

New agency for a new era



The National Mental Health Development Unit is becoming the lead agency for supporting the implementation of mental health policy in England. Its director, Dr Ian McPherson, explains its role

As the 10-year National Service Framework (NSF) for Mental Health draws to its natural end in April, new policy priorities are emerging as a result of the New Horizons programme, a project that is seeking to identify mental health policy priorities for the future.

Alongside these changes, the Department of Health (DH) initiated a review of future arrangements to support the delivery of mental health policy over the next three years. This was in the context of the NHS Next Stage Review, led by Lord Darzi, which put the emphasis on quality of care, clinical leadership and patient choice, and Putting People First, a government programme to transform social care that embodies the personalisation approach.

This review had input from strategic health authorities, the NHS Confederation, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) and the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE).

It recommended that the DH would continue to lead on national mental health policy development and that strategic health authorities focus on supporting regional and local delivery. However, specific central support for mental health policy implementation remained important, and this will be the remit of a new organisation, the National Mental Health Development Unit, or NMH DU.

The unit will be replacing the national component of NIMHE, building on NIMHE's successes, but operating in a manner more suited to a post-NSF and post-Darzi era. In other words, NIMHE's former regional resources will be focused on supporting local delivery under the direction of the strategic health authorities.

The new unit, which will be fully operational from April 2009, is being established to provide national support to implement mental health policy. The development unit will support both the department and the strategic health authorities by advising on the best national and international practice, which has been shown to improve mental health services and mental health. This will be done by commissioning or providing:

- specialist expertise in areas of policy and delivery
- effective knowledge transfer on research, evidence and good practice

- support to translate national policies into practical deliverables that achieve the right outcomes
- co-ordination of national activity to help regional and local implementation.

With New Horizons shaping the future mental health policy agenda, the development unit will develop its work through a process of co-production between the department and strategic health authorities, and active partnerships with other national stakeholders, including the NHS Confederation, ADASS and the major mental health organisations in the third sector. New Horizons will be consulting on its recommendations during 2009. Our initial programmes will take forward some of the current work of NIMHE, but focus only on those aspects that continue to require national co-ordination. These include:

- **Improving access to psychological therapies (IAPT):** The decision to invest £173m over the next three years on improving access to psychological therapies has been widely welcomed. However, creating these new-style services in primary care and developing training for an expanded workforce is a major logistical challenge, and IAPT will be a core component of the unit's work.
- **Supporting effective commissioning:** The recognition of the importance of commissioning through the government's World Class Commissioning initiative presents major opportunities for the whole of the health and social care system, but needs to address some particular issues in relation to mental health. The unit will be working closely with all agencies to support mental health commissioning.
- **Improving Mental Health Care Pathways:** The NSF has led to numerous improvements in mental health provision, such as early intervention, but not all of these are fully integrated into local provision and there are other areas (inpatient care, for example), where more work is needed. The unit has national experts in these areas who can advise on how care pathways can operate most effectively within specialist services and between these and primary care.
- **Delivering equalities (race, gender and age):** Inequalities in mental health provision need to be addressed. There is a wealth of evidence that many



Dr Ian McPherson, director of NMH DU



people from black and minority ethnic communities continue to be dissatisfied with their experience of mental health services, while women from all communities frequently report that services appear to be insufficiently sensitive to their needs. Older people also complain that they do not have access to the same range of services as adults of working age. The unit will focus on nationally co-ordinated initiatives to help commissioners and providers implement best practice in each of these areas.

- **Promoting social inclusion and social justice:** The personal and social experience of individuals can significantly influence the likelihood of recovery from mental health problems. In this programme the unit will focus on the national co-ordination of work, with agencies supporting people living with severe mental illness to secure greater equality of employment opportunities and improved settled accommodation. This will reduce the extent of inequalities they experience and improve their overall health and wellbeing. It will also incorporate the national SHiFT initiative to tackle stigma and discrimination, which includes a strong focus on employment.
- **Promoting wellbeing and public mental health:** The NSF priority was given to changing services rather than promoting wellbeing. However, there have been recent statements about emerging policy priorities that have challenged this approach (eg. the Future Vision Coalition of seven major national mental health organisations, which recognised that there are actions that can benefit the whole population.) The development unit will contribute to the cross-government, multi-agency approach required to support the delivery of the wellbeing and public mental health agenda, and establish a connected programme of implementation support.

I am privileged to lead the NMHDU, working with a small team of specialists heading up national activity in the above areas. As someone who has been involved with NIMHE since it was established in 2002, I recognise that some people may be concerned that, as NIMHE is ending,

the profile of mental health will be reduced.

I am determined that shall not happen. I see the unit as being a natural successor to NIMHE in terms of its national focus in promoting mental health policy. I look forward to working with former NIMHE colleagues as they establish new regional arrangements to support mental health delivery in a manner more suited to the greater devolution of responsibility for commissioning and provision of services in the post-NSF era.

I am delighted at how positively the establishment of NMHDU has been welcomed by leading stakeholders in mental health as the comments below testify. ■

Features on NMHDU's workstreams will be appearing in *Mental Health Today*. More information about NMHDU will appear on its website from 1 April: www.nmhdu.org.uk

NHS Next Stage Review is available at: www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_085825

Putting People First is available at: www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_081118

A warm welcome to NMHDU

'Sainsbury Centre warmly welcomes the creation of the National Mental Health Development Unit. With the National Service Framework for mental health coming to an end and an era of New Horizons for mental health upon us, the need for expert support to the NHS and local authorities for turning policy into practice has seldom been greater. It is vital that programmes such as Improving Access to Psychological Therapies and Delivering Race Equality continue to get the support they need nationally. And national support will be invaluable for health and social services to implement the Bradley Review.' *Angela Greatly, chief executive, Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health*

'The NHS Confederation's mental health network looks forward to working with the NMHDU to build on the impressive work of the National Institute of Mental Health in England in supporting the development and implementation of key strands of mental health policy.' *Steve Shrubbs, director of the mental health network, NHS Confederation*

'ADASS welcomes the creation of the National Mental Health Development Unit. NIMHE has played a vital role over the past decade in improving mental health services. However, the New Horizons review gives us the challenge of addressing much broader issues about mental health within society, as well as mental health care, and we look forward to working with the new unit to take these issues forward.' *Richard Webb, joint chair of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services mental health network*