1. SAMH
SAMH is the leading voluntary sector organisation in its field in Scotland and is dedicated to mental health and wellbeing for all. SAMH provides both direct services and an independent voice on all matters of relevance to people with mental health and related problems.

SAMH has over 80 services throughout Scotland which address a range of individual needs including supported housing, home support, crisis support, training, employment and structured day services. Our services support people who have experience of mental health problems and other forms of social exclusion including homelessness and addictions.

The SAMH Centre for Research, Influence and Change promotes the development of legislation, policy and practice that is based on the real life experiences of people with mental health and related problems and respects their human rights. The Centre also provides an information service, offering general mental health information and specialist legal and benefits advice. Both the Centre and the wider organisation are committed to challenging the stigma and discrimination experienced by people who live with mental health problems.

General Comments

There is strong evidence of the benefits of getting the early years right, and it is encouraging to see the Scottish Parliament Health and Sports Committee taking a strong interest in early years. SAMH supports all efforts to support children and young people from their earliest years through to adulthood.

Specific Comments

How children and adolescents potentially at risk of developing mental health problems are identified and how those problems should be prevented.

One in four people will experience a mental health problem at some point in their lives, and all children and young people are ‘potentially’ at risk of developing mental health problems.

As with adults, children and young people may face a range of personal, social and environmental factors which could give rise to, or exacerbate, a mental health problem. It is often amongst our most deprived communities that mental health problems are found in the greatest severity and abundance.
In particular, child poverty poses significant problems for the mental health of Scotland’s children and young people. In order to address this, consideration needs to be given as to where and how resources are targeted.

Many children and young people have chaotic and complex lives and any interventions must allow for this. Assistance is required in relation to a range of factors such as sexual health, substance misuse, housing, relationships; addressing risk factors for mental health problems at an early stage. Greater investment must be directed at the preventive and supportive capacities of community networks and community-led initiatives, dealing with mental health and related issues.

Interventions should also work to promote inclusion and foster friendships between children and young people, identifying those who may be more isolated. Often those who are most at risk of mental health problems are those who are most marginalised and excluded, such as the children of prisoners and looked after children. We must consider how children are protected from discrimination and intolerance, and what can be done to ensure their best interests are central to laws and policies which affect them.

What obstacles there are in identifying children and adolescents with mental health problems and how they might be overcome.

SAMH is part of an alliance of five Scottish mental health organisations which run the ‘see me’ anti-stigma campaign. There are many myths about mental health problems. These myths create a stigma that can stop children and young people getting help when they need it or prevent them talking openly about their problems. It can also make them feel guilty, isolated or ashamed if they become unwell.

Children and young people should be educated in mental health at the earliest opportunity in order to help dispel myths. Including mental health as part of the curriculum at an early stage would also greatly enhance the capacity of Scotland’s young people to promote and sustain their own mental health and wellbeing.

Wider societal stigma and discriminatory practice must not be reflected in the minds and actions of those working with Scotland’s children and young people. School staff should receive training in mental health awareness, highlighting the importance of their contribution to children and young people’s mental health and enabling them to identify key protective/ risk factors.

It is essential to promote a positive, supportive ethos in relation to mental health, creating environments where young people are empowered to discuss their
mental health and wellbeing. It is important that children and young people are encouraged to want to seek help, rather than forcing help on them.

**What action is being taken to facilitate early intervention and what else can be done.**

Effective joint working across Scottish Government Health and Education Departments is required to facilitate early intervention. Examples of actions being taken in this area include the introduction of a link worker within each school, NHS staff working with local authorities to provide training in mental health for school staff and ongoing planning and review meetings between NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and school staff.

It is vital that mental health features on the agendas of everyone whose work impacts on children – including teachers, social workers, criminal justice teams, nurses, directors of local authority services, classroom assistants etc. Examples of good practice could then be shared and the mental health of children and young people approached in a joined up way.

We must respond helpfully to children and young people, building up their self-esteem and promoting their mental wellbeing, as well as addressing the risk factors for mental health problems. This will require the involvement of children and young people, teaching staff, parents and the wider community.

Greater support for the families and carers of children and young people is also required, providing education and training and raising awareness of mental health and related issues. All families should be able to access support before things reach crisis point. Family support by the non statutory sector needs considerable development and sustained investment and community-led and family-led recovery networks should be expanded through sustained development funding. It should also be remembered that many children and young people experiencing issues relating to their mental health will be supported by a wide range of voluntary and community groups. This must be both recognised and valued in the planning and delivery of services.

**How access to services and ongoing support can be improved.**

NHS boards, local authorities and other partners require far greater investment and resources to enable improvement in mental health service provision for children and young people.

Developing accessible and timely mental health services will require effective joint planning and working; multi-agency agreement on local needs and the balance of care; an agreed service framework which meets the assessed need;
service user involvement; and an accurate knowledge of the totality of resources available to provide services.

Increasing capacity is a key component to delivering for children and young people. In order to ensure delivery of accessible and timely mental health services, the role of the voluntary and community sector must also be recognised. People who use child and adolescent mental health services, those who care for them and staff in voluntary and community organisations must be considered as partners and stakeholders.

Developing accessible and effective services will also require that we consider our attitudes towards children and young people. It is absolutely essential that young people are listened to and that they are taken seriously. We should embed the principle of respect for the views of children in policy and practice and involve children in their care and the development of services from the offset. This would help ensure services are both relevant and accessible.

A continuous improvement framework should also be developed by services to collect, review and evaluate services by and for young people to ensure relevance, engagement and impact. This approach has been core to the development of ‘respectme’, which has involved young people, primarily school-age children from the inception of the project in March 2007. Ongoing work since then continues to be heavily influenced by the input received from young people, via surveys, focus groups and one-to-ones.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) refers to a child’s right to be healthy and happy. Policy and practice in Scotland should recognise that children’s rights are relevant to everyone whose work impacts on children.

SAMH is aware that sometimes children and young people can languish on waiting lists for services. Following lobbying by SAMH and others in June this year, waiting time targets have now been announced for children and young people in relation to access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

SAMH greatly welcomes moves to ensure access to healthcare which is equitable, appropriate, and responsive to individual need. At present it is the case that some young people are placed in adult wards due to a lack of age appropriate services. This is not appropriate and should be stopped.

SAMH would be pleased to discuss our response with the Committee and looks forward to hearing the outcome of the inquiry.
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Inquiry
Scottish Association For Mental Health (SAMH)

SAMH
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