anxiety during each stage of lockdown.
- The mental health impacts of the measures that were put in place alongside lockdowns to mitigate their impact, including furlough, housing for homeless people, practical support for those unable to access services, and the impact of school closures on children and young people.
- The negative consequences of restrictions on the mental health of groups most impacted by the disease and the disproportionate impacts on those living in poverty, on people of colour, on children and young people and on women and the need for a diverse mental health workforce.
- Why, despite the extensive evidence on mental health impact, this is neglected in plans to tackle the NHS backlog?
- The importance of expanding and developing a more diverse mental health workforce to ensure a choice of accessible and culturally appropriate therapy is

urgently in place to support those most impacted by the pandemic alongside vocational rehabilitation support to assist people to return to or remain in work.

We urge you and members of the Inquiry committee to urgently reconsider the terms of the inquiry and ensure that mental health is given the consideration it deserves so that future impacts can be managed and that people are given the appropriate and accessible support they urgently need.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Ballantine Dykes

Deputy CEO and Chief Professional Standards Officer, BACP

Signed on behalf of the 23 organisations listed below

1. Association of Child Psychotherapists (ACP)
2. Association of Christian Counsellors (ACC)
3. British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)
4. British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)
5. British Infertility Counselling Association (BICA)
6. British Psychoanalytic Council (BPC)
7. Centre for Mental Health
8. The College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists (COSRT)
9. Connect2Counselling
10. The Council for Health and Work
11. Cruse Bereavement Support
12. Human Givens Institute
13. Independent Age
14. Kooth
15. Lifelink
16. National Counselling Society (NCS)
17. Northern Ireland Counselling Forum
18. Optima Health
19. Psychosynthesis Trust
20. Relate
21. Rethink Mental Illness
22. United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy
23. Vocational Rehabilitation Association