

Sir Keir Starmer  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA



10th October 2024

## Dear Prime Minister

We want to acknowledge the challenges you and your colleagues have faced since assuming leadership during these turbulent times. Your dedication to addressing the UK's pressing social and health issues is commendable, and we believe there is a real opportunity to build on the foundations laid to create a stronger future for all.

As a charity committed to improving mental health and reducing stigma, we are writing to highlight a crucial area that we believe requires urgent attention: the need for a stand-alone Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. Currently, mental health responsibilities are part of a broader portfolio held by Baroness Merron (Minister for Patient Safety, Women's Health, and Mental Health). While her work is appreciated, we believe the complexity of the mental health crisis, particularly the rise in suicides among young people, requires a full-time ministerial focus with its own dedicated brief.

Previously, this role was shared between Maria Caulfield (Women and Mental Health) and Gillian Keegan (Care and Mental Health), but these duties have since been absorbed into other areas. In a country where suicide is the leading cause of death among young people, and with millions waiting for mental health treatment, we cannot afford to dilute the focus on mental health any longer. A stand-alone Minister would ensure that mental health receives the targeted attention it so desperately needs.

The situation is urgent. Over 1.2 million people are currently waiting for mental health treatment, with some waiting over two years for follow-up care in adult mental health services. More than a quarter of a million children and adolescents are awaiting vital support, and post-COVID-19, the mental health crisis has been compounded by the cost-of-living crisis, putting even more strain on already overburdened services.

Internationally, we have seen the benefits of appointing a dedicated mental health minister. Australia and New Zealand have been pioneering examples in ensuring that mental health remains a priority. For young people, mental health is the issue that concerns them, and there needs to be an individual who can coordinate cross departmental support.

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In the UK, we have seen positive steps such as the expansion of the 111 service to include mental health emergencies, but with over 52,000 calls per day, the system is overwhelmed. We need dedicated leadership to ensure that such services are supported and that people in crisis, particularly those at risk of suicide, are seen promptly and effectively. A stand-alone Minister would provide the leadership necessary to ensure robust implementation and accountability.

We also wish to note that mental health wasn't mentioned in the Prime Minister's speech at the Labour Party Conference. This only underscores the importance of raising this issue now, as mental health affects every one of us, transcending political divides. We respectfully ask for your support in advocating for the appointment of a stand-alone Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, and for MPs across all parties to lend their voices to this cause.

Such a role would allow for clear prioritisation of mental health, targeted policy-making, and stronger collaboration with the communities and organisations on the frontlines of this crisis. We believe this is a moment to bring mental health to the forefront of national policy and to create a more compassionate and responsive system of care for all.

The Be Free Campaign is proud to advocate for a future where mental health is treated with the seriousness it requires. Together, we can build a mental health system that saves lives and offers hope to millions. We stand ready to work alongside you and MPs across parliament to make this vision a reality.

Yours sincerely,

*Be Free Campaign & Supporters*