



## In Focus

### World Health Day, 7 April 2017

#### Overview

World Health Day is observed on 7 April each year to mark the anniversary of the founding of the World Health Organization (WHO). It is among a number of global health days promoted by the WHO, which provides a “unique opportunity to mobilise action around a specific health topic of concern to people all over the world”.<sup>1</sup> The health theme for 2017 is ‘[Depression: Let’s Talk](#)’. Preceding the day, the WHO undertakes a range of promotional activities, including events, and makes available news releases, resources for government and policymakers and tailored materials for different world regions.

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#### Depression: Situation Worldwide

A report produced by the WHO in February 2017, entitled [Depression and Other Common Mental Health Disorders: Global Health Estimates](#), stated that the total number of people with depression was estimated to be 322 million worldwide in 2015, an increase of 18 percent since 2005, making the condition the leading cause of disability, with anxiety being ranked sixth. This translated to an estimated 4.4 percent of the global population suffering from depression in 2015, with 3.6 percent suffering from anxiety disorders. The report stated that depression was the major contributor to the around 800,000 suicide deaths which occur globally each year.<sup>2</sup>

In promoting World Health Day, the WHO has said that it hopes to address the estimated 50 percent of cases of major depression that go untreated. In some countries there is little or no support available for people with mental health disorders. On average, 3 percent of government health budgets are invested in mental health, ranging from less than 1 percent in low income countries to 5 percent in high income countries.<sup>3</sup> The WHO states that for every US\$1 invested in scaling up treatment for depression and anxiety there is a return of US\$4 in better health and ability to work, with treatment usually involving either a talking therapy or antidepressant medication, or a combination of the two. Both approaches can be provided by non-specialist health workers using WHO guidance.<sup>4</sup>

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#### Depression: Situation in the UK and Government Policy

Figures collated by the Mental Health Foundation, a UK charity, in part based on the [Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2014](#) (APMS), showed that an estimated 19.7 percent of people in the UK aged 16 and older showed symptoms of anxiety or depression in 2014—a 1.5 percent increase from 2013. This percentage was higher among females (22.5 percent) than males (16.8 percent). Data also suggested that 43.4 percent of adults thought they had had a diagnosable mental health condition in their lifetime (35.2 percent of men and 51.2 percent of women), with a fifth of men (19.5 percent) and a third of women (33.7 percent) having had diagnoses confirmed by professionals.<sup>5</sup>

The study found that common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety were disproportionately suffered by the poorer and more disadvantaged, with two thirds of people in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance reporting common mental health problems and the same percentage suicidal thoughts. In this group, 43.2 percent reported having made a suicide attempt and 33.5 percent reported that they had self-harmed. The APMS found that there was a widening gap in mental health between young men and young women in England, with women aged 16–24 being almost three times as likely as their male contemporaries to experience a common mental health problem.<sup>6</sup>

In promoting good practice in addressing mental health ahead of World Health Day, the WHO cited as a positive example the NHS programme '[Improving Access to Psychological Therapies](#)'. This programme had treated over one million people since 2012, of whom 680,000 completed the full course of treatment. The recovery rates of those who completed the course were consistently above 45 percent, as predicted by research evidence.<sup>7</sup>

The Coalition Government published a mental health strategy in February 2011, which set out its plan to improve mental health and wellbeing and improve services for those with mental health problems.<sup>8</sup> This was followed by the Health and Social Care Act 2012, which gave mental health parity of esteem with physical health and provided explicit recognition of the Secretary of State for Health's duty towards mental health. An independent Mental Health Taskforce was appointed in March 2015, in part to review progress on the 2011 strategy, and published its findings in February 2016.<sup>9</sup> It made a series of recommendations to achieve the ambition of parity of esteem between mental and physical health, as well as proposals for cross-government activity and for tackling inequalities.

In January 2016, the Government announced a series of new investments to enhance mental health services, including £290 million to help new and expectant mothers who have poor mental health and £247 million to place mental health services in every hospital emergency department.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, on 9 January 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May announced a new set of initiatives to improve mental health support, including offers of mental health first aid training in schools; new partnerships with employers to improve mental health support in the workplace; further investment in models of community based care such as crisis cafés and community clinics; and investment in digital mental health services.<sup>11</sup>

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## Further Information

- House of Commons Library, [Mental Health Problems: Statistics on Prevalence and Services](#), 19 January 2017; and [Mental Health Policy in England](#), 9 May 2016

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, '[World Health Day 2017: Campaign Essentials](#)', accessed 5 April 2017.

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization, [Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders: Global Health Estimates](#), February 2017, pp 5–8.

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization, "["Depression: Let's Talk" Says WHO, as Depression Tops List of Causes of Ill Health](#)", 30 March 2017.

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization, [mhGAP Intervention Guide for Mental, Neurological and Substance Use Disorders in Non-specialized Health Settings](#), October 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Mental Health Foundation, [Fundamental Facts About Mental Health 2016](#), 2016, p 14.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, pp 5 and 15.

<sup>7</sup> World Health Organization, '[World Health Day 2017: Background](#)', accessed 4 April 2017.

<sup>8</sup> HM Government, [No Health Without Mental Health](#), 2 February 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Mental Health Taskforce to the NHS in England, [Five Year Forward View for Mental Health](#), February 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Prime Minister's Office, '[Prime Minister Pledges a Revolution in Mental Health Treatment](#)', 11 January 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Prime Minister's Office, '[Prime Minister Unveils Plans to Transform Mental Health Support](#)', 9 January 2017.

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