

IIMHL & IIDL Leadership Briefing XLI

COVID-19 and Equity Approaches by Countries

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Introduction

COVID-19 has shone a light on existing inequalities in the provision of health care and mental health care in particular. Two key national documents are described below, both of which outline strategies for increasing equalities in the future. The first is from Canada, which provides a comprehensive approach to supporting equity in health. The second is from England, and it summarises the core actions that can be taken to bridge the gaps for communities fairing worse than others in mental health services.

Canada

From Risk to Resilience - An equity approach to Covid-19

Public Health Canada, 2020

This report is The Chief Public Health Officer of Canada's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada 2020. Her motto is: "The bottom line: **no one is protected until everyone is protected**".

It draws on previous work, which demonstrates that the health of Canadians is dependent on a set of fundamental social determinants. COVID-19 has underscored the inequities in health that are shaped by these determinants, and how these inequities may be exacerbated in the context of a pandemic,.

Section one sets the context of the pandemic. Section two reviews the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 on the health and well-being of people in Canada. It reviews inequities prior to COVID-19, and how these were exacerbated by the pandemic itself. Section three suggests ways forward to rebuild from the COVID-19 pandemic with a view to improving health for all Canadians.

One example: many First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities have shown leadership, resilience and community collaboration in responding to COVID-19. The success of these efforts can be exemplified by First Nations living on-reserve having lower rates of hospitalizations due to COVID-19 (8.4% compared with 13.4% of the general Canadian population) and lower rates of death (1.4% compared to 7.1%) for reported cases at the end of August 2020.

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/corporate/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state->

public-health-canada/from-risk-resilience-equity-approach-covid-19/cpho-covid-report-eng.pdf

England

BLOG: “Making mental health care fairer for all” by Jacqui Dyer

16 October 2020

Jacqui Dyer is the founder of Black Thrive, former vice-chair of the NHS England Mental Health Taskforce and the chair of the NHS England Advancing Mental Health Equalities Taskforce. The taskforce published its report on 16 October. Jacqui write this blog to coincide with the reports’ publication. Jacqui is a member of the IIMHL I_CIRCLE collaborative.

“I have seen first-hand the devastating impact health inequalities can have on people’s lives.

I have lost two brothers who throughout their lives had struggled with long-term mental health challenges – the second one just this year, one week after George Floyd’s death and in the midst of COVID-19 sharply unfolding.

It has been a tough year for many of us. I now live with the very painful thought that if culturally appropriate services like advocacy and peer support had been available for my brothers they would still be here. Instead they passed age 53 and 41.

I channel my distress into the mission for equality in mental health services as this is one of the most urgent challenges of our lifetime. We have a chance to prove ourselves as a different kind of society than we have experienced thus far.

Today, as the chair of the Advancing Mental Health Equalities Taskforce, I work closely with NHS services to make sure we are progressing towards equitable and accessible mental health care for all. This work must yield tangible outcomes for those who have been discriminated for too long – we can no longer work in a system that assumes the same approach fits all. The cost of this dissonance can be fatal.

The events of 2020 have shone a light on the inequality that persists in our society. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately impacted specific groups, including Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, older people, and the LGBT+ community, also highlighted the inequalities in mental health care.

I am proud to announce that NHS England and NHS Improvement has published its first [Advancing Mental Health Equalities Strategy](#), (see below) laying out plans for addressing inequalities in access, experience and outcomes in mental health care.”

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/blog/making-mental-health-care-fairer-for-all/>

NHS: Advancing Mental Health Equalities Strategy September 2020

The NHS defines health inequalities as: “...preventable, unfair and unjust differences in health status between groups, populations or individuals that arise from the unequal distribution of social, environmental and economic conditions within societies, which determine the risk of people getting ill, their ability to prevent sickness, or opportunities to take action and access treatment when ill health occurs”. (p.4)

The taskforce found that:

- Different groups access services differently, with underrepresentation in some services and overrepresentation in others. This is an **inequality in access**. Examples include older people being underrepresented in talking therapies and black-British men being overrepresented in mental health secure care.
- Different groups report having different levels of satisfaction with the healthcare they receive. This is an **inequality in experience**. An example is lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) individuals reporting poor levels of satisfaction with community mental health services compared to heterosexual and white-British counterparts.
- Different groups receiving the same treatment also have different recovery outcomes. This is an **inequality in outcomes**. As an example, BAME groups generally have poorer recovery rates in talking therapy services (IAPT) than white-British groups.

There are three workstreams proposed:

- Workstream 1: Supporting local health systems
- Workstream 2: Data and information
- Workstream 3: Workforce

Implementation of this strategy will be overseen by the Advancing Mental Health Equalities Taskforce. The strategy aims to ensure access to the timely high-quality mental healthcare described in the NHS Long Term Plan is equitable, by equipping systems with the tools and enablers they need to bridge the gaps between communities faring worse than others in mental health services.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/00159-advancing-mental-health-equalities-strategy.pdf>