

News story: Prime Minister announces review to tackle detention of those with mental ill health

Prime Minister Theresa May has announced plans for an independent review of mental health legislation and practice to tackle the issue of mental health detention.

There have been concerns that detention rates under the Mental Health Act – passed more than 3 decades ago – are too high. The number of detentions has been rising year on year. Last year on average there were 180 cases a day where people were sectioned under the terms of the act.

The Mental Health Act sets out rights and obligations that govern when and how the state can detain and treat someone in relation to their mental illness. It includes specific provision for individuals in contact with the criminal justice system.

People from black and minority ethnic populations are disproportionately affected, with black people in particular being almost 4 times more likely than white people to be detained.

The review will be chaired by Professor Sir Simon Wessely, a former President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. It will seek to address concerns about how the legislation is currently being used, and give recommendations for improving practice in the future.

The review will look at existing practice and evidence. It will consider the needs of service users and their families, in order to tackle injustices and improve how the system supports people during a mental health crisis.

In particular, the review will consider:

- why rates of detention are increasing – what can be done to reduce inappropriate detention and improve how different agencies respond to people in crisis
- reasons for the disproportionate number of people from certain ethnic backgrounds, in particular black people, being detained under the act, and what should be done about it

Following consultation with stakeholders, Sir Simon will produce an interim report identifying priorities for the review's work in early 2018, and develop a final report containing detailed recommendations on its priorities, by autumn 2018.

The review is part of a set of measures to improve mental health provision and tackle what the Prime Minister has described as the 'burning injustice' of mental illness.