

Jayne Bryant MS  
Chair, Children, Young People and Education  
Committee

Jenny Rathbone MS  
Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee

14 December 2021

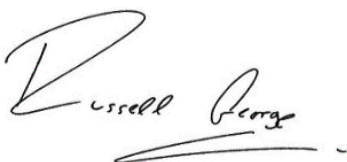
Dear Jayne and Jenny

### Health and Social Care Committee inquiry into mental health inequalities

At our meeting on 2 December 2021, the Health and Social Care Committee agreed to launch an inquiry into mental health inequalities early in the new year. As this inquiry may be of interest to your Committees, I am writing to share our terms of reference and an overview of how we will approach this work. I would be grateful if you could treat this information in confidence until the inquiry has been launched.

To help identify opportunities for cross-committee working in areas of mutual interest, I have also asked my clerk to ensure that your clerks are kept informed as the inquiry develops, for example by sharing key dates and information such as summaries of written evidence and details of our plans for oral evidence and engagement activity as they emerge.

Yours sincerely



Russell George MS

Chair, Health and Social Care Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg. We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

# Health and Social Care Committee inquiry into mental health inequalities

## Background

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The [Centre for Mental Health](#) describes a 'triple barrier' of mental health inequality, which affects large numbers of people from different sections of the population:

- Some groups of people are disproportionately at risk of poor mental health. This is often linked to wider inequalities in society.
- Groups with particularly high levels of poor mental health can have the most difficulty accessing services.
- When people do get support, their experiences and outcomes are often poorer.

These inequalities existed before the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic has made them worse.

Research suggests that groups particularly affected by mental health inequalities include: older people; autistic people ; people living in poverty; Black adults; LGBT+ people; deaf people; children and young people with a learning disability; and people experiencing severe and enduring mental illness. Research also suggests that gender has an impact on an individual's mental health risk, and that there are gender differences in the ways that mental health distress manifests itself.

## Terms of reference

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Our inquiry will consider, in particular:

- Which groups of people are disproportionately affected by poor mental health in Wales? What factors contribute to worse mental health within these groups?
- For the groups identified, what are the barriers to accessing mental health services? How effectively can existing services meet their needs, and how could their experience of using mental health services be improved?
- To what extent does Welsh Government policy recognise and address the mental health needs of these groups? Where are the policy gaps?
- What further action is needed, by whom/where, to improve mental health and outcomes for the groups of people identified and reduce mental health inequalities in Wales?

We plan to take a multi-phase approach to gathering evidence:

- **Phase 1 evidence gathering:** in January and February we will hold an open call for written evidence, supplemented by engagement work to promote the inquiry and the potential for people to provide written evidence and a series of focus groups to ensure that we hear from groups who are particularly likely to experience mental health inequalities, but who may be less likely to submit written evidence.
- **Analysis of phase 1 evidence:** in March we plan to hold 'scene-setting' oral evidence sessions with organisations who have done extensive work in respect of mental health inequalities. We will use these sessions and the evidence gathered during phase 1 to identify who we need to hear from during phase 2, and what methods of hearing from them would be most suitable (for example formal oral evidence or further engagement activity).
- **Phase 2 evidence gathering:** during the summer term we will hear formal oral evidence or undertake engagement activity as required to enable us to hear directly from people with relevant lived experience and expertise. We also intend to seek a written update from the Welsh Government on progress made on key recommendations made by Fifth Senedd committees in respect of mental health. We would be keen to coordinate with the Children, Young People and Education Committee on this.
- **Ministerial evidence:** early in the autumn term, we plan to invite the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing to a Ministerial evidence session, drawing on all of the evidence gathered throughout our inquiry.

