



NEWS

Mental health: 50 organisations vow to win back years of patients' lost physical health

Declan C Murphy

London

More than 50 organisations have committed to combating disproportionately poorer physical health in people with mental illness.

The signatories of Equally Well UK's *Charter for Equal Health* say that they will work towards winning back the 17 years of life that people with long term mental health conditions lose on average.^{1,2}

"These are the stolen years of life," says the charter. "And for too many, this means living for many years in pain and with reduced quality of life. We want to win back these stolen years and make sure people with mental health conditions have longer and healthier lives."

Signatories promise to work "at every level to reduce the negative effects of poverty, smoking, obesity, alcohol misuse and both illegal and prescribed drugs, among others, on people's health, wellbeing and life expectancy." This will be achieved, says the charter, by working across political, health, and social boundaries and constructs.

The charter commits mental health providers to conducting yearly physical health checks for people with mental health conditions and securing access to evidence based treatments. Primary care and public health services should identify people at risk of physical ill health and should intervene early, while commissioners should collect and publish routine data on physical health inequalities to drive improvements, it advises.

The charter has been established by the Centre for Mental Health in partnership with Rethink Mental Illness and Kaleidoscope Health and Care. It is supported by the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, NHS England,

Health Education England, Public Health England, NHS Improvement, the Royal College of Nursing, and others.

Sarah Hughes, chief executive at the Centre for Mental Health, said, "We are supporting and promoting Equally Well UK to help bring about sustained and significant change across the country in addressing this shocking health inequality."

Philippa Lowe, chair of the charity Rethink Mental Illness, who has a son with schizophrenia, said, "I remember being very concerned about my son's weight gain when he started his antipsychotic medication. When I asked our then psychiatrist about it he said, 'Let's get the psychosis under control, then we'll think about his weight.' I now know that this wasn't the right approach at all.

"The most up to date thinking is that physical health should be monitored and encouraged alongside mental health from the word go, and so I'm pleased to see the Equally Well UK project making this a priority.

"The best medication for my son's mental health, which has changed his life so positively, has been the worst for his weight. He now weighs twice what he should, and the consequences for his health and life expectancy are scary to contemplate."

See <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/equally-well> and @EquallyWellUK

- 1 Chang CK, Hayes RD, Perera G, et al. Life expectancy at birth for people with serious mental illness and other major disorders from a secondary mental health care case register in London. *PLoS One* 2011;6:e19590. 10.1371/journal.pone.0019590 21611123
- 2 Kisely S, Crowe E, Lawrence D. Cancer-related mortality in people with mental illness. *JAMA Psychiatry* 2013;70:209-17. 10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2013.278 23247556

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