

It is an uncomfortable fact: people with long-term mental health problems often die much earlier than people with no mental health problems. But work is taking place across Dorset to turn that around. Dr Caoimhe O’Sullivan explains.



Mental health: More can be done to promote mental wellbeing and to prevent people becoming ill.

By Dr Caoimhe O’Sullivan

Good mental health and good physical health go hand-in-hand.

On average, people with severe and prolonged mental health conditions die an estimated 15 to 20 years earlier than other people. This has to be one of the greatest inequalities facing us today.

Heart disease and strokes account for two thirds of these premature deaths, and many are as a result of smoking. Psychiatric patients with alcohol or drug disorders tend to fare worst of all.

Gaining insight

For the past year, Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has been leading a review of mental health care for adults.

This review has involved key partners and the public. It has also brought together a wealth of local data on what people need and what services are available to meet these needs.

We have been working closely with [Dorset CCG](#), [Dorset HealthCare](#), [Dorset Mental Health Forum](#) and other partners to look at how we develop future care.

We now have a good picture of the numbers and percentages of mental health conditions in different areas across Dorset.

This shows that deprived areas have higher percentages of people with serious mental illness.

For example, six general practices in East Bournemouth had among the highest numbers of patients with severe mental illness in Dorset.

Developing services that meet people's needs

As a result of all of this work, services are likely to undergo some changes to have a fairer system. This will aim to meet the needs of local people wherever they live.

There are a number of options being considered, but two possible ones include providing two retreats – 24-hour spaces to help people in crisis – and three living rooms, which are community-based support spaces available throughout the week. Once the proposed options have been agreed, there will be a consultation early next year.

But we also have to consider the wider picture, beyond hospital care.

We know that we need to focus not just on helping people to recover from episodes of mental illness. We can do much more to promote mental wellbeing and to prevent people becoming ill in the first place.

This is one example of a large programme of work around mental health that Public Health Dorset is involved in.

Other examples include training local council staff to [look after their own mental wellbeing](#) and knowing how to look out for others. We are also supporting Dorset HealthCare with its plans to go smokefree and tackle obesity.

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