

September 2023

# Britons and Mental Health Time to Act



**More in  
Common**

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## Methodological information

The polling cited in this report came from several polls conducted by More in Common, Public First and YouGov between 2021-2023. The primary polls used are:

- More in Common, Fieldwork (15/06/2023 – 19/06/2023), N = 2,018
- More in Common – YouGov, Fieldwork (19/11/2021 – 01/12/2021), N = 2,201
- More in Common – Public First, Fieldwork (02/12/2022 – 05/12/2022), N = 2,001
- More in Common - Public First, Fieldwork (29/11/2022 – 01/12/2022), N = 2,013

Details of other polls are available on request. More in Common is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

The qualitative research in the report was primarily carried out in June 2023 with a focus on the Loyal Nationals and Established Liberals segments. Participants were screened using the British Seven segmentation survey. Recruitment was carried out by the independent research recruitment agency (CRD) and moderated by More in Common's researchers.

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More in Common has retained full editorial control over this report.

## Introduction

Over the past six months, More in Common has been speaking with Britons about their views on mental health. What we found was not the polarised debate we sometimes see in the media – between those who care about mental health and those who dismiss it as ‘woke complaining’. Instead, we’ve seen a sea change in how the British public thinks and talks about mental health.

How Britons approach mental health has undergone a transformation over the past decade – from what was once a subject little discussed and often regarded as taboo, talking about mental health has become mainstream from workplaces and schools across the country to TV shows and Parliament.

That shift and transformation is thanks to the decades of work from campaigners and mental health professionals, alongside ordinary people sharing their stories about living with mental health issues. Britain today is much more aware of and comfortable talking about mental health.

But the British public want more than just talk. From More in Common’s conversations with thousands of Britons over the last few years, it is clear the public want to see efforts from politicians that turns their concern about mental health into real action. Mental health regularly ranks as one of the top issues of public concern, ranking between sixth and eight only after issues like the cost of living, NHS, and climate change. For younger generations, mental health is an even higher priority sitting as the fourth top issue for those under 40.

That desire to see action around mental health is rooted in people’s day-to-day experience of mental ill-health, whether their own or that of friends and family. While one in six people report experiencing a common mental health problem (like anxiety and depression) in any given week in England,<sup>1</sup> over half (52 per cent) say that they know someone living with mental health problems.

There is no doubt that the collective experience of the pandemic and the ongoing cost of living crisis have had a direct impact on mental health and well-being. Around a third of the public say that these twin crises have taken a toll on their own mental health. That survey data is supported by clinical evidence - in 2021, the Royal College of Psychiatrists said that the number of referrals for specialist NHS mental health care had reached a record high,<sup>2</sup> while the ONS revealed that cases of depression had doubled since before the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

Rethink Mental Illness – a charity serving thousands of people whose lives are severely affected by mental illness and mental health more generally – commissioned More in

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<sup>1</sup> [How common are mental health problems? - Mind](#)

<sup>2</sup> [NHS struggling with 'long tail' of pandemic mental ill health - BBC News](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Are we facing a mental health pandemic? | Office for National Statistics](#)

Common to better understand the shift in public understanding around mental health and highlight their priorities for improving mental health.

This report explores three key aspects of public attitudes to mental health:

1. **The public's starting points on mental health and mental illness.** A better understanding of how the public approach these issues can lead to better policy design and narrow the gap between what the public expect from mental health services and what policymakers assume they need to deliver.
2. **How the public navigates debates around mental health and mental illness.** Much existing research and commentary focuses primarily on the experiences of those living with mental health problems, and less so on how the wider public think about the range and severity of mental health issues. Understanding how different segments of the public approach mental health debates - in particular those who remain more sceptical about mental health concerns - can help the mental health sector and campaigners better reach less engaged and more sceptical audiences - whose support will be key to consolidate and extend the progress made in recent years.
3. **The public's ideas for better supporting those whose lives are affected by mental health and mental illness.** This includes exploring what the public expects from workplaces, schools and everyday institutions up and down the country in supporting those whose lives are affected by mental health.

Throughout this report, More in Common will conduct analysis through the lens of the British Seven segments - our ground-breaking segmentation model which groups the public together by their values, core-beliefs and social psychology rather than by their demographics or voting intention. More in Common's values-based segmentation model helps provide an upstream perspective on public opinion that goes beyond simply describing what the public's attitudes, and moves towards understanding what drives and shapes those attitudes. A full breakdown of the British Seven segments and their starting points on mental health is found in section five of this report.

By outlining the general public's starting points on mental health, this report can provide a guide for policy makers to help them better reflect the public's values and viewpoints in their policy and spending priorities; and help campaigners shape their campaigning on mental health to better resonate with the public.

This report sits alongside analysis from Rethink Mental Illness exploring how the mental health policy framework might better reflect the public's values and expectations in the lead up to and after the next General election.

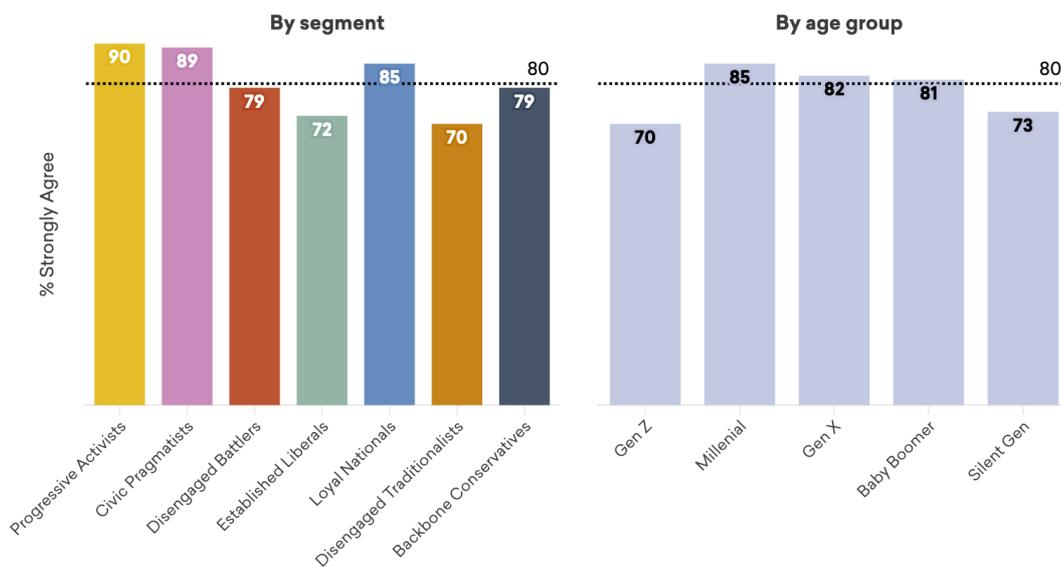
## Section One - Britons' starting points on mental health

### Talking about mental health

In a short space of time, Britain has come a long way in how it thinks, talks about, and treats mental health. The public certainly do not believe that mental health is or should be a taboo topic – eight in ten Britons now say they would be comfortable if a friend shared how their mental health was affecting their life. That openness to discussing mental health includes clear majorities across all the British seven segments. Even those groups who can be more sceptical about the ways in which we talk about mental health in Britain today are open and willing to talk and listen to those in their lives suffering from mental health challenges.

Figure 1

### Eight in ten Britons would be comfortable to discuss mental health with friends



How comfortable, if at all, would you feel if a friend shared how their mental health affects their life? (More in Common, June 2023)

Perhaps counter-intuitively, it is the youngest generation who are the least likely to say they'd be comfortable if a friend shared how their mental health was affecting their life. Seven in ten (70 per cent) of 18–24-year-olds say they would feel comfortable talking with their friends, compared with 85 per cent of Millennials and 81 per cent of Baby Boomers. This is despite Gen-Z consistently prioritising mental health higher as a top issue facing the country than other generations.

It is likely that this reticence stems less from a lack of empathy and more from young people's concern that they are ill-equipped to properly support friends suffering from mental ill health. More work remains to be done, particularly with these younger audiences, to give them the practical tools needed to help those whose lives are affected by mental health issues – whether they are friends, family, or colleagues. At the same time, despite the progress already made in enabling people to talk about their own mental health, recent research from the Time to Change campaign revealed that over three-quarters (78 per cent) would tell friends and family they were fine, even if they were struggling with a mental health problem. More work remains to be done to help the public feel able to talk with those closest to them about their own struggles with mental health.<sup>4</sup>

## What shapes public attitudes on mental health?

*I think it's even more important now than probably ever. I think from Covid time onwards to now, it just feels like nothing's getting better. The cost of living, food going up, you're just hearing it more and more. The pressures, especially if you've got a family, if you are on minimum wage, especially the gas and electric prices, they're not matching your wage, it's nowhere near matching now how much you're needing to survive. Now more so than ever, a hundred percent. I think mental health is so important right now and should be really prioritised.*

**Rebecca, 36, Loyal National, Blyth**

Mental health consistently ranks as one of the public's top issues facing the country – even above more traditional 'bread and butter' issues such as crime and education. This is particularly true among those under 40 for who mental health is consistently a top five concern. Our research identified several key factors that drive public concern about mental health.

