

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2008](#): Provide funding for a separate mental health A&E for children, lodged by Kirsty Solman

[PE2008](#) calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide funding to create a specialised Accident and Emergency (A&E) stream for children and young people attending A&E with mental health issues.

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

A&E attendance for mental health reasons among children and young people

The table below shows the number of 'new unplanned' and 'return unplanned' attendances at A&E for mental health reasons among under-18s in Scotland over the past five years, by year. These figures do not necessarily represent numbers of individual children and young people, as some patients may have attended A&E on more than one occasion.

Table 1: Number of mental health-related A&E attendances for under-18s in Scotland by year

Year	No. of mental health-related A&E attendances for under-18s
2018	4,530
2019	5,027
2020	4,377
2021	4,834
2022	4,784

Source: Public Health Scotland

Children and young people seeking mental health support out-of-hours are advised [to contact NHS24](#) in the first instance, or to dial 999 in the event of an emergency. Some children and young people experiencing a mental health crisis are advised to go to A&E by NHS24 or an out-of-hours GP, and others may attend A&E directly.

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine (RCEM)'s [Mental Health in Emergency Departments \[ED\] toolkit](#) states that “a patient presenting to ED with either a physical or mental health need should have access to ED staff that understand and can address their condition, and access to appropriate specialist services, regardless of their postcode, GP or time of arrival”. The toolkit also notes that the RCEM's standards should apply to children and young people as much as adults.

The RCEM's toolkit advises that when a young person attends A&E for mental health reasons, a risk assessment should be completed by a mental health clinician with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) training to determine whether the patient is high risk and needs to stay in, or whether they can go home and be seen the next day. The [Scottish Government's response to the petition](#) states:

“Each Health Board has arrangements in place to ensure any patient presenting at A&E in mental health crisis is properly assessed and cared for, at any time of day. In practice this involves specialist mental health clinical staff working alongside A&E teams to ensure people who have suicidal intentions are assessed and that tailored care plans are put in place. Those care plans may include accessing support from crisis support organisations or local mental health services; or, where necessary, admission to hospital.”

However, as the petitioner notes, this standard is not always achieved in practice. Within NHS Boards that do have on-call psychiatrists available for out-of-hours CAMHS emergencies, the service [may not be based in the hospital at which the patient presents](#), necessitating a transfer to access mental health support.

The Scottish Government's response to the petition adds:

“Some areas in Scotland have services in place that can respond to children and young people's mental health needs out of hours, but there are inconsistencies in what is available and gaps in provision in some areas which is why work is ongoing with key professional groups to create a safe, meaningful, equitable and sustainable pathway for children and young people to access essential mental health care out of hours across Scotland. To support the development of the CAMHS out of hours provision, the Scottish Government has provided funding to NHS Boards over the last two years, and we continue to work closely with Boards to support them in the delivery of this alongside other aspects of the CAMHS Specification.”

In 2019, [a voluntary service to support young people attending A&E for mental health reasons](#) was launched at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. The service is delivered by 6VT Edinburgh City Youth Café and Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity. Two youth workers are based in the accident and emergency department of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh during peak incident times on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Impact of CAMHS outpatient waiting times on A&E attendances

Some children and young people who seek emergency mental health care do so whilst awaiting outpatient treatment. Audit Scotland's 2018 [Children and Young People's Mental Health report](#) investigated the number of children and young people who use emergency and unplanned care for mental health reasons whilst awaiting outpatient treatment. The report drew on data from 2016-17 which showed that 131 children and young people attended A&E on 297 occasions for mental health reasons, before attending outpatient CAMHS. Audit Scotland stated that this use of emergency care suggests that some children and young people were not receiving appropriate mental health care until reaching a crisis point. The report noted that analysing treatment pathways could help to identify opportunities for earlier intervention, thereby reducing the need for emergency care.

The Scottish Government's [Local Delivery Plan Standard for CAMHS](#) states that 90% of young people should commence treatment within 18 weeks of referral. [Public Health Scotland's latest data](#) states that for the quarter ending December 2022, 70.1% of children and young people were seen within 18 weeks of referral. This represents an increase from 67.9% for the previous quarter, but remains some way below the 90% target.

Development of mental health crisis support for children and young people

The Scottish Government's [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services: National service specifications](#) outline the provisions that young people and their families can expect from the NHS. Among these provisions is the development of a 24/7 mental health crisis response service for children and young people.

The [Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Delivery Board](#), jointly chaired by the Scottish Government and COSLA, was formed in 2021. One of the Board's key deliverables is to develop 24/7 crisis support for children and young people. The Board's [most recent newsletter](#), published on 18 April 2023, gives an update on wider work impacting children and young people's mental health support, but does not specifically address crisis support.

Following the completion of its pilot programme, the Scottish Government's [Distress Brief Intervention](#) (DBI) Programme, a non-clinical intervention designed to support people aged 16 and over experiencing a mental health crisis, is expected to be rolled out across Scotland by 2024. The applicability of DBI to people under 16 is currently under exploration.

Scottish Government Actions

In response to written question [S6W-09147](#), the then-Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care, Kevin Stewart MSP, confirmed that £1.17million of the £40million invested in NHS Boards in 2021-22 to improve CAMHS

services had been allocated to improvements in [out-of-hours unscheduled care](#).

The Scottish Government's [CAMHS National Service Specification](#) states that:

“CAMHS crisis services provides a 24/7 emergency/crisis response assessment and management service, working alongside other agencies (Police, ED, SWS etc.) and may provide support as required to these agencies. CAMHS Crisis services work intensively with children and young people and their families/carers as required to respond to mental health crisis immediately. CAMHS crisis services ensure children and young people are safe and receive appropriate follow up care, including medical and psychiatric inpatient care where require, social work and other services response. CAMHS crisis services will work closely with the Crisis supports under development for the Children and Young People’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Programme Board.”

The Scottish Government’s new [Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) is expected to be published in Spring 2023, following a period of public consultation which included questions regarding CAMHS services.

Scottish Parliament Actions

The Scottish Parliament Health, Social Care, and Sport Committee held an inquiry into [the health and wellbeing of children and young people](#). The provision of CAMHS services was one of the topics explored during the inquiry. The Committee [published its inquiry report](#) on 13 May 2022. In its response to the inquiry report on 11 July 2022, [the Scottish Government stated](#) that it had allocated £40million to NHS Boards in 2021-22 to improve CAMHS services, including establishing access to out-of-hours assessments.

The Public Petitions Committee conducted an inquiry into mental health support for young people in Scotland, and [published its report](#) on 24 July 2020. The report was [debated in Parliament on 1 December 2020](#).

Sarah Swift
Researcher
19 April 2023

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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