

Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health
Report of the Chief Officer for Communities, Public Health, Environment and Prosperity

Recommendation: That the Health and Wellbeing Board support work to develop an action plan that focusses on supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of the Devon Population during and following the Covid -19 pandemic

1. Context

1.1 Poor mental health and wellbeing has a considerable impact on the quality of life and is a major contributor to premature death. This is highlighted in 'Healthy and Happy Communities', Devon's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for 2020-25, which sets a priority to focus on mental health and build good emotional health and wellbeing, happiness and resilience.

1.2 The Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health was developed by Public Health England as a mechanism for promoting good mental health and providing a focus for cross-sector action to increase the adoption of public mental health approaches.

1.3 The Devon Health and Wellbeing Board and Devon County Council signed up to the prevention Concordat in early 2020, however the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that the action plan has not been developed as public health staff and partner agencies have been focussed on responding to the pandemic.

1.4 During the response period of the pandemic, the mental health and wellbeing of workforces has been a priority.

2. Impact of Covid -19 on Mental health and Wellbeing

2.1 Whilst there has been some positive outcomes as a result of the pandemic; increased sense of social cohesion through people volunteering within their communities and more people accessing green spaces etc, It is expected that mental ill health will increase widely as a result of the direct impact of Covid -19 infection and through its impacts upon the wider determinants of health.

2.2 Whilst there may have been an increased collective spirit initially (we are all in this together) Moore et al (2004) report that this feeling may shift in that later phases of the disaster cycle; initial feelings of unity and mutual support may give way to feeling of disillusionment and anger.

2.3 During the first month of lockdown; the equivalent of 7.4 million people (14.3%) of the population said that their wellbeing was affected by being lonely, however, ONS analysis suggests that 'chronic Loneliness hasn't changed as a result of lockdown.

2.4 The health and social effects of the previous decade of austerity means that already disadvantaged groups are even more vulnerable to the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic. It has been estimated that 1.1 million more people could face poverty at the end of 2020, bringing the total number of children living in poverty in the UK to 4.5 million, an increase of nearly 5%. Unemployment is expected to reach just under 10% by the end of 2020. A report by the mental health foundation highlights the mental health effects of financial inequalities, noting that employment is one of the most strongly evidenced determinants of mental health

2.5 Existing evidence on the health impacts of recessions show that they have negative impacts upon people's health and wellbeing, Janke et al (2020) have modelled the impact of economic shocks on chronic health conditions which suggests that people with pre-existing poor mental health will be particularly vulnerable to the effects of an economic downturn. If the impact of the predicted economic downturn is similar to that of 2008, then the number of working age people suffering poor mental health would increase by 500,000. Evidence suggests that periods of economic recession increase overall suicide rates, modelling research by Janke et al (2020) showed that each 10% increase in the number of unemployed men was significantly associated with a 1.4% increase in male suicides.

2.6 Research by the Early Intervention Foundation highlights the impact of lockdown and social distancing on the delivery of early intervention and early help services. They noted that the ability of services to support children and families have been seriously affected at a time when they are facing even greater challenges. They anticipate that there is likely to be a rapid increase in referrals to children's social care, acute services and early help as lockdown eases.

2.7 Figure 1 illustrates the potentially longer lasting impact of pandemic on population mental health

Figure 1, Expected COVID -19 burden of disease over time

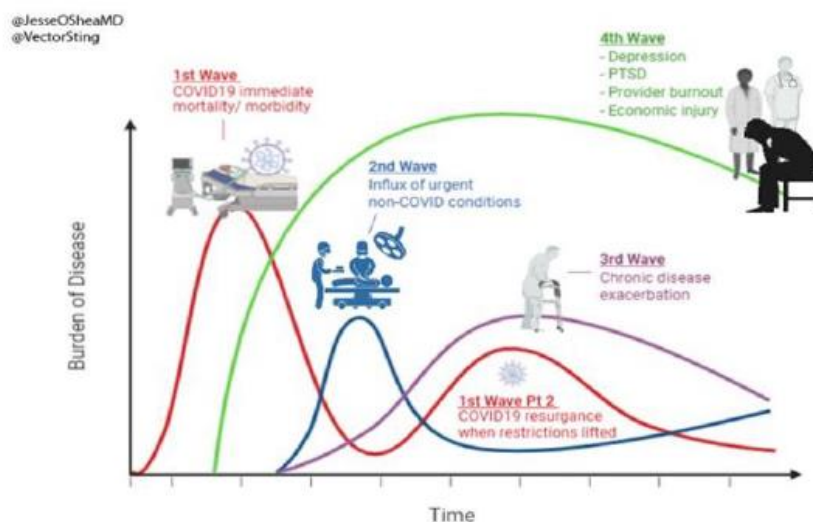


Figure 1. Expected COVID-19 burden of disease over time (credited to Tseng, Victor [@VectorSting])

3. Conclusions and Next Steps

3.1 In light of the mental health challenges highlighted in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Report, and the prioritisation of mental health in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, adopting the Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health in Devon should provide a local focus to local partnership work on preventive approaches to mental health. Following the precedent set by others, sign-up by the Health and Wellbeing Board could be useful in encouraging a cross-sector approach.

3.2 It is recommended that the Health and Wellbeing Board support work to develop an action plan through their constituent organisations, and sign-up to the Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health.

3.3 The focus has been on supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of DCC staff during the lockdown period support has also been offered to staff working in Care Homes.

4. Risk Management Considerations

Not applicable.

5. Options/Alternatives

Not applicable.

6. Public Health Impact

Poor mental health is a major public health issue, and work to develop a more preventive approach and promote good mental health should have a positive impact.

Dr Virginia Pearson

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Background Papers: Nil