### The experiences of our friends and family

That eight in ten Britons would feel comfortable talking about mental health is driven by personal experiences. Over half the public (52 per cent) say that they know someone who lives with mental health problems, and even more (69 per cent) say they worry about the mental health of their friends and family at least some of the time. This is a sentiment shared across demographic groups and More in Common's segments.

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<sup>4</sup> [Time to Change: Three quarters of Brits would say they are 'fine' even if struggling with a mental health problem](#)

### Crisis Britain – the pandemic and cost of living

The twin crises of the pandemic and cost-of-living have also driven concern for and experience of mental health issues. While most tend to say that their mental health has stayed the same during these crises, a significant minority of the public say their mental health has deteriorated during this time.

**Figure 2**

### Over a quarter of Britons say the pandemic has had a negative impact on their mental health

Which of the following, if any, best describes the impact of the pandemic on your own mental health? ● It has improved ● It has stayed the same ● Don't know ● It has gotten worse



Source: More in Common, June 2023

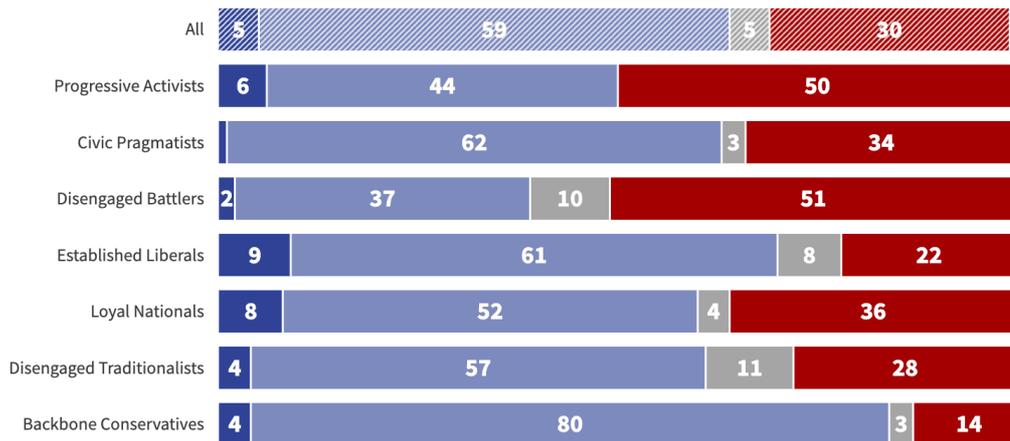
Three in ten Britons say their mental health has worsened as a result of the cost-of-living crisis, and a quarter say the same about the impact of the pandemic. However, each of the British seven segments report slightly different experiences. Progressive Activists, Disengaged Battlers and Loyal Nationals are significantly more likely to say that the cost-of-living crisis has negatively affected their mental health, while Civic Pragmatists are more likely to say the pandemic has had a negative impact on their own mental health.

**Figure 3**

## One in three Britons say the cost of living crisis has had a negative impact on their mental health

Which of the following, if any, best describes the impact of the cost of living crisis on your own mental health?

● It has improved ● It has stayed the same ● Don't know ● It has gotten worse



Source: More in Common, June 2023

The starting points and social psychology of the different segments helps to explain those distinct impacts:

- **Civic Pragmatists are the most likely to say their mental health worsened during the pandemic.** As a group who are civically oriented and active members within their local communities, 18 months of lockdowns and Covid-related restrictions took their toll – making it harder for them to meet and continue participating in the activities that form the core of their identity. Other research has found the impact of the pandemic disproportionately affected women.<sup>5</sup> The Civic Pragmatist segment has the highest female proportion of any of the segments – with women making up three in five members of the group.
- **Half (51 per cent) of Disengaged Battlers say the cost-of-living crisis has made their mental health worse, compared to a 30 per cent average.** This is understandable given that the Disengaged Battlers are More in Common's most economically precarious segment. In focus groups, they told us their real and serious anxiety about making ends meet and the extra workload and sacrifices they

<sup>5</sup> L. Kelly, 'Direct and indirect impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls. K4D Helpdesk Report'. *Institute of Development Studies* (2021), available at <https://www.gov.uk/research-for-development-outputs/direct-and-indirect-impacts-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-women-and-girls#citation>

were being forced to make to stay afloat. That constant need to battle against the system can compound the existing stress and anxiety brought about by their economic struggles. Worries about the financial cost of being ill can also lead this group to delay seeking treatment for physical and mental health. They are clearly a group that needs better access both to direct mental health support, but also financial support that allows them to address mental health issues before they deteriorate further.

- **Loyal Nationals are much more likely to say their mental health has deteriorated as a result of the cost-of-living crisis than the pandemic.** Despite not being the most economically precarious group, they can often be considered to be 'just about managing' or one unfortunate event away from precarity. In focus groups, Loyal Nationals explain that they have had to cut out all of the fun things in life such as eating out, holidays or day trips with kids and grandkids which improve mental well-being. Their high levels of threat perception also mean that this group are the most likely to believe that the cost-of-living crisis will never end and that they will continue struggling for many years to come.

*I feel like it's affecting other parts of your life as well. Cause you have no spare money for even a haircut or if the kid needs new trainers or then that's a struggle. It's not something that you're just able to go out and buy and yet that's not a luxury either. That's a necessity. No days out or no cinema.*

**Jenny, Loyal National, Lanark**

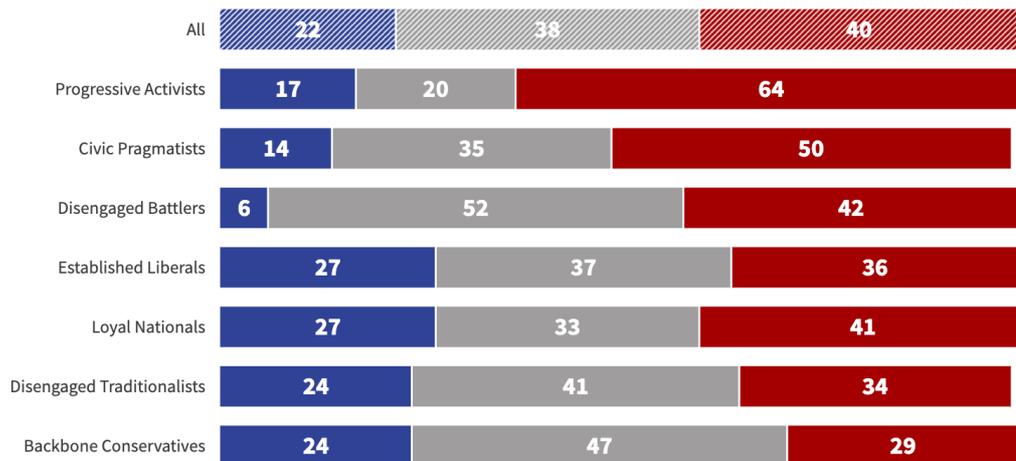
## Britons' verdict on current mental health support

In their assessment of the performance of the health system in dealing with mental health, the public are more than twice as likely to think it is performing poorly than performing well (40 per cent performing well vs 22 per cent performing badly). The Disengaged Battler segments are the least likely to say that the health system is currently performing well on mental health (6 per cent vs 22 per cent average).

