



Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP
Shadow Minister for Mental Health
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

10 October 2022

Dear Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP,

I am writing to you as the Chief Executive Officer for Young Lives vs Cancer, the UK's leading charity for children and young people with cancer.

The 10th October 2022 marks **World Mental Health Day**. Despite progress on mental health awareness and provision, there is still work to be done to ensure that mental health services are equitable, accessible and meet the needs of all.

Being diagnosed with cancer as a child or young person comes at a unique time during the developmental stage of one's life. Because of this, young cancer patients' needs are different from other young people and adults. The impact of cancer goes beyond the physical, affecting children and young people's ability to cope with their day to day. In our (2017) 'Hidden Costs' report, we learned that young cancer patients are often disproportionately experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. This report also highlighted that **41% of young people did not access support for the mental health impact of their cancer diagnosis and treatment**. Reasons for this included: delays in accessing treatment, lack of information, and appropriate support not being available through traditional pathways or in their local area.

In 2021, the NHS found that the rate of probable mental health disorders among children and young people (**ages 6-19**) had increased to **one in six** (NHS Digital, 2021). This was a **5.6%** increase from **one in nine in 2017**. With current workforce shortages and mounting backlogs, children and young people will be unable to access the mental health support they need. We welcomed the government's announcement in July of a ten year plan to improve mental health services and submitted a response on behalf of young cancer patients (provided with this letter). However, since then the government are yet to release their plan.

We fear that the cost of living crisis will have an additional impact on young cancer patient's mental health as they will face significant financial pressures and worries. Young cancer patients already faced unmanageable costs associated with living with cancer before bills started to rise.

It is vital that the government release the ten year plan for mental health and that support for young cancer patients is not overlooked. For children and young people with cancer to cope with everything that cancer throws at them, adequate mental health and emotional provision needs to be in place.

We would welcome continuing this conversation with you on how we can ensure young cancer patients' mental health needs are met and how the government, health and third sector can work together to achieve this. To arrange a meeting, please contact Helen.Gravestock@younglivesvscancer.org.uk.

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rachel Kirby-Rider".

Rachel Kirby-Rider
Chief Executive Officer, Young Lives vs Cancer

General enquiries 0300 330 0803

younglivesvscancer.org.uk