



Does your local NHS Strategic Plan deliver improved mental health services for ALL children?

- This autumn, local NHS commissioning systems are required to agree 5-year strategic plans which set out how they will deliver the commitments in the NHS Long Term Plan¹.
- The Long Term Plan states that there will be an improvement in mental health services for ALL children aged 0-25, and describes a goal "to ensure that 100% of children and young people who need specialist care can access it"².
- CCGs will receive additional funding to deliver Long Term Plan commitments. Funding for children and young people's mental health services is growing faster than both overall NHS funding and total mental health spending.
- Babies and toddlers may not often have diagnosed mental illnesses, but they can still experience poor mental health. Early toxic stress and relational trauma can have pervasive effects on many aspects of child development, with long term costs to individuals, families, communities and society. Yet children aged 0-2 are often excluded from mental health provision. Research by Parent Infant Partnership UK found that in 42% of CCG areas in England, CAMHS will not take referrals for children aged two and under³.
- Supporting the mental health of children aged two and under requires a specific set of skills including understanding early child development, and working with babies, parents and their relationships. Specialised parent-infant relationship teams are multi-disciplinary teams that can do this important work and also provide training, supervision and consultation to other professionals working with families in the first years of life. Without commissioning parent-infant relationship support, it is unlikely that local systems will be able to meet the mental health needs of the youngest children.

Every local NHS strategic plan should set out how mental health services will be expanded to meet the needs of all children, from birth upwards.

What does your local plan say?

1. Groups of Clinical Commissioning Groups in Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships or Integrated Commissioning Systems.
2. NHS Long Term Plan, page 50.
3. Hogg, S (2019) *Rare Jewels: Specialised parent-infant relationship teams in the UK*, Parent Infant Partnership UK.

The first 1001 days of life is a special time, requiring a special response.



The **first 1001 days**, from conception to age two, is a period of rapid growth. During this time, **babies' growing brains** are **shaped by their experiences**, particularly the **interactions** they have with their parents and other caregivers. What happens during this time lays the **foundations for future development**.



Babies are completely dependent on adults.



Babies are more vulnerable: more likely to be abused and more fragile.



Babies cannot speak but communicate their needs in different ways.



Yet in many places, mental health services do not meet babies' needs.



Babies' needs are not identified because professionals may not have the training to recognise signs of early stress and trauma.



Babies' needs are not supported because professionals in CAMHS may not have the specific skills and expertise to meet their needs.



Babies' needs are not recognised because CAMHS services might require service users to meet certain thresholds which exclude babies whose mental health needs must be understood in a different way.



Babies are not prioritised because stretched services may be under pressure to prioritise cases which are perceived to be more urgent, such as older children who are exhibiting disruptive or harmful behaviour.

In response to a Freedom of Information request

42% of CCG areas in England

said their CAMHS service would not accept referrals for children aged two or under.



The NHS Long Term Plan states that in the next decade 100% of babies, children and young people aged from 0-25 who need specialist mental health care should be able to access it. What is your area doing to improve mental health provision for children aged two and under?