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## **TITLE PAGE**

### **New mental health research goals are an important step forward for child and adolescent mental health**

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## **New mental health research goals are an important step forward for child and adolescent mental health**

Children and young people's mental health is a key public health priority and the clear focus on children and young people in the new Mental Health Research Goals, 2020-2030 (Wykes et al., 2021) is therefore to be welcomed. Adolescence is a critical period for the emergence of mental health problems (Kessler et al., 2005) and evidence suggests there has been a worsening of mental health among the adolescent population in recent years (Collishaw, 2015; Patalay & Gage, 2019). Young people in the UK also fare less well compared with other high-income countries (UNICEF, 2020; Inchley et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated concerns about children and young people's mental health and may well continue to have an impact for years to come (Department for Education, 2020). This makes it all the more important to better understand the aetiology of mental health problems and effective approaches to prevention and treatment.

The adolescent years provide an important window of opportunity for early intervention and prevention; if we neglect this opportunity we will fail our young people and particularly those growing up in more disadvantaged circumstances. Policies and programmes targeted at children and adolescents have the potential for a "triple dividend" not only by supporting healthy growth and development during the adolescent years, but also by promoting positive health outcomes in adulthood and improving the health of the next generation (Patton et al., 2016). The commitment to child and adolescent mental health outlined in recent policy documents across the four UK nations (Department of Health & Social Care & Department of Education, 2018; Scottish Government, 2017; Department of Health NI, 2020; Welsh

Government, 2020) provides an essential platform on which to build effective research strategies to support implementation of the goals.

The involvement of those with lived experience of mental health problems throughout the development and subsequent implementation of the goals is crucial to ensuring that research meets the needs of those it is intended to support. Greater involvement of children and young people in research and intervention development will lead to a greater impact more relevant to their mental health experiences. This approach is at the core of our work within the TRIUMPH Network<sup>1</sup> and our research agenda has been co-produced alongside young people, policymakers, practitioners and academics from across the UK highlighting key mental health research areas relevant to the pressures facing children and young people today (TRIUMPH, 2020).

Alongside a clear need for more investment in high quality, youth-friendly mental health services, the goals rightly highlight the need to target a range of settings to optimise support for young people's mental health, including education and community settings. Schools have a key role to play in mental health promotion, as do youth work organisations and community-based programmes. Researchers also need to establish better ways to reach out to socially marginalised groups, including BAME, care-experienced, LGBTQ+ young people and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who often experience multiple risk factors for mental ill-health. Recognising the diversity of young people's experiences and needs is an essential step towards reducing stigma and discrimination and improving the mental health and wellbeing of all children and young people.

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<sup>1</sup> The Transdisciplinary Research for the Improvement of Youth Mental Public Health (TRIUMPH) is one of eight UKRI-funded mental health research networks, led by the University of Glasgow.

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