

Mental health: a decade of change in just 2 years



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Hello and it's a real pleasure to join you all today.

It's fantastic that, 4 years after the UK hosted the inaugural summit in London, it's still going strong, and I'd like to thank Minister Véran and his team for organising this year's event.

This year's summit comes at a critical moment. There's never been a more important time to talk about mental health, after our shared experience of this pandemic. A pandemic which has brought so much heartache and devastation, and has led to millions of people mourning loved ones all across the world.

And we must also recognise that there's been another – less visible – impact: the impact on people's mental health.

Our fight against this invisible killer forced us to take steps that, in normal times, would have seemed unthinkable, as we had to place restrictions on the social contact and shared experiences that bring us so much good health and happiness.

And, although these sacrifices were vital to slow the spread of the virus, we cannot deny that they've placed a strain on our mental health.

Around 1 in 5 adults in Britain experienced some form of depression in the first 3 months of this year. That's over double the figure before we started our fight against COVID-19.

And almost half of adults have reported that their wellbeing has been affected by this pandemic.

As a result, we've seen more people seeking help, both here and around the world, at a time when health systems were

already under the greatest of strains. A survey by the World Health Organization (WHO) showed that the pandemic disrupted mental health services in 93% of countries worldwide.

But, although this was an arduous time for health systems everywhere, there's a lot that we can learn from one another about how we handled this period of pressure and the new ways of working that we were forced to adopt.

In England, we set up 24/7 crisis hotlines that have received 3 million calls since the start of the pandemic, and we used mental health apps and virtual consultations to provide extra pathways for care.

We've seen a decade of change crammed into just 2 years. And today provides a perfect opportunity to share experiences from far and wide, and look at what changes we can take forward as we look to move out of this pandemic.

We're at an important moment for mental health.

The strains of the pandemic have meant that the issue of mental health has been in the public consciousness like never before. And we should be encouraged that more people, from all walks of life, are now talking more openly about their mental health and wellbeing.

But we know that, for every person who comes forward, there are more who're suffering in silence. So we must keep encouraging people to get help if they need it and keep working to eliminate the stigma that's far too often attached to mental health so that people know it's OK not to be OK.

Our mission must be for mental health to be treated with the same urgency as physical health. After all, its effects can be just as harmful.

Suicide accounts for one death around the world every 40 seconds and severe mental illness has been found to reduce life expectancy by 10 to 20 years.

The silent pandemic of poor mental health has taken too

many people before their time, and now is the time to act with the same sense of urgency as we have done for other major killers.

It should also trouble us that disparities in mental health are often linked with other disparities. In the UK, children from the poorest 20% of households are 4 times as likely to have serious mental health difficulties by the age of 11 compared with those from the wealthiest 20% of households.

We have to put this right.

And, as we all look to rebuild after the pandemic, one of the best ways to forge a happier, a fairer and a more prosperous society is a relentless focus on mental health.

In England, we've committed an extra 2.3 billion pounds per year to transform mental health services by 2023, expanding them to reach families, communities, workplaces and schools.

We've also strengthened mental health support for colleagues on the frontline, and we're reforming our Mental Health Act to make sure that everyone is treated with respect that they deserve.

And, at the same time, as we strive to improve mental health at home, we also want to play our part in a global effort.

In this increasingly interconnected world, we all have an interest in the mental health of people beyond our shores. We know that improving mental health would make a huge difference to pressing problems all across the world, and a recent study led by the WHO estimates that depression and anxiety costs the global economy \$1 trillion each year in lost productivity.

So now we must summon the same spirit of global cooperation that we've seen throughout the pandemic. Because poor mental health is a common adversary, just like COVID-19, and we all have a duty to step up and play our part.

I was at the G20 Health Ministers' Meeting recently in Rome,

and it was brilliant to see that mental health was high up on the agenda and that everyone was united in recognising the need to improve access to mental health services.

And it's only through working together, learning from one another, and sharing what's worked and what hasn't that we can improve mental healthcare all across the world.

We've already been partnering with other nations to share our experience, like the sessions we've held, for example, with Mexico to share ideas around strategies for mental health, and we'll also be driving change through global institutions like the World Health Organization.

The Mental Health Coalition, which was recently formed by WHO Europe, is a fantastic step forward in reinforcing the importance of this mission and, rest assured, we will be playing an active part in its work.

This pandemic has seen so much shared solidarity on physical health, like the vaccine distribution that's getting jabs in arms all across the world, and now we must do the same for mental health too.

So let's all come together today, and tackle this growing and global challenge – and make sure mental health gets the recognition and the response that it deserves.

Thank you very much and I'd like to wish you every success for this vital summit.

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