Informing the Mental Health Strategy for England. Briefing for Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network (VAMHN) members

June 2026

Why this Consultation Matters

The Government is currently consulting on a new Mental Health Strategy for England. For the Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network (VAMHN), this consultation presents an important opportunity to ensure that violence and abuse are recognised as major determinants of mental health and mental health inequalities.

Experiences of child maltreatment, domestic abuse, sexual violence, and exploitation are associated with increased risk of depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, psychosis, substance misuse, self-harm and suicide. Violence and abuse also affect education, employment, housing, social participation and quality of life.

Despite clear evidence, violence and abuse are not yet treated as core mental health issues. VAMHN's response argues that preventing, identifying and responding to violence and abuse should be recognised as an essential part of improving the nation's mental health.

VAMHN's Key Asks

Through this consultation, VAMHN is calling for the new Mental Health Strategy to:

- Recognise violence and abuse as major determinants of mental health and mental health inequalities across the life course.
- Recognise violence prevention as mental health prevention and align the Mental Health Strategy with the Government's Freedom from Violence and Abuse Strategy.
- Ensure mental health services are equipped to identify and respond safely to violence and abuse, including through safe enquiry, workforce development, supervision and access to specialist support.
- Improve access to evidence-based psychological and psychosocial support for survivors, particularly those who fall within the "missing middle" between NHS Talking Therapies and secondary mental health services.
- Invest in specialist domestic abuse, sexual violence and violence against women and girls (VAWG) services as essential components of the mental health support system, supported by sustainable, long-term funding.
- Promote recovery-oriented approaches that recognise the importance of safety, housing, financial security, education, employment, social connection and participation in community life alongside clinical outcomes.
- Strengthen the role of violence and abuse within suicide prevention policy and practice, recognising their contribution to suicide risk and avoidable deaths.

VAMHN's Key Messages

Violence and abuse should be recognised as major determinants of mental health
Violence and abuse are among the most significant and preventable contributors to poor mental health across the life course. Mental health policy should recognise their role in shaping population mental health, service demand, inequalities and recovery.

We are calling for greater alignment between the Mental Health Strategy and the Government's Freedom from Violence and Abuse Strategy, recognising that violence prevention is also mental health prevention.

Prevention matters
The strongest preventative approaches address the social determinants of mental health. Alongside action on poverty, housing, education and social exclusion, preventing violence and abuse should be recognised as a core mental health prevention strategy.

This includes supporting children affected by abuse and neglect, preventing domestic abuse and sexual violence, promoting healthy relationships, and addressing wider social and economic factors that increase vulnerability to both violence and poor mental health.

Mental health services should identify and respond to violence and abuse
Mental health services should be equipped to identify and respond safely to experiences of violence and abuse through trauma-informed practice, workforce development and effective referral pathways.

Identification alone is not enough. Survivors need access to appropriate support once abuse has been recognised. This includes specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence services, evidence-based psychological support, housing advocacy, welfare advice and other forms of practical assistance.

The "missing middle" requires urgent attention
Many survivors fall between existing services. Needs may be too complex for NHS Talking Therapies but may not meet thresholds for secondary mental health care. At the same time, specialist violence and abuse services are often overstretched and face long waiting lists.

VAMHN is calling for greater investment in community-based, trauma-informed support, including psychological therapies for people affected by trauma and abuse, specialist therapeutic provision within violence and abuse services, and stronger partnerships between NHS and voluntary sector providers.

Recovery is about more than symptom reduction
Mental health recovery should not be measured solely in terms of symptoms or service use.

For many survivors, recovery is closely linked to safety, housing, financial security, education, employment, social connection and participation in community life. Mental health services therefore need to work effectively with housing, social care, education, employment and specialist violence and abuse services.

VAMHN

Violence and abuse are relevant to suicide prevention
There is growing recognition of the role of violence and abuse in suicide risk, including domestic abuse-related suicides.

Suicide prevention efforts should recognise violence and abuse as significant and preventable contributors to suicide risk and ensure that violence prevention and suicide prevention policies are closely aligned.

Specialist services need sustainable funding
Specialist violence and abuse services play a vital role in supporting mental health and recovery. However, many operate with insecure funding, workforce pressures and increasing demand.

In many areas, referral pathways already exist; the challenge is often the capacity and sustainability of the services receiving referrals. Long-term investment is needed to ensure that survivors can access timely and effective support.

How VAMHN Members can Contribute

We strongly encourage members to respond to the consultation where relevant to their professional and/or lived experience expertise. Together, we have an opportunity to help ensure that England's new Mental Health Strategy recognises violence and abuse as major public mental health issues and strengthens support for people affected by violence and abuse throughout their lives.

Cite as: Oram S (2026). Informing the mental health strategy for England. Briefing for Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network (VAMHN) members. VAMHN, London.