

Key data

Children's treatment for mental health problems

REFERRALS FOR SUPPORT

There were 949,000 children and young people who had active referrals to children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) in 2022/23. Almost 305,000 children and young people entered treatment, 270,000 were still waiting at the end of the year to receive two contacts with services, and 373,000 had their referral closed.



CHILDREN'S CHARACTERISTICS

Children and young people aged 13 to 15 were the largest group of children accessing CYPMHS treatment, making up 37% of all those engaging with services despite making up only 17% of all children in England. Most of those entering treatment were girls (56%), 40% were boys and 1% non-binary. Gender was not recorded for the rest. Meanwhile, 62% of those children entering treatment were of white ethnicity.



SPENDING LEVELS

England-wide, integrated care boards (ICB) spent £997 million on CYPMHS in 2022/23, equal to 1.02% of the total spent by ICBs, an increase of 8%. However, when adjusted for inflation, annual growth has slowed from 7% in 2021/22 to 1% last year. The average spend per child with an active referral was £1,050, ranging from £2,236 in North Central London to £573 in Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West.



DRAGANA GORDIC/ADOBE STOCK

REASONS FOR REFERRAL

Due to NHS data shortcomings, a third of referrals had no primary reason recorded. Of the known primary referral reasons, anxiety was the most common (20%), and children 'in crisis' was the second most common referral reason (10%). This reflects a 53% rise in emergency mental healthcare referrals in the last three years.



EXTENT OF DELAYS

For the 270,300 children and young people still waiting at the end of the year for their second contact with CYPMHS, they waited on average 142 days (median) or 359 days (mean). Of the 270,300 children and young people still waiting at the end of the year, 32,200 had been waiting over 2 years (104 weeks).



WAITING TIMES

For the 305,000 children who entered treatment, they waited an average of 35 days (median) or 108 days (mean). About 15% of children entered treatment within four weeks. There were 6,300 young people who waited over two years before entering treatment, for whom the average wait was 1,128 days (median) or 1,399 days (mean).



Source: Children's mental health services 2022/23, Children's Commissioner for England, March 2024 <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/childrens-mental-health-services-2022-23/>