

Professional Standards Authority response to call for evidence on a mental health strategy for England

1. About us

- 1.1. The Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care (PSA) is the UK's oversight body for the regulation of people working in health and social care. Our statutory remit, independence and expertise underpin our commitment to the safety of patients and service-users, and to the protection of the public.
- 1.2. There are 10 organisations that regulate health professionals in the UK and social workers in England by law. We audit their performance and review their decisions on practitioners' fitness to practise. We also accredit and set standards for organisations holding registers of health and care practitioners not regulated by law.
- 1.3. We collaborate with all of these organisations to improve standards. We share good practice, knowledge and our right-touch regulation expertise. We also conduct and promote research on regulation. We monitor policy developments in the UK and internationally, providing guidance to governments and stakeholders. Through our UK and international consultancy, we share our expertise and broaden our regulatory insights.
- 1.4. Our core values of integrity, transparency, respect, fairness, and teamwork, guide our work. We are accountable to the UK Parliament. More information about our activities and approach is available at www.professionalstandards.org.uk

2. Answers to questions

What commissioning, funding and oversight or accountability arrangements (nationally and locally) best support safe and integrated mental health services that improve outcomes across mental health, participation in work, education and community life, and social functioning? Please provide examples. (Optional, maximum 300 words)

- 2.1. In order to realise the ambition for a cross-government mental health strategy for England, it will be crucial to ensure that oversight, accountability and regulatory arrangements are considered proactively and in tandem with any wider thinking about changes in delivery models for mental health services.

Regulatory implications of the 10 year health plan for England

- 2.2. The Government's aspirations for the health service as part of the 10 year health plan for England will require significant shifts in the way that care is delivered with an emphasis on shifting care into the community and an increased focus on preventative activity.
- 2.3. As outlined in the call for evidence for a mental health strategy, the challenge will be improving access to appropriately trained and qualified mental health professionals who can support objectives including reduction of waiting times for support, earlier intervention, personalised care and tackling health inequalities.
- 2.4. In light of the transition from analogue to digital platforms, the regulation of AI must also be a key consideration, including ethical use of AI by professionals and clear lines of accountability.
- 2.5. These objectives will necessarily require changes to the composition and skillset of the workforce. This will require training more people, accelerating training, broadening scopes of practise, adapting skillsets and creating new roles. All of these shifts have regulatory implications and therefore thinking about regulatory oversight must be built in from the start.

Contribution of the Accredited Registers programme

- 2.6. A broader recognition of the contribution of both regulated and unregulated workforce will be essential. There are a number of different groups of professionals and practitioners operating within mental health not all of whom are regulated by law.
- 2.7. The PSA's Accredited Registers programme for registers of unregulated roles in health and care has already been a key mechanism for providing fast and proportionate assurance to employers and patients/service users.¹ It could play an important role in helping to support the objectives of the proposed mental health strategy.
- 2.8. There are currently 28 registers in the programme, covering a total of more than 135,000 practitioners. This includes 14 mental health practitioner registers, which collectively register more than 80,000 practitioners. Practitioners on an Accredited Register must demonstrate that they have undertaken appropriate education and training and meet standards set by the register and registers must operate a robust complaints process.
- 2.9. Ever since the Accredited Registers programme was first set up, we have sought to maximise its potential to supplement the NHS workforce and improve outcomes in a number of different areas, including mental health, occupational health, and public health generally. We believe that more could be done, with the support of the Government and NHS England to maximise the contribution of practitioners on Accredited Registers to improve overall population health. This could include investing in raising awareness of the programme with the public and employers and embedding AR registration as a clearer employer requirement for roles where robust assurance is required, such as with the example provided of psychological

¹ **[Our work with Accredited Registers | PSA](#)**

practitioners in the NHS below.

Review of the regulatory arrangements for counselling and psychotherapy

- 2.10. The Partnership for Counselling and Psychotherapy Bodies (PCPB), a collaboration of six PSA-accredited counselling and psychotherapy registers representing approximately 75,000 therapists, has established an independent Commission on the Future of Counselling and Psychotherapy to examine the current and future landscape of the professions and the key issues affecting the sector.²
- 2.11. The Commission is considering a range of questions relating to professional standards, public protection, workforce development and the future regulatory framework for counselling and psychotherapy, including whether there is a case for changes to existing regulatory arrangements.
- 2.12. Given the significant role that counsellors and psychotherapists play in supporting population mental health, any future Government mental health strategy should actively consider the findings and recommendations of the Commission which will be published later in 2026. This will help ensure that decisions about workforce expansion, service quality, patient safety and public confidence are informed by a comprehensive assessment of the current regulatory landscape and the options available for strengthening protections for people accessing psychological and emotional support services.

A regulatory strategy approach

- 2.13. In its response to the call for evidence on the 10 year workforce plan the PSA has advocated for the development of a regulatory strategy to sit alongside or as part of the plan to manage risk and safely support the workforce changes required.³
- 2.14. A regulatory strategy approach starts with the outcomes that health and care services are seeking to achieve and proactively considers the role that regulation and registration can play in supporting safe and effective change. Rather than viewing regulation as a separate or reactive process, it involves assessing the risks associated with new models of care, workforce expansion, innovation and changing patient needs, and identifying the most appropriate form of oversight to manage those risks. This may include statutory regulation, Accredited Registers, employer-led assurance, professional standards or a combination of approaches. The objective is to ensure that public protection, professional standards and public confidence are considered alongside service redesign from the outset.
- 2.15. In the context of mental health services, a regulatory strategy approach can help ensure that plans to improve access, expand the workforce and develop new roles are all supported by proportionate and effective safeguards. The PSA's work with NHS England on registration requirements for new psychological practitioner roles demonstrates how appropriate oversight can support workforce growth while maintaining public assurance. NHSE now requires registration with one of our Accredited Registers as a condition of employment for some of these roles, which provides assurance for the public about standards.

² **Commission for the Future of Counselling and Psychotherapy - PCPB**

³ **Response to call for evidence on the NHS 10 year workforce plan | PSA**

-
- 2.16. As Government develops its mental health strategy for England, consideration should be given to the regulatory implications of proposed service changes, including whether existing arrangements remain sufficient and where additional forms of oversight may be required. Taking a proactive approach to regulation will help ensure that workforce innovation, new routes into practice and evolving models of care are implemented in a way that maintains patient safety, supports quality improvement and strengthens public confidence in mental health services.
- 2.17. We note that there is draft NHSE guidance on registration arrangements for the psychological professions which has been due for formal launch for some time. This could be a helpful addition in ensuring clarity about the regulatory arrangements in place for different roles to allow employers and contracting bodies to deliver safe, high-quality services.

AI regulation

- 2.18. As the call for evidence notes, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other technology has the potential to play an increasingly important role in mental health services, including supporting triage and assessment, helping people access information and signposting, improving administrative efficiency, and assisting practitioners in delivering care.
- 2.19. However, the use of AI in mental health settings also raises important questions relating to patient safety, quality, accountability and liability, transparency, privacy, bias and equity of access. Given the particularly sensitive nature of mental health services and the potential vulnerability of service users, the Government should ensure that the development and deployment of AI is underpinned by an appropriate regulatory framework that is proportionate to the risks posed and provides clear safeguards for the public.
- 2.20. The work by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) through the National Commission into the Regulation of AI in Healthcare⁴ will provide an important foundation for any further work, with the Commission's final report and recommendations expected this summer. However, there are potentially further sector specific considerations which could be included within the mental health strategy for England.

⁴ **National Commission into the Regulation of AI in Healthcare - GOV.UK**