

# Summary of findings from the public consultation about a survey of the mental health of children looked after

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**Information and technology**  
**for better health and care**

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## Overview

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Department for Education (DfE) are interested in having updated information on the prevalence of mental health conditions among children and young people who are looked-after by the local authority, previously looked-after children and care leavers. As part of the scoping process for a new study, NHS Digital carried out a public consultation to get feedback and information to help inform the development of the survey.

## Aim of the consultation

The aim of the proposed new survey is to understand the prevalence of mental health conditions among looked after children, previously looked-after children, and care leavers. The survey could be developed further to help improve understanding of the drivers of poor mental health in looked after children, and to inform how their wider mental health needs can be better met. The consultation aimed to identify topic areas of interest and support development of the survey questionnaires and inform our understanding of the information needs of local authority children's social services departments.

## Consultation process

NHS Digital worked with the Mental Health of Children Looked After Working Group<sup>1</sup> to identify key stakeholders to participate in the consultation. These included local authorities, voluntary organisations focusing on mental health or children and professional bodies

The questions included as part of the consultation were carefully considered to ensure feedback would be relevant and would sufficiently address any issues or concerns and give stakeholders the opportunity to provide advice to ensure the survey would meet users' requirements.

The consultation was published on 29 March 2019 via Citizen Space on the NHS Digital website. It invited readers to complete an online questionnaire and provide their feedback. Potential respondents were informed about the consultation via the website and social media, emails to national organisations, health statistics user group network and DfE's newsletters to local authorities.. The consultation closed on 24 July 2019.

## Who responded to the consultation?

74 responses were received in total. The majority of these were from clinicians and local authorities. Charities and voluntary organisations, public sector organisations at local, regional and national levels and academic researchers also replied.

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<sup>1</sup> Comprising representatives from Department of Health and Social Care, Department for Education, NHS England and NHS Digital

## Consultation findings

### People to include within the survey

This survey would cover looked after, previously looked-after children and care leavers generally. The consultation asked for the views of respondents about how important it was to include some specific groups within the survey. The groups seen as most important to include are shown below in order of popularity:

- Asylum seekers
- Looked-after children in foster care
- Looked-after children in residential care
- Children / young people in youth justice provision
- Care leavers entitled to ongoing support aged 18+
- Care leavers not in staying put or staying close arrangement
- Voluntarily in care (e.g. those with disabilities at residential special schools)
- previously looked after - In special guardianship or care arrangements
- previously looked after - With parents or other relatives
- previously looked after - Adopted

### Topics to include within the survey

The intention is that the survey would include two diagnostic tools for assessing child mental health – the [Development and Wellbeing Assessment \(DAWBA\)](#) – and the [Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire \(SDQ\)](#) that comprise a large part of the questionnaire. They constitute the core of the existing Department of Health's child mental health survey series and are needed for estimating the prevalence of mental disorders and enabling consistent comparisons with the other surveys. We asked consultation participants what the other higher priority topics to include in the survey would be. Topics rated as very or extremely important are listed below:

#### **Parent / carer interview**

- Care experience
- Use of services for significant mental health problems (including medication)
- Significant problems the child has
- Strengths of the child (best or pleasing things about the child)

#### **Child / young person interview (aged 11+ only)**

- Help seeking behaviours
- Strengths (e.g. what the child says are their 'best qualities' and things they are proud of)

#### **Self-completion questionnaire (for the child/young person aged 11+)**

- Mood and feelings
- Exclusion from school

## **Teacher questionnaire**

- Social behaviour
- Help from school

## **New topics proposed for the survey**

From the new topics suggested to include in the survey, the ones rated most highly were:

- Traumatic experiences and consequences
- Stigma and discrimination
- Well-being
- Bullying, cyber bullying and social media
- Resilience
- Contact with the Youth Justice System (as a victim or suspect)

## **What do respondents want to use the survey findings for?**

We asked what people intend to use the survey results for. The most popular uses are listed below:

- Comparing local indicators with national figures
- Examine trends and behaviours
- Inform policy making
- Policy monitoring and evaluation
- Planning services
- Help develop local services and training of staff
- Research & analysis

## **Topics to include in the report on the survey findings**

The 7 most popular topics wanted in a report on the survey's findings are listed below:

- Emotional disorders (including depression and anxiety)
- Traumatic experiences
- Truancy, exclusion, special educational needs
- Conduct disorders
- Bullying and cyber bullying, stigma, discrimination
- Drinking, drug use and smoking
- Use of services

## Others key topics of interest

Other topics mentioned by respondents as one of their own top seven are listed below:

- Wellbeing
- Self-harm
- Exploitation, including criminal and child sexual exploitation
- Contact with the justice system
- Foetal alcohol syndrome- which can get diagnosed as ADHD, autism or conduct disorder.
- If the child was premature
- Less common disorders e.g. autism, disorganised attachment, callous unemotional traits

## Thank you

We would like to thank everyone who took the time to participate in this consultation. The more detailed anonymised responses and feedback we received will be used to inform the next steps for the survey.