

Building an NHS fit for the future: why counsellors and psychotherapists will be critical to the next Labour government

The Labour Party has committed to delivering an ambitious mission-led approach to improving mental health support across children and adult services, where patients receive greater choice, autonomy and dignity throughout treatment.

Unleashing the potential of counsellors and psychotherapists holds the key to ensuring that Labour delivers on this promise – ramping up workforce capacity and embedding a greater focus on prevention throughout mental health services.

With more than 16,500 members, the National Counselling and Psychotherapy Society (NCPS) is a leading professional body for counsellors and psychotherapists in the UK. A standard-bearer for those working in the profession, our members offer flexible and holistic talking therapies across a range of modalities in both the voluntary sector and private practice.

As demand for mental health services becomes an increasing priority in the NHS, accredited counsellors and psychotherapists will be critical to ramping up workforce capacity, thereby enabling individuals to access support services sooner. Now more than ever, this workforce is capable of supporting your mission to meet rising demand for mental health support across children and adult services.

This document outlines a clear plan for how you can achieve this, transforming mental health outcomes and strengthening the NHS.

Our Vision

We envision a mental healthcare system where:

- Counsellors and psychotherapists are integrated into the NHS workforce, recognised as performing an indispensable function in the provision of mental health support services.
- Individuals understand the therapeutic value of the human connection over Artificial Intelligence.
- Tailored and child-led mental health care is available in all schools and primary care settings.

Key policy recommendations

Expand the provision of mental health support teams (MHSTs) to include accredited counsellors and psychotherapists

We are concerned that blanket commitments to bolstering the mental health workforce and improving access to services, particularly in education settings, risks overlooking the critical function of counsellors and psychotherapists. The findings in the NCPS' recent report, '[Investigating Referral Patterns of Mental Health Support Teams in England](#)', propose a number of ways in which an incoming Labour Government could improve provision in educational establishments, ranging from low-cost solutions such as enhancing guidance to teams to

improve referrals and streamlining processes; to bold strategies to include mandated integration of counselling into schools.

Among its most ambitious recommendations includes ensuring that the provision of mental health support teams (MHSTs) across schools and communities is expanded to include accredited counsellors and psychotherapists. The MHST+ model – set out in [more detail](#) by Barnardo's – will be critical in meeting the demands of individuals for whom current interventions may not be suitable.

Promote the importance of human connection in therapy vs. digital apps, Artificial Intelligence, and arms-length interventions

The core of therapy lies in the genuine, empathetic connection between people; something that cannot be replicated by AI. The nuances of human interaction – both verbal and non-verbal – form the basis for trust and understanding, both essential components of effective therapy. Every person's experiences and challenges are unique and, therefore, require a personalised approach that AI simply cannot offer. Counselling and psychotherapy are not a one-size-fits-all solution to a single problem, rather creative, collaborative, and facilitative of a therapeutic environment that facilitates healing and growth.

That is why it is critical that a system that is truly evidence-based is rooted in the centrality of the therapeutic relationship between the practitioner and the patient. An incoming Labour Government must prioritise mechanisms that recognise this, including through enabling access to direct access to a range of therapy via Accredited Registers.

Integrate counsellors and psychotherapists into the NHS workforce to expand direct access to counselling

Thousands of people are currently left without the urgent support they need as a result of reduced workforce capacity, with research indicating that almost a quarter of adults with mental illnesses are waiting more than 12 weeks to start treatment, with many people facing a so-called 'hidden wait time' for access to therapy and a significant proportion turning to A&E for help.

Counsellors and psychotherapists will be crucial to ramping up mental health workforce capacity, enabling patients to access support services sooner. The NCPS-accredited workforce is highly flexible and in a unique position to support medical colleagues across the NHS to meet the severity and range of problems experienced by people across the country. Capable of offering a more holistic approach than other professions, this workforce can often provide longer-term support, through the provision of direct access to counselling, than the low-intensity roles used in the NHS and can work with people who may not have received a specific diagnosis or who may be experiencing issues that are not well-suited to other forms of therapy, such as guided self-help or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Facilitating direct access to counselling and psychotherapy will free up GP time and reduce waiting times.

A comprehensive and ambitious approach to meeting the demand for mental health services will be vital to transforming outcomes for decades to come, ensuring that the next Government enables a system which prioritises prevention and early intervention.

For more information, please contact ncps@plmr.co.uk

The NCPS stands ready to work with you to make this vision a reality.