**Figure 4**

### Only one in five think health system performing well on mental health

How well do you think the health system is performing on the issue of mental health? ● Well  
● Neither well nor poorly ● Poorly



## In focus: age and mental health

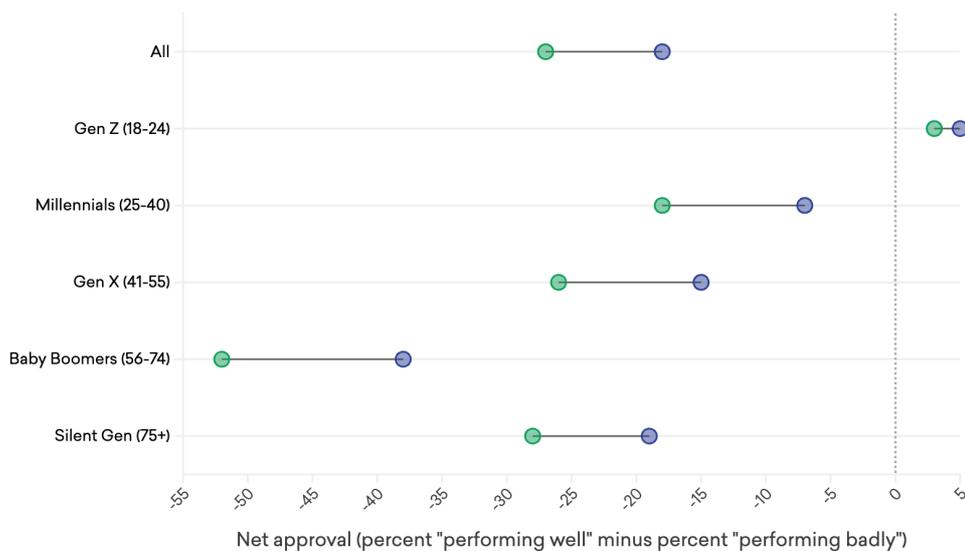
While young people are more likely to see mental health as a top issue facing the country, older people are more likely to believe that the health system is performing poorly on mental health. Baby Boomers take the dimmest view of the health service's performance on mental health, while Gen Z are the only age group where more people believe that the health service is performing well than poorly. This same pattern holds for Baby Boomers and Gen Z who know someone with a mental health problem.

**Figure 5**

### Gen-Z is the only generation who think that the health system is performing well on mental health

**How well do you think the health system is performing on the issue of mental health?**

● People who know someone with a mental health condition ● Everyone



Source: More in Common (July 2023)

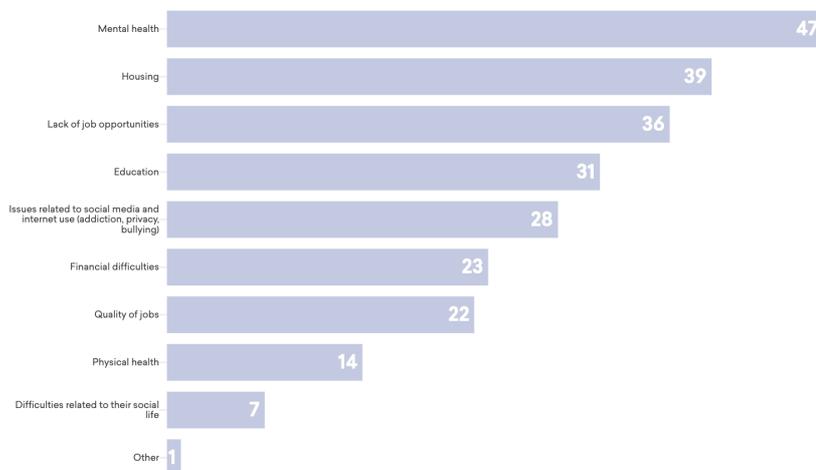
While a plurality of Gen Z (39 per cent) say that the health system is performing neither well nor badly on mental health, Gen Z are the only generation more likely to think it is performing well (33 per cent) than badly (28 per cent). This is particularly striking given the priority Gen Z give to mental health as a top issue facing the country and their closeness to people with mental health problems. One potential explanation for Gen Z's more positive verdict on mental health support might be the work that schools, colleges and universities have done recently on improving mental health support. For example, young graduates are more than twice as likely to think health services are performing well than young non-graduates.

However, notwithstanding clear generational differences across this research, previous research conducted by More in Common found that the public, across age groups, identified mental health as a top post-pandemic priority for young people.

**Figure 6**

### Emerging from the pandemic, mental health seen as top priority for young people

Of the specific issues facing young people in the UK as we emerge from the pandemic, which ones do you think should be addressed as a priority? Select up to 3.

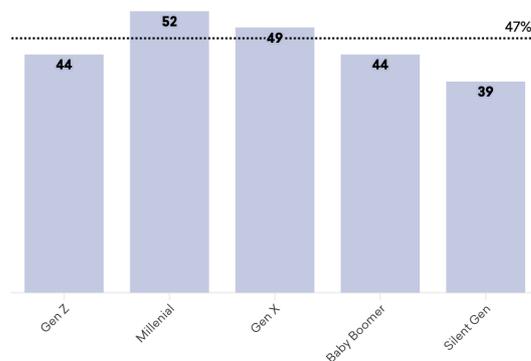


Source: More in Common, November 2021

**Figure 7**

### Mental health top young people post-pandemic priority - for all age groups

Of the specific issues facing young people in the UK as we emerge from the pandemic, which ones do you think should be addressed as a priority? Select up to 3. (Showing % selected mental health)



Source: More in Common, November 2021

## Section Two - Mental health and mental illness

While the public's increased willingness to talk about mental health and the extent to which they treat it as a priority issue is clear, there is less evidence available on what the public think falls under the umbrella of mental health, and how, if at all, they perceive differences between mental health/wellbeing and mental illnesses.

This chapter explores:

- Whether differences in the public's perception of 'mental health' and 'mental illness' affect the level and type of support that should be available for those struggling with mental ill-health.
- Whether the public see greater awareness of mental wellbeing as helping or hindering getting the right support and treatment to those with serious mental illness.
- If there are benefits or drawbacks of using either a mental health frame or a mental illness frame when talking about mental health with more sceptical groups.

*I think mental health is how you maybe deal with things. Your mental health might not feel so great on one day, but another day it's okay. I think an illness is kind of where you're diagnosed.*

**Gemma, 45, Loyal National, Blyth**

*I think it's such a big term mental illness and everybody is different. You can't compare one person's to the next. Everyone's got different triggers, everyone's got different ways of looking at things, everyone's got a different personality, so it's not one size fits all.*

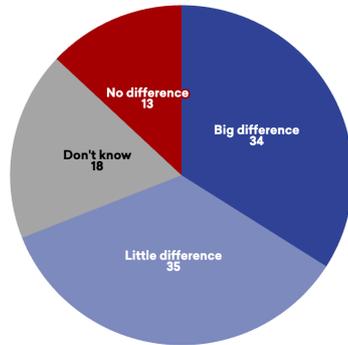
**Diane, 56, Established Liberal, Wycombe**

The public does not make a clear distinction between mental health and mental illness. Barely more than a third (34 per cent) say that there is a big difference, with more either saying there is little difference (35 per cent) or 'no difference' (13 per cent).

**Figure 8**

**Most don't make a major distinction between mental illness and mental health**

To what extent do you think there is a difference between mental health and mental illness? ■ Big difference ■ Little difference ■ Don't know ■ No difference



Source: More in Common (June 2023)

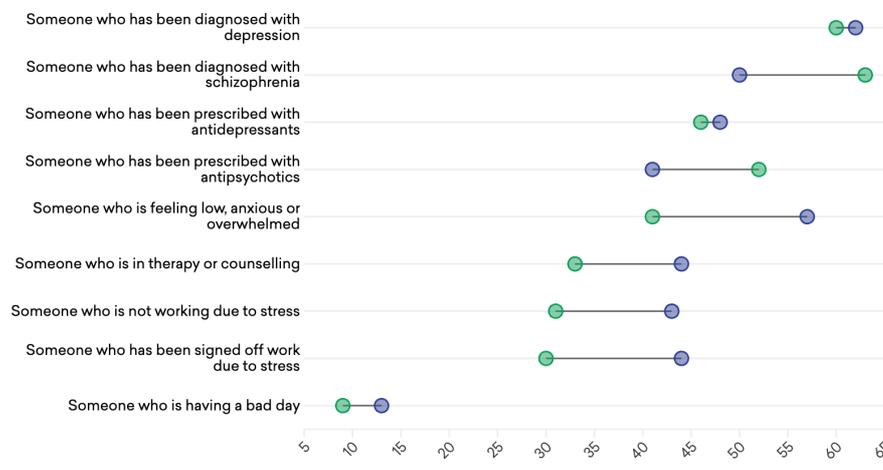
That elision of mental health and mental illness also emerges when the public are asked to select from a range of descriptors for people affected by either a mental health issue or a mental illness. While the public are slightly more likely to say that diagnosis, prescriptions and conditions such as bipolar and schizophrenia are most indicative of mental illness, and more likely to say that feeling 'low, anxious or overwhelmed' best describes a mental health issue, there is considerable overlap. Depression, in particular, is seen to be indicative of both a mental health issue and mental illness.

