


Labour's mental health care plans: What to expect under the new government

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On Friday 5 July, the Labour party was elected to power, marking a significant shift in the UK's political landscape. Wes Streeting, the new Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, has described the NHS as “broken” and has promised to change and rebuild the system, including mental health care. The new government believes that Britain is currently facing a “mental health epidemic” that is particularly affecting children and young people. So, what are Labour's mental health care plans?

The new government has said that it plans to give mental health the same attention and focus as physical health. To reduce mental health waiting times, Labour has promised to recruit 8,500 new mental health staff during its first term, who will be specially trained to support those at risk of suicide. The party has also committed to provide access to specialist mental health professionals in every school and establish Young Futures hubs, which will provide open access mental health services for children and young people in every community.

In addition, Labour has promised to modernise mental health legislation to give patients greater choice, autonomy, enhanced rights and support, and ensure everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Labour has previously criticised the current Mental Health Act as being “woefully out of date” and discriminatory against Black people, who are much more likely to be detained under the Act than other racial groups. Labour has also condemned the care and treatment of people with autism and learning difficulties under the current Act.

Although the Conservatives made some headway in reforming the Mental Health Act during their tenure, progress was slow, and we expect Labour to move more quickly with mental health law reforms. Wes Streeting previously pledged to introduce a new mental health bill as part of the party's first legislative programme. All eyes are therefore on the King's Speech, which will take place on 17 July, to see whether mental health legislation is included.

It is unclear whether Labour will adopt the existing draft mental health bill published under the Conservatives in 2022, make amendments to it, or create a new proposal altogether. Labour may seek to incorporate some of the recommendations made in previous legislative reform proposals, such as the creation of a statutory mental health commissioner, the introduction of a “responsible person” role within health organisations to monitor inequalities, and the abolition of community treatment orders. Labour may also seek to introduce safeguards to reduce the number of individuals with learning difficulties and autism detained in mental health hospitals.

It remains to be seen whether the new government will implement the long-awaited Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS), which were postponed indefinitely by the Conservatives in 2023. This seems unlikely, given that the Labour party voted against the legislation enacting the LPS when in opposition, citing concerns that it was not fit for purpose and weakened the current safeguards of people without capacity. We will therefore have to wait and see what steps are taken to reform the current deprivation of liberty safeguards system, which is struggling to cope with demand, leading to significant delays and leaving vulnerable people without legal protection.

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