



Councillor David Jefferys
London Borough of Bromley
Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Board
Town Hall
Civic Centre
Stockwell Close
Bromley BR1 3UH

17th May 2016

Dear Councillor Jefferys

In the last 20 years, smoking rates among the general population have fallen but this has not been the case for those with a mental health condition. Less than 20% of the general population smoke, compared to around 40% of those with a mental health condition and up to 70% of people discharged from a psychiatric hospital. This difference in prevalence has significant consequences: people with mental health conditions die on average 10-20 years earlier than the general population and smoking is the single largest factor in this difference. Clearly there is an urgent need for action.

We enclose a copy of Action on Smoking and Health's (ASH) new report, *The Stolen Years: The Mental Health and Smoking Action Report*. The report contains specific recommendations for action to be taken by Health and Wellbeing Boards and we are writing to you to request that these recommendations are implemented as part of local delivery plans. You can also access the report online here: <http://www.ash.org.uk/stolenyears>.

The core ambition of *The Stolen Years* is that smoking among people with a mental health condition declines to less than 5% by 2035, with an interim target of 35% by 2020. The report was developed in collaboration with 27 leading mental and public health organisations including **Rethink Mental Illness**, **The Royal College of Nursing** and **The Royal College of Psychiatrists** and is supported by a wide range of partners, from experts by experience to those working in mental health, public health, providers, local authorities and primary and secondary care. This report also builds on important work that has been undertaken by others in recent years including The Royal College of Physicians and The Royal College of Psychiatrists' 2013 report, *Smoking and Mental Health*; *The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health* by the Mental Health Taskforce; and NICE guidance PH48 & PH45.

Tackling smoking among people with a mental health condition will benefit the overall health system. As you will be aware, the NHS is currently under great financial pressure. Around 40% of mental health trusts experienced reductions in income in 2013/14 and 2014/15, with only 14% of patients saying that they received appropriate care in a crisis. Smoking-related disease among those with a mental health condition cost the NHS an estimated £719 million in 2009/2010 and a recent study estimated the cost of facilitating smoking in four mental health wards as over £130,000 in six months. This money could be put to better use in providing care for people with mental health conditions.

Key recommendations of *The Stolen Years* include:

- National targets and leadership to drive action across the country.
- Strong focus on the skills and training of the workforce.
- Availability of evidence-based services alongside peer support for all those who need them.

- Better access to the medications that will help people to quit.
- Improved understanding that electronic cigarettes provide a less harmful alternative to smoking.
- Moving to smokefree mental health settings alongside provision of the right support to smokers.

Health and Wellbeing Boards have key role in working together with local Directors of Public Health to join up activity across the local healthcare system, including ensuring that high quality Joint Strategic Needs Assessments are in place that and organisations are supported to achieve change.

Key recommendations for Health & Wellbeing Boards in *The Stolen Years* include:

- Health and Wellbeing Boards must ensure there are co-ordinated local approaches to reducing smoking among people with a mental health condition.
- Local Authorities should estimate the number of smokers with mental health conditions and the proportion receiving cessation interventions in primary care, specialist stop smoking services, IAPT, social care and secondary care as part of their Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, as recommended by NICE (2013) to inform commissioners about the size of unmet need locally.

The publication of this report is only the start of work on this agenda. After decades of stagnation, change is only possible with collective action. Going forward we will be working with partners across the healthcare system to ensure that actions recommended in *The Stolen Years* become a reality and Health and Wellbeing Boards have a vital role to play. If you would like to get more involved in this work or receive more information about what you can do to help reduce smoking prevalence among those with a mental health condition in your area please email admin@smokefreeaction.org.uk or call 020 7404 0242.

With best wishes,



The Right Honourable Paul Burstow
Chair of the Tavistock and Portman Mental Health Trust and trustee of Action on Smoking and Health



Danielle Hamm
Associate Director Campaigns and Policy
Rethink Mental Illness



Deborah Arnott
Chief Executive
Action on Smoking and Health



Janet Davies
Chief Executive
Royal College of Nursing



Professor Sir Simon Wessely
President
Royal College of Psychiatrists