**Figure 9**

**Diverging and overlapping views on what constitutes a mental illness or mental health issue**

Which of the following, if any, would you consider to specifically describe someone affected by a....

● Mental health issue ● Mental illness



Source: More in Common (June 2023)



*I think there's a lot of it banded around, it's like it's an umbrella word, it just covers absolutely everything. Everyone gets anxious and upset and they're like, oh it's depression and all that... In lockdown, two of my friends were given antidepressants and I thought they're just giving them away like confetti and both of them work related. If you're having a bad time at work, it doesn't mean you have to pop a pill, you have to change your work, you have to change your environment. That's paper over the cracks, isn't it? So, I think there's a lot of that happening.*

**John, 47, Loyal National, Blyth**

*There could be something wrong in the brain I guess if you're diagnosed with a mental illness. As for mental health, some people have a better coping mechanism than others. Some people are stronger, some people can't cope with the environment we're living in today with social media, with the way we've just been through that pandemic, there's so many things going on right now that some people aren't strong enough to cope with, especially if they probably got families and children and everything. They worry about putting food on the table and everything. Yeah, it depends on everybody's individual situation, I guess. But I can see how people get sucked down by what's going on these days with things.*

**Christopher, 60, Loyal National, Blyth**

There is also some evidence that the use of mental health as a catch-all topic is leading some to doubt the veracity of mental health problems. As the public has grown more comfortable talking about mental health, so too have doubts that everyone's concerns are genuine.

The public are three times more likely to think that people who talk about their mental health have 'genuine concerns' (61 per cent) rather than using it as 'an excuse' (20 per cent). But scepticism is slightly higher among the more socially conservative segments – Disengaged Traditionalists and Backbone Conservatives – driven by their belief in individualist rather than systemic explanations for people's outcomes in life. However, even among more left leaning segments such as the Disengaged Battlers, who are likely to say they have experienced mental health issues, there remains a baseline level of scepticism.

For some of these groups highlighting the distinction between mental well-being and severe mental illness can help to tackle that scepticism, and in particular reiterating the importance of diagnosis, processes, and the agency of those living with mental illness can act as an important validator for more socially conservative groups.

## In focus: Loyal Nationals and mental health

*I think that's the problem – a lot of people don't know who to go to or where to turn to really. And anything to do with the government just seems to be totally not enough to help these people. So yeah, I think it seems to be quite a serious issue at the minute. Like I said, you don't know if it is genuine depression or if it's just somebody feeling a bit low. But yeah, I think it's quite worrying at the minute the amount of people that seem to feel that way.*

**Gemma, 45, Loyal National, Blyth**

Loyal Nationals are an important electoral swing group.

Traditionally Labour supporting, this economically left leaning but socially conservative group swung behind the Conservatives in the 2017 and 2019 elections delivering their victories in places like the 'Red Wall'. However, since 2021 they have swung back to the Labour Party, powering their opinion poll leads in the latter half of this 2019 Parliament.

Loyal Nationals think about the country and its challenges through a lens of group identity and loyalty (they are concerned about who is 'on their team' and who isn't). They also have high levels of both threat perception and victimhood. This group are more likely than other socially conservative segments to think that systemic factors and external context shape people's life outcomes, not just individual responsibility. Taken together, this shapes how they engage with mental health as an issue.

Loyal Nationals are the second most likely of any segment to say that plans to deal with mental health will affect their decision on which party they will vote for at the next election. They want to see the government doing more to improve services so that others, such as charities, are not left to pick up the pieces on providing essential care. They are also concerned that the police are increasingly having to deal with mental health problems that should be out of their remit.

**Figure 11**

**Loyal Nationals  
Voting Intention (2017-2023)**

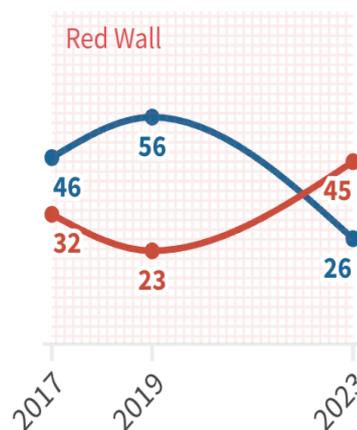
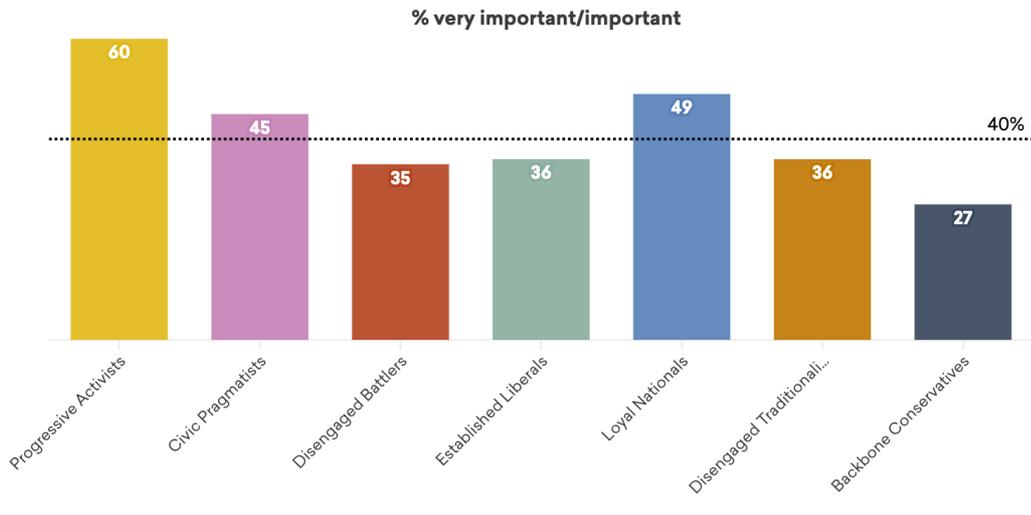


Figure 12

## Loyal Nationals are second most likely segment to say mental health will be an important election issue

How important or unimportant will mental health as an issue be in your decision for which party to vote for at the next general election?



Source: More in Common, June 2023

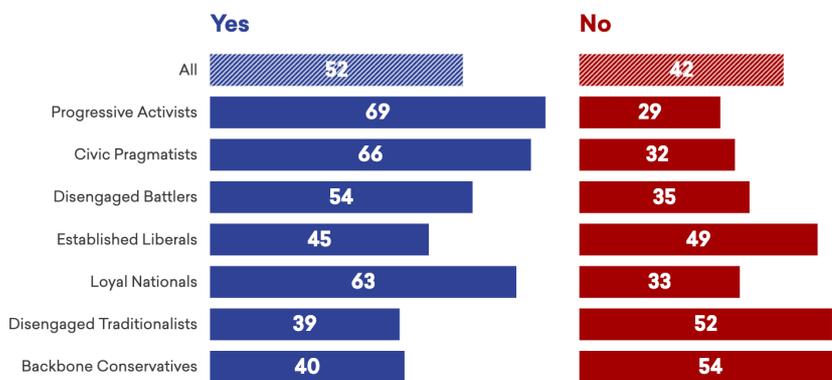
Loyal Nationals are one of the groups most likely to know someone affected by mental health problems and to worry about the mental health of those close to them. They take a broad view of what it means to either have a 'mental health issue' or a 'mental illness' from diagnoses of depression, people in therapy and counselling, and also those having a 'bad day'.

Figure 13

## Most know someone with mental health problems

Loyal Nationals are more likely than average to know someone with mental health problems

Do you know someone who lives with mental health problems? ● Yes ● No



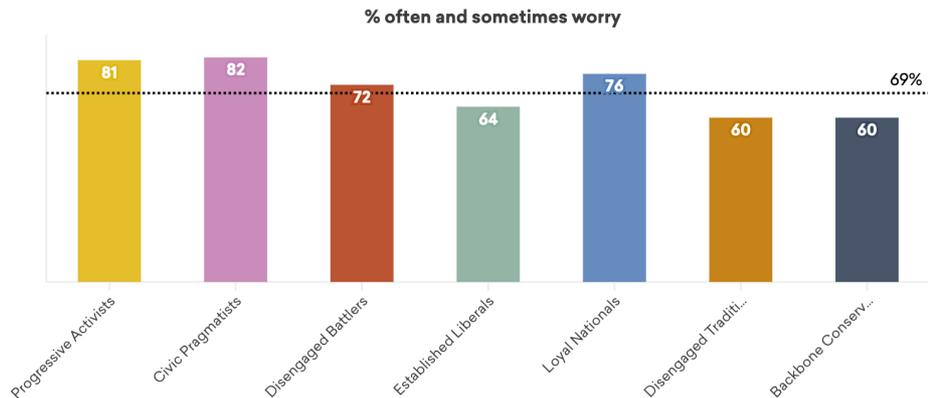
Source: More in Common (June 2023)

**Figure 14**

**Most worry at least sometimes about the mental health of their friends and family**

Loyal Nationals worry about friends/family mental health more than average

Do you ever worry about the mental health of your friends and family?



