

Speech: PM's words at World Mental Health Day reception: 10 October 2018

I'm really pleased to be able to welcome you here to Number 10 on World Mental Health Day.

And I want to say a huge thank you to everybody here for everything you are doing to transform how we look after mental health, here in Britain but also around the world.

Because as I've been discussing with a number of you and with some young people earlier – for too long, too many people have suffered in silence in fear of the stigma surrounding mental health conditions.

While those who have sought help haven't had the access to care they would have for a physical ailment.

Putting right that historic injustice is – I think – one of the defining challenges of our time.

We all know someone who has been affected by mental health problems – whether a family member, a colleague or a friend.

Yet average global spend on mental health is just 2.8 per cent of government health spending worldwide.

And we have to change this.

For we are not looking after our health if we are not looking after our mental health.

And we need that true parity between physical and mental health, not just in our health systems but elsewhere as well – in our classrooms, our workplaces, in our communities too.

That is why we were so pleased this week to host the first ever Global Ministerial Summit on mental health.

And in this landmark agreement we see more than 50 countries have supported the declaration to achieve equity for mental health in the 21st Century.

And I am delighted that we have representatives from many of those national delegations here with us this afternoon.

Now we must turn those words into action.

Here in the UK, as you've just heard, I have made parity of care a priority for our long-term plan for the NHS.

And as a result, our record investment in the NHS will mean record investment

in mental health.

For the first time ever, the NHS will work towards standards for accessing mental health services that are just as ambitious as those for physical health.

The Independent Review of the Mental Health Act, led by Simon Wessely, will enable the government to bring forward historic new legislation – and it is amazing that it has taken so long for us to review our mental health legislation – to help ensure that all people treated under the act are treated with dignity and respect.

We are investing more than £220 million over the next decade in the mental wellbeing of our brave armed forces – changing the culture, so those in need are not stigmatised but rather encouraged to step forward and then helped to return to the frontline. And we are ensuring that we have the right mental health support for our veterans too.

Our new campaign – Every Mind Matters – will train 1 million people in mental health awareness, with the first pilot beginning today in the West Midlands ahead of a national launch next Spring.

But I want us to go further, in particular in two areas: how we prevent the tragic loss of too many lives from suicide and how we support the mental wellbeing of our young people.

I think it's utterly heart-breaking that suicide is the biggest killer of men under 50 and most likely to occur among those who are disadvantaged in our society today.

And we cannot stand by and allow this injustice to continue.

But to tackle it we need to focus on the full range of challenges that those at risk of suicide are so often facing – from ill-health to debt or unemployment; from family breakdown to bereavement or loneliness; from drugs and alcohol dependency to homelessness.

And we need to break the stigma that so often prevents people from talking when they are at their most desperate.

For this to happen we need to give suicide prevention the priority it deserves.

So I am today appointing Jackie Doyle-Price as the first ever Ministerial Lead for Suicide Prevention.

And what Jackie will be doing is bringing together a national effort to tackle this injustice – working with all of you here – across national and local government, with suicide and self-harm prevention experts, clinicians and those personally affected by suicide. This will include charities like one whose representatives I've just met – the Campaign Against Living Miserably – who have campaigned so tirelessly on this issue.

Jackie will also explore how we can harness the latest technology – such as predictive analytics and artificial intelligence – to identify those at risk of suicide.

She will be looking at the support offered to families affected by suicide.

And she will also help to ensure there are effective suicide prevention plans in every local area – and we'll be publishing a national progress report by Spring next year.

As we do all of this, we are committing up to £2 million for the Zero Suicide Alliance over the next two years to improve suicide awareness and training across the NHS and beyond.

And we will ensure that when people do want to talk, there is someone there to listen.

So we are also committing up to £1.8 million for the Samaritans' helpline over the next four years, to ensure that it remains free for everyone who needs it, when they need it, 24 hours a day.

As I said, I also want us to do more to support the mental wellbeing of young people.

Half of all mental illness, as we know, begins by the age of 14 – and with young people spending more time online, the strains on mental wellbeing are only going to increase.

So it's critical that we not only deliver parity of care between mental and physical health – but that we do the same for prevention too.

That is why we are making education about mental health and resilience a mandatory part of the national curriculum.

And we are developing an entirely new mental health workforce that will support schools to get the right help early to young people with mild to moderate mental health needs.

Recruitment has just begun for the first cohort of trainees. They will begin studying in January and be fully trained working in schools by the end of next year.

But we need to go even further in ensuring that mental wellbeing and resilience is at the forefront of our whole approach to supporting young people.

For generations, we have measured our children's physical health throughout their childhood.

And we have done the same with their academic attainment.

But we haven't done this for their mental wellbeing.

That not only sends the wrong message about the importance of mental health but it also denies us vital data that can help transform the support we provide for generations to come.

So we are going to change this.

From next year, we will publish an annual State of the Nation report every World Mental Health Day to highlight the trends and issues in young people's mental wellbeing.

And we will provide schools with an approved framework which can help them with measuring all aspects of their students' health, including their mental wellbeing.

Now, when I first became Prime Minister, I stood on the steps of Downing Street and pledged to fight the burning injustices in our society.

I think there are few greater examples than the injustice which faces those with mental health conditions.

But working together we can change that.

We can end the stigma that has forced too many to suffer in silence.

We can prevent the tragedy of suicide taking too many lives.

And we can give the mental wellbeing of our children the priority that it so profoundly deserves.

So let's do that. And let me thank you all again for everything that you are doing to support that vital mission.

And let's go forward together, determined to ensure we improve people's mental health and give help and support to those that need it.