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## Landmark MRC review of mental health research calls for change

Friday 28 May 2010

The Medical Research Council (MRC) is calling for a rethink in strategic funding of mental health research following a major six-month review, published online today and reported in the journal [The Lancet](#) .

The [review](#) undertaken by the MRC to advise the Government's Office for Strategic Coordination of Health Research (OSCHR), aims to address the huge mismatch between the social and economic burden of mental health diseases on our society and the lower levels of investment and progress in research in this field.

The findings pick out priority areas, strengths and gaps in current research practice and focus on four key themes in mental health; severe mental illness (primarily psychosis); anxiety and depression (bipolar disorder is included in this theme); neurodevelopmental, learning and intellectual disabilities; and pathways to mental wellbeing.

Key recommendations to be addressed by the UK research community in the next 5-10 years set out the ambition to:

- focus on the prevention of mental disorders based on better understanding of causes, risk levels and new approaches to early preventive measures;
- accelerate research and development to provide new, more effective treatments for mental illness, and implement them more rapidly;
- expand the capacity for research in this area in the UK.

Professor Chris Kennard, Chair of the Medical Research Council's Neurosciences and Mental Health Board said:

*"We know it's not easy to unravel the complex interplay of genetic, social and environmental influences that affect our mental wellbeing and lead to mental health disorders. More work must be done to translate current scientific advances in brain research to make progress in finding effective preventive, therapeutic and rehabilitative strategies. The UK is in a strong position to play a major role internationally in this area of research. With expertise already embedded in the UK and the increased research capacity we are proposing, we are well placed to achieve this. Mental health disorders are extremely common and have a devastating impact on individuals, their families and our society. We hope that additional funding for research resulting from our review will enable UK researchers to address these problems more effectively and reduce the burden of mental health disorders."*

Til Wykes, Director of the Mental Health Research Network and Professor of Clinical Psychology and Rehabilitation, Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London said:

*"I welcome this thoughtful analysis which shows where research can make a real contribution to the understanding, prevention and treatment of mental health problems across all ages. The report highlights the strengths of UK research and how we can answer the important questions raised by patients and their families."*

Poor mental health is common and disabling, affecting 16.7 million

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people in the UK at any one time and accounting for 15 per cent of all the disability due to disease. A mental health problem is now the most common reason for someone claiming Incapacity Benefit. It is estimated to cost at least £77 billion annually in England alone, and severe forms of mental illness are associated with social exclusion and deprivation. Mental health problems frequently start in childhood and persist throughout the life course, affecting people at crucial stages of life: in the home, during school and through working life into old age.

MRC will be working with key funding agencies such as the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) and the Health Departments of the devolved administrations on approaches to take forward these recommendations.

## Ends

Case studies available for interview on common mental health disorders including depression Adult ADHD and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

Please contact the MRC press office on 07818 428 297/020 7637 6011 [press.office@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk](mailto:press.office@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk) .

## Note to editors:

1. [Review of mental health research: Report of the Strategic Review Group 2010](#) is published on the MRC website and reported in The Lancet.

2. For almost 100 years the Medical Research Council has improved the health of people in the UK and around the world by supporting the highest quality science. The MRC invests in world-class scientists. It has produced 29 Nobel Prize winners and sustains a flourishing environment for internationally recognised research. The MRC focuses on making an impact and provides the financial muscle and scientific expertise behind medical breakthroughs, including one of the first antibiotics penicillin, the structure of DNA and the lethal link between smoking and cancer. Today MRC funded scientists tackle research into the major health challenges of the 21st century. [www.mrc.ac.uk](http://www.mrc.ac.uk)

3. National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Mental Health Research Network (MHRN). NIHR MHRN supports high quality mental health studies that are important to the NHS in England. Last year 50,000 took part in MHRN studies from every NHS Mental Health Trust in England. The MHRN is managed by a partnership between the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London and the University of Manchester. It is part of the NIHR and is one of six topic specific networks. It supports high-quality research in mental health and social care in the NHS, the results of which inform policy and practice. The projects running through the network are investigating and testing treatments for a range of mental health problems including alcohol and drug addiction, anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism, depression, eating disorders, learning disabilities, psychosis and self-harm, for example. For more information visit [www.mhrn.info](http://www.mhrn.info) .