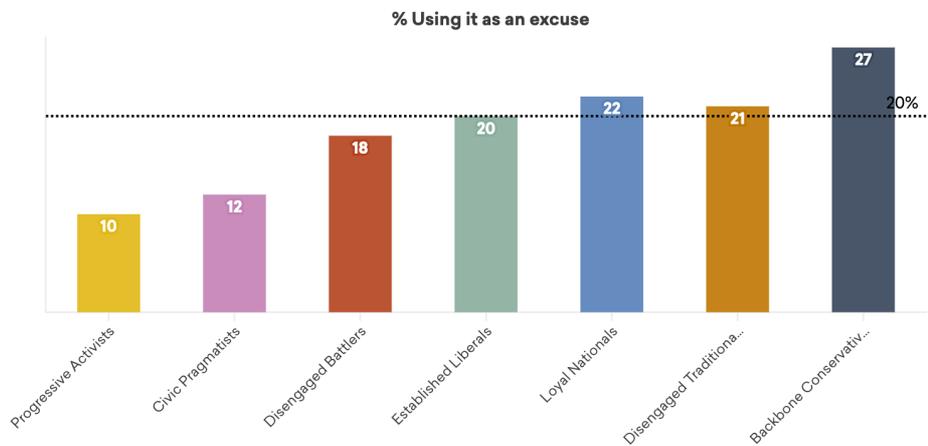
Source: More in Common (June 2023)

However, Loyal Nationals are also the second most likely to believe that those who talk about mental health are often using it as an excuse. Their perception of being neglected by those in power sometimes means they have a zero-sum world view. This can mean they worry that they will be left to take on extra work if a colleague says they have mental health concerns, and also worry about what it will mean for pressures on NHS services if more people are presenting with mental health issues.

**Figure 15**

**One in five think people who talk about their mental health problems are using it as an excuse**

Which do you agree with more: Most people who talk about their mental health problems: are often using it as an excuse, have genuine concerns about their own health and welfare, don't know



Source: More in Common (June 2023)

Tackling this concern requires reassuring Loyal Nationals that those who need the most help will receive it first, and that safeguards are in place to avoid abuse of the system. Part of this reassurance comes from a better explanation and understanding of process and diagnosis of mental health issues – this will be key to building confidence among Loyal Nationals that mental health is not being used for the wrong reasons. Loyal Nationals also want to be reassured that the full burden for dealing with mental health does not fall on the NHS and think that employers are not taking mental health seriously. Increasing this number or turning that concern about workplaces requires a focus on outlining practically how workplaces can do better to support people with mental health conditions.

*I think the huge problem we have is who has genuine mental health? You've no idea the amount of people, young people and sort of mixed ages at my work - as soon as it reaches a peak where they are going to get into trouble for it, it's "my mental health." But they don't mention mental health before that. So you don't know who's actually genuine out there that do need the help or would these people just pull on the resources of whatever that was put in place as much as they do on the NHS?*

**- Alexa, 55, Loyal National, Blyth**

## Section Three - The politics of mental health

*Mental health is one of the biggest killers of 2023. And I agree with everyone's point that that must be the main focus because everything's surrounded that. If someone's suffered from mental health, I feel sorry for them because it's a serious thing. I mean, I've had people killed with mental health, so it's not a joke...tougher regulations might help, but the main thing is money too.*

**Gaz, Loyal National, Blyth and Redcar**

In the run up to a likely general election in 2024, and with changes to benefits for people with long-term mental illness rumoured to feature in the Chancellor's 2023 budget, the politics of mental health are under the spotlight. This chapter explores how public attitudes to mental health could shape the politics of the next election.

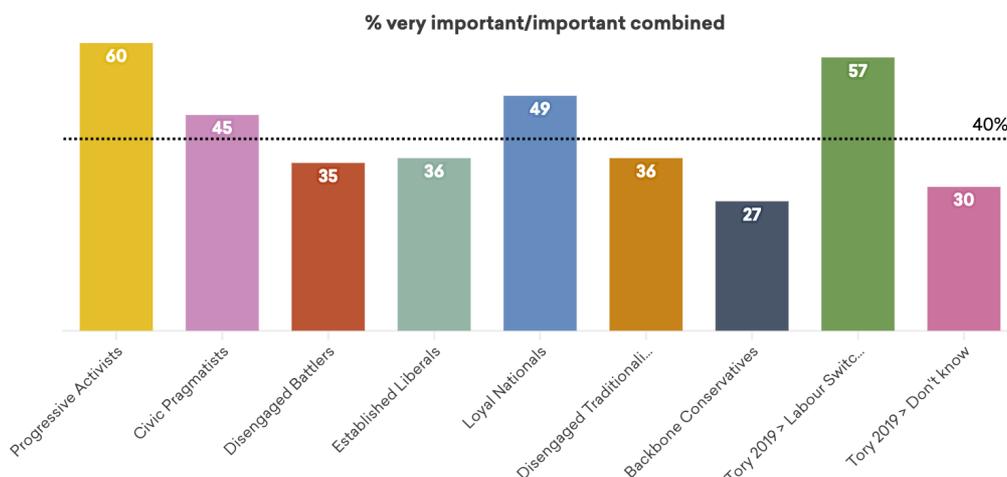
### Mental health as an election issue

Four in ten Britons say mental health policies will be an important factor in making up their mind on who they vote for at the next General election – the public are more than twice as likely to say mental health will be important (40 per cent) than unimportant (18 per cent). While there are differences in its electoral importance across segments, mental health commands support of both more socially Conservative segments (such as Loyal Nationals) and more socially liberal segments (such as Progressive Activists and Civic Pragmatists).

**Figure 16**

### Mental health matters to voters - including Tory to Labour switchers

How important or unimportant will mental health as an issue be in your decision for which party to vote for at the next general election?



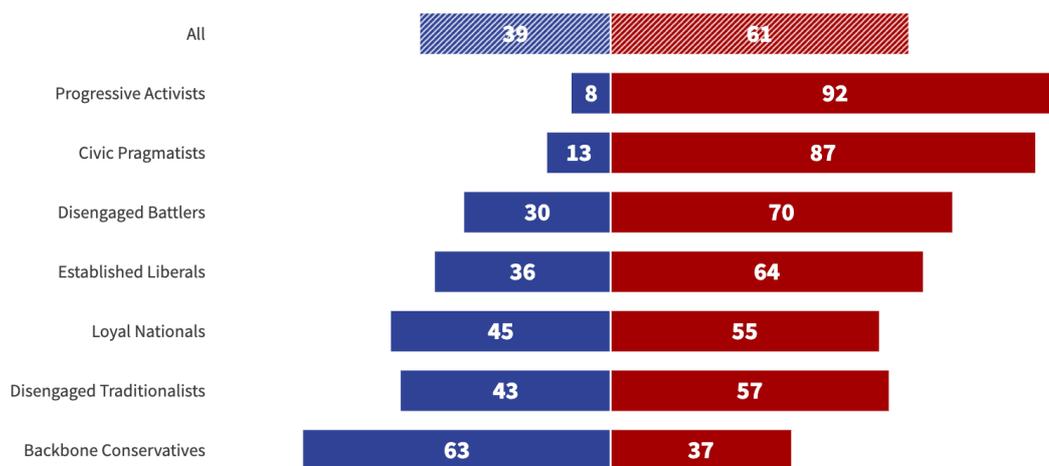
Through a more political lens, people who voted Conservative in 2019 but are now intending to vote Labour at the next election are significantly more likely than average (57 per cent versus 40 per cent average) to say that mental health will be an important issue in their decision for which party to vote for at the next general election. Mental health also regularly ranks between the sixth and eight top issues facing the country in More in Common’s monthly issue tracker. It is a top five issue for Gen Z and Millennial voters and across all segments between 10 per cent and 15 per cent prioritise mental health as a top issue facing the country.

As of summer 2023, when asked about which of the main parties they trust on mental health, the public are significantly more likely to say they trust Labour (61 per cent) than the Conservatives (39 per cent). Socially liberal segments have much stronger support than average for Labour, while socially Conservative are more evenly split, and only one segment (Backbone Conservatives) are more likely to trust the Conservatives than Labour when it comes to mental health.

