



NEWS

Mental health services turned down help for 50 000 young people in England last year, report estimates

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Children and adolescents in England face barriers when seeking help for mental health problems, with access and waiting times for treatment varying across the country, a report by the think tank the Education Policy Institute has found.¹ The institute sent freedom of information requests to all 67 providers of child and adolescent mental health services providers in England in April 2017 and received 57 responses (response rate 85%).

Rejections

Over a quarter (26.3%) of referrals of children and adolescents to specialist mental health services were not accepted in 2016-17, up from 21.1% in 2012-13. The report estimates that this represents 50 000 young people.

Variation

Some providers turned away less than 5% of referrals, while others turned away over half. Providers in the south of England (excluding London) rejected the highest proportion of referrals (34%), while London had the lowest rejection rate (19.3%).

Waiting times

Children and adolescents waited a median time of 39 days in 2015-16 to be assessed, down from 33 days in 2016-17.

Similarly, the average waiting time to be treated in 2016-17 was 56 days, down from 67 in 2015-16. The longest waiting time for treatment to start was in London (66 days) and the shortest in the Midlands and East of England (50 days).

Data access

The report called for information on access and waiting times to be published routinely in a standard format. At the moment the only way to get the figures is to request them.

Capacity

The high thresholds that providers applied for accepting referrals of children and adolescents highlight the need to expand specialist services in England, the report concluded. It also said that there was a strong case for national waiting time standards.

1 Frith E. Access and waiting times in children and young people's mental health services. Education Policy Institute. Sep 2017. https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/EPI_Access-and-waiting-times_.pdf.

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