**Figure 17**

**Labour more trusted than the Conservatives on mental health**

Which of the following do you trust most to tackle mental health? ● Conservative ● Labour



Source: More in Common, June 2023

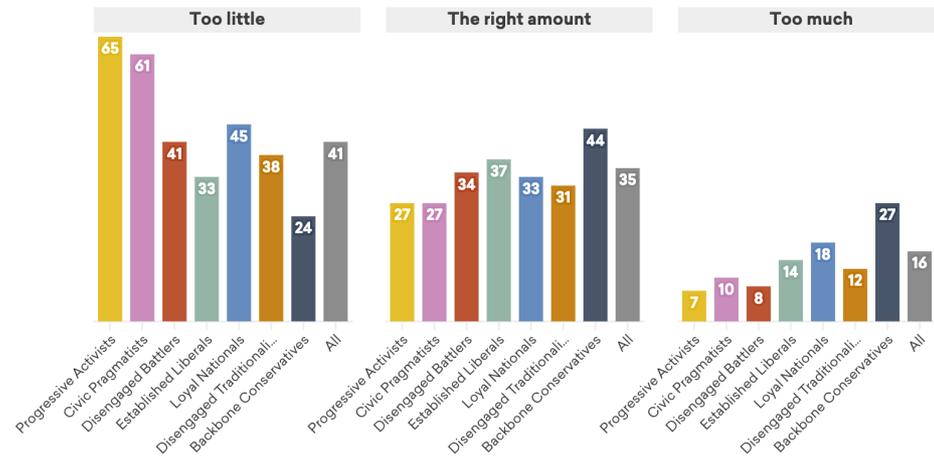
**Little appetite for a culture war on mental health**

Far from talking too much about mental health, most of the public think we either talk the right amount (35 per cent) or too little (41 per cent) about mental health – the idea that we spend too much time talking about mental health is only shared by one in seven Britons (16 per cent).

Figure 18

### Britons are more than twice as likely to think we talk too little about mental health than too much

Generally speaking, do you think that mental health is talked about too much, too little or about the right amount?



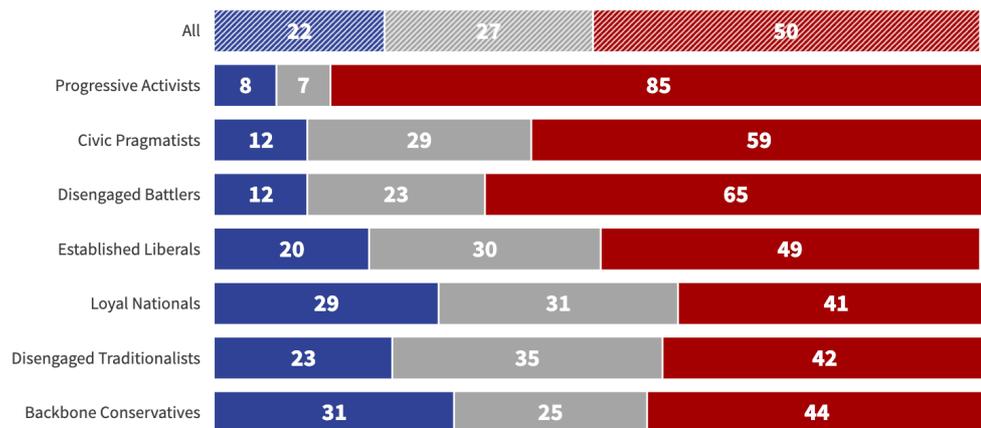
Source: More in Common, June 2023

In the lead up to the next general election, there is a risk that mental health debates could get caught in the crosshairs of a culture war or that it gets dragged into the ‘war on woke’. That would be a mistake and would land badly with the British public for whom most do not see mental health as a “woke” issue.

Figure 19

### Britons are more than twice as likely to reject than accept the idea that mental health is a woke issue

Do you consider mental health to be a "woke" issue? ● Yes ● Don't know ● No



Source: More in Common, June 2023

However, the public’s views on whether mental health is a woke issue are nuanced and - learning the lessons of backlash in other areas - campaigners or policymakers should not be complacent for several reasons:

- A majority (56 per cent) think that young people are too sensitive these days - including more than seven in ten Loyal Nationals and Backbone Conservatives. The excesses of progressive campaigning on mental health can alienate these more socially Conservative audiences.
- Socially conservative segments are more evenly divided on whether mental health is a ‘woke’ issue, and there are significant minorities of Loyal Nationals and Backbone Conservatives who do consider mental health to be a “woke” issue.
- Socially Conservative groups are more likely than average to think that we talk too much about mental health, while Progressive Activists and Civic Pragmatists are the only groups where a majority feel we talk “too little” about mental health – meaning the risks of mental health becoming a wedge issue should not be discounted.

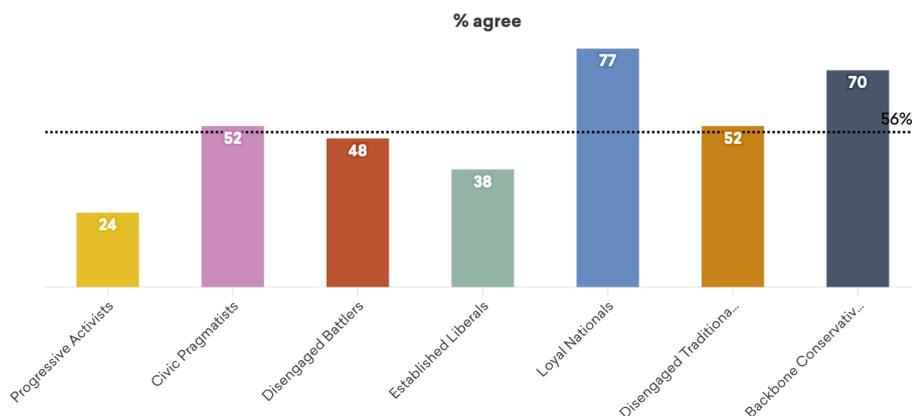
Consolidating and maintaining the public mandate for action on mental health requires careful communications strategies that do not simply dismiss concerns as bigoted or reactionary - which would increase the likelihood of mental health becoming a polarised issue in a way it simply is not at the moment. Instead, it places a premium on continuing to find narratives and advocates who to better speak to, reflect the values of and reassure more socially conservative segments.

**Figure 20**

**Most think that young people are too sensitive**

More than three quarters of Loyal Nationals think young people are too sensitive

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Young people are too sensitive and don’t have a thick skin



Source: More in Common, May 2023

## Section Four - The public's expectations on mental health reform

The public have clear expectations about the change they think will lead to better support for people with mental illness and mental health issues – both in terms of policy priorities and who they hold responsible for reform. While politicians play an important part in improving mental health support, the public don't think that mental health is solely the responsibility of politicians.

### The public's mental health policy priorities

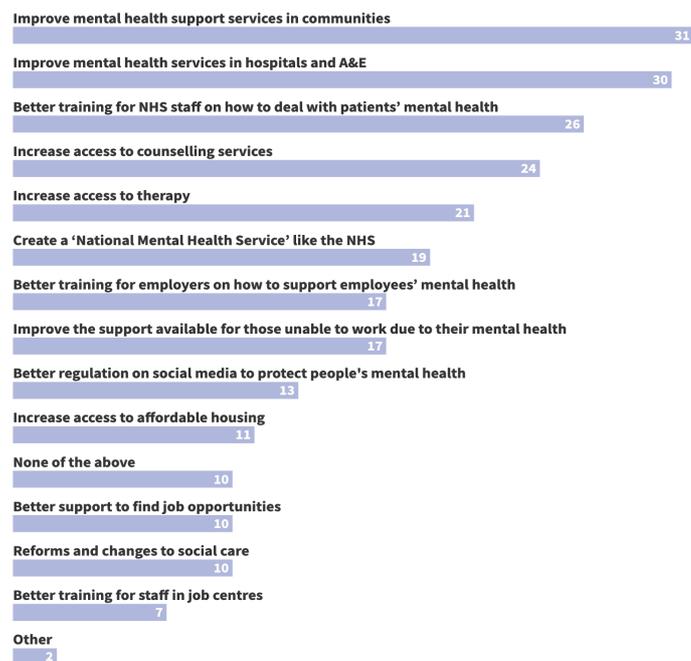
#### Better support in communities, hospitals, and better training

Improving support services in communities, better emergency responses in hospitals and A&E and better mental health training for NHS staff are the public's top three priorities for mental health reform. In short, the public favour improving the provision that is already in place rather than creating radically new structures or institutions. That improved mental health services in communities is the public's top policy priority on mental health is partly driven by the public's perceived need to take pressure off acute services.

**Figure 21**

#### Public want government to prioritise improvements to the current system to better support mental health and mental illness

Which of the following policies do you think the government should prioritise to better support those with mental health problems and those severely affected by mental illness? Please select the top three.



While NHS-centric options generally command the highest public support, More in Common’s segment lens reveals some nuance in different segments’ policy priorities. For example, Disengaged Battlers, the group most likely to say their mental health is affected by day-to-day struggles, are more likely than average to think that access to affordable housing and job-seeking support should be a government priority for helping those with mental health problems and illnesses.

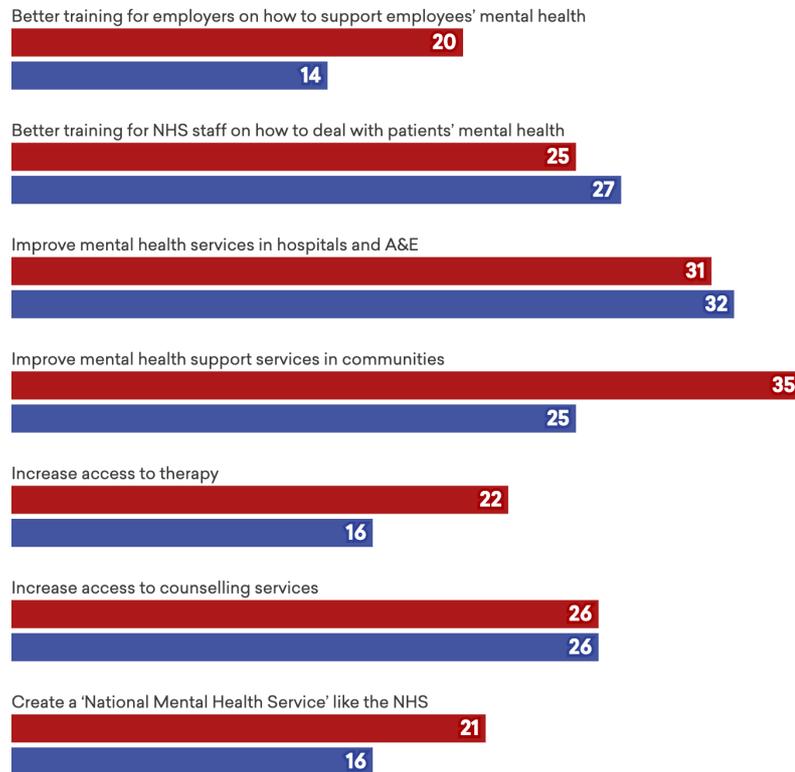
Knowing someone with mental health problems also shapes some of the public’s policy priorities for mental health. Those who know a friend or family member with mental health problems show stronger support for better community-based services, better access to therapy and better mental health training for employers. Better training for NHS staff, better mental health provision in hospitals and increased counselling holds consistent support among those who know and do not know people with mental health problems.

**Figure 22**

**Those who know people with mental health problems prioritise community-based policies and action from employers**

Which of the following policies do you think the government should prioritise to better support those with mental health problems and those severely affected by mental illness? Please select the top three.

■ Know someone with mental health problems ■ Don't know someone with mental health problems



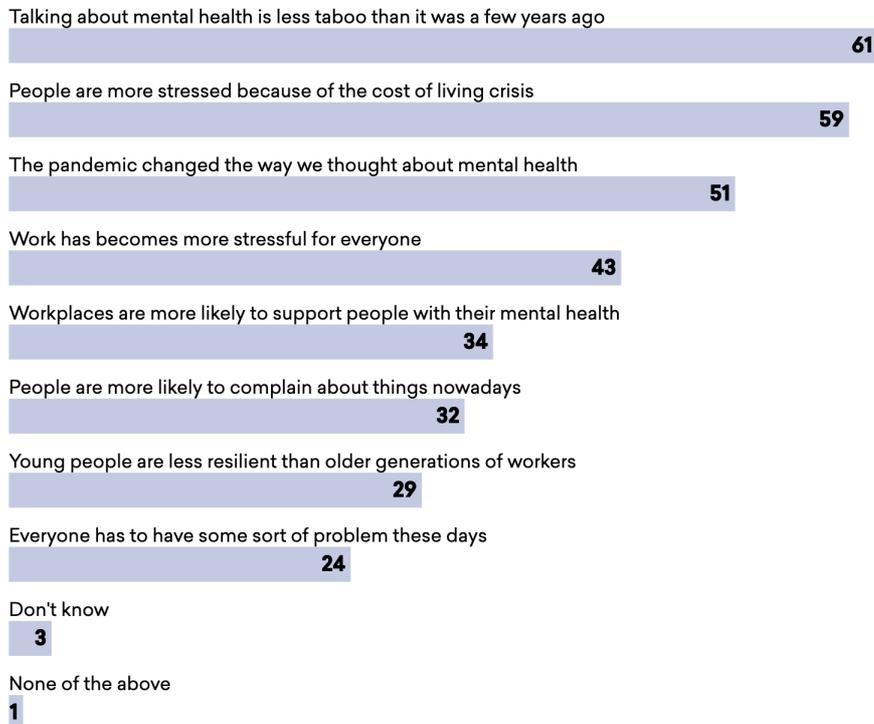
## Better mental health support in workplaces

Previous research by More in Common examined the drivers behind increasing reports of mental health concerns in the workplace. The ending of mental health as a taboo topic, cost of living stresses and the pandemic provided the main explanations the public hold for increasing reports of mental health concerns.

**Figure 23**

### Less taboo, the pandemic and the cost of living crisis explain increasing mental health concerns at work for the public

**There has been an increase in the number of employees raising mental health issues in workplaces in the last few years. Which of the following best describe the reasons for that increase? Please select all that apply**



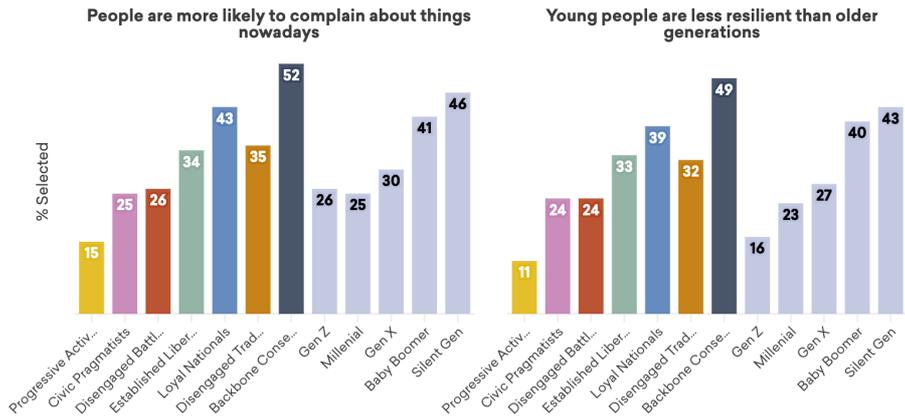
Source: More in Common, December 2022

When looked at through a segment lens, a significant divergence emerges. For example, considering the resilience of young people or people’s likelihood to complain as drivers of increasing mental health reports, a four-to-five fold gap emerges between Backbone Conservatives (49 per cent and 52 per cent agreement respectively) and Progressive Activists (11 per cent and 15 per cent agreement respectively). There are also clear generational patterns where older people are much more likely to see a lack of resilience and people’s readiness to complain as key drivers of increasing reports of raising mental health issues at work.

**Figure 24**

### Significant segment and generational splits on why mental health issues have increased in the workplace

There has been an increase in the number of employees raising mental health issues in workplaces in the last few years. Which of the following best describes the reasons for that increase? Select all that apply.



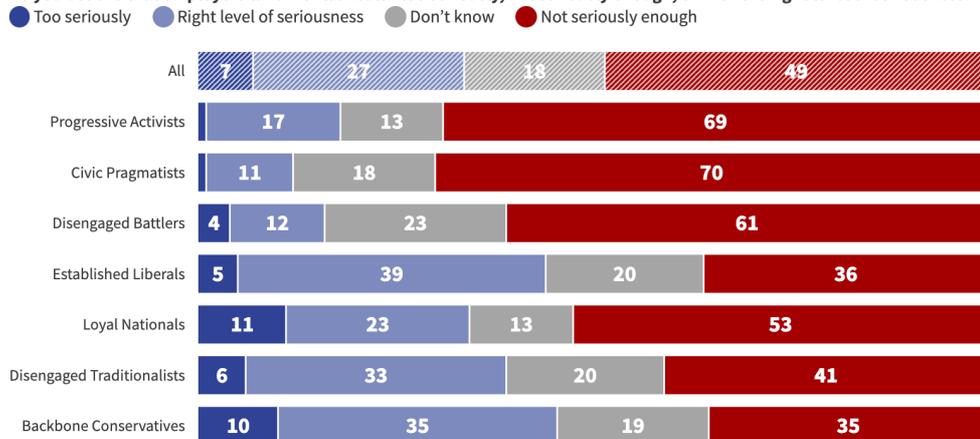
Source: More in Common, December 2022

Despite diverging opinions on the drivers of increased reporting of mental health in the workplace, it is clear that the public expect workplaces to do more to support their employees' mental health. Almost half the public (49 per cent) do not think that employers take mental health seriously enough – while only a tiny minority (7 per cent) think that employers take mental health too seriously.

**Figure 25**

### Half the public think that employers don't take mental health seriously enough

Do you believe that employers take mental health too seriously, not seriously enough, or with the right level of seriousness?



Source: More in Common, June 2023

There are differences between how typical Blue Wall voters (Established Liberals) and typical Red Wall voters (Loyal Nationals) view the responsibilities employers have to their employees. Established Liberals are more likely than any other segment to think employers treat workplace mental health with the right amount of seriousness (39 per cent versus 27 per cent average), while Loyal Nationals are more likely than average to think that workplaces don't take mental health seriously enough (53 per cent versus 49 per cent average).

This difference between Loyal Nationals and Established Liberals can be partly explained by the segments' psychology. Established Liberals are a more optimistic, comfortable group with lower levels of threat perception, while Loyal Nationals are a more anxious group who have higher levels of threat perception - which tracks with their contrasting views on workplaces' responsibility on mental health. A more practical explanation can also explain these dynamics - Established Liberals are more likely to be in white collar jobs, while Loyal Nationals are more likely to work in blue collar jobs. More work is needed to promote positive workplace cultures on mental health not just in white collar office jobs, but also in blue collar jobs up and down the country.

In our focus group discussions, better mental health support in the workplaces was viewed as a common sense and responsible investment that would help employees perform better. In More in Common's qualitative research for the coalition Unchecked UK, strong support was found for extending employers' responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act to include mental health responsibilities.<sup>6</sup>

It is well documented that, alongside the impacts on individuals, mental ill health has a significant negative effect on the economy and economic growth. To address this, the Chancellor plans to use his 2023 Autumn statement to announce measures to reduce the number of people unable to work because of long-term mental health problems.<sup>7</sup> Last month, the ONS reported that over half of those economically inactive because of long-term sickness reported having depression, bad nerves, or anxiety in the first quarter of 2023.<sup>8</sup> Such an approach, if framed correctly, is likely to be welcomed by the public.

The public are much more likely to see increased reports of mental health in the workplace as both a positive sign of tackling stigma, but also increased prevalence due to the cost of living/pandemic pressures. Given this, there would be little public appetite for a 'mental health shirkers' framing from the Government. However, a policy agenda which speeds up diagnosis and assessment for those who need it and provides support schemes at work would be much more likely to command public support. This should be matched by the public's expectations for both more effective acute support in hospitals, and more preventive public health support in communities.

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<sup>6</sup> [Strong Protections Do regulations hold the key to winning the next general election and fixing Broken Britain?](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Jeremy Hunt to target mental illness at work as UK benefits bill mounts](#), Financial Times

<sup>8</sup> [Rising ill-health and economic inactivity because of long-term sickness, UK: 2019 to 2023](#), Office for National Statistics

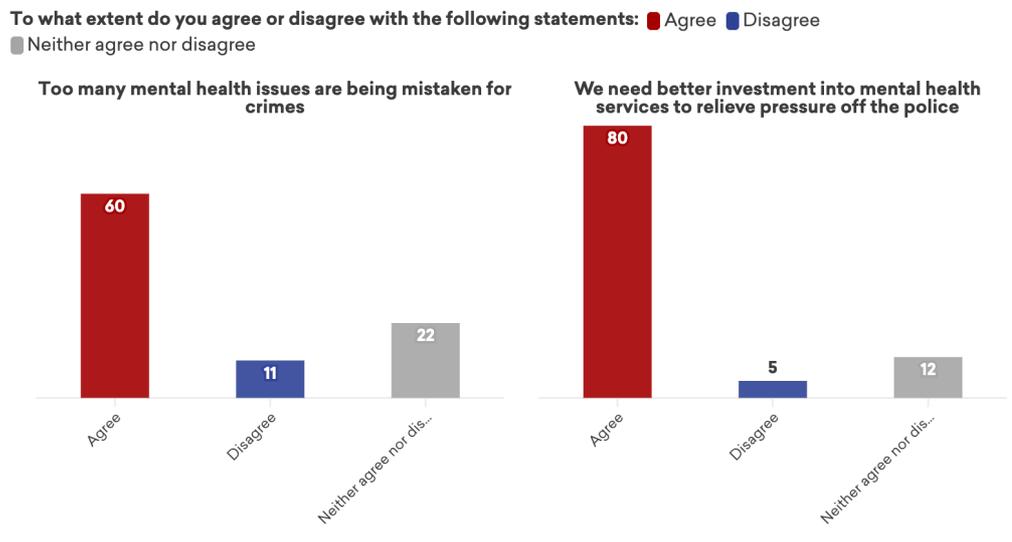
### More appropriate response from the police

As part of the government’s mental health emergency strategy, the police now only respond to mental health calls where there is a risk of violence.<sup>9</sup> The Metropolitan Police rolled out this new strategy from 1st September 2023.<sup>10</sup> This approach responds to the public’s concern that too much police time is being spent on dealing with mental health incidents. As More in Common’s previous research showed, the public thought that police responding to mental health emergencies was an inappropriate use of resources, and that it was not right for those who were suffering to be dealt with in the criminal justice system.<sup>11</sup>

Four in five Britons think better mental health services are needed to relieve pressure from the police, while a further 60 per cent think that too many mental health issues are being mistaken for crimes. Britons’ concerns about the police dealing with mental health are two-fold: first, responding to mental health emergencies pulls the police away from dealing with crime, and second, those with mental health problems are not getting the appropriate help they need. This second concern highlights the risks of pulling the police away from responding to mental health emergencies without investing in adequate and suitable alternative support in those mental health emergencies.

**Figure 26**

### Public think investment in mental health is needed to take pressure off the police



Source: More in Common, December 2022

<sup>9</sup> [Agreement to support mental health care and free up police time - GOV.UK.](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Met police to stop attending emergency mental health calls](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Where are the police? Britons’ attitudes to crime, anti-social behaviour and the police](#)

## Who is responsible for mental health reform?

Sitting alongside the public's priorities on mental health reform are the public's expectations about who should be delivering that reform. This research shows that while the public have clear expectations for politicians and the NHS, they also see an important role for themselves and their workplace.

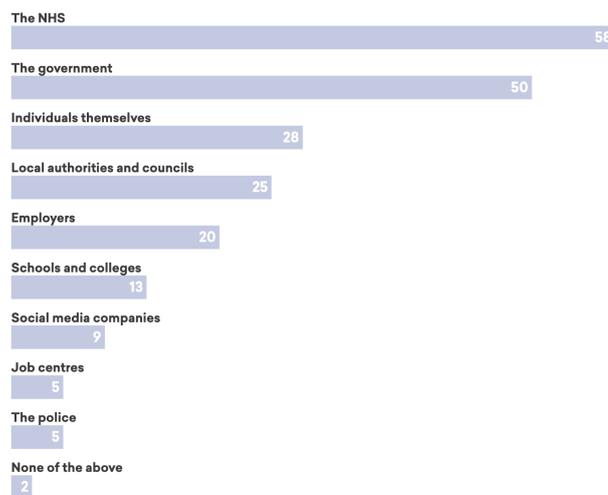
### The government versus the NHS

At the top level, the public hold both the NHS and the government responsible for improving support for people with mental health problems and mental illnesses. However, when forced to choose, the public are more than twice as likely to hold the government than the NHS responsible. Seven in ten say that the government is more responsible – a view shared by a clear majority in each of More in Common's segments.

**Figure 27**

#### Public see NHS, government and individuals themselves responsible for improving mental health support

Which of the following groups/organisations bears the most responsibility for improving support for people with mental health problems and mental illnesses? Please select the top three



Source: More in Common, June 2023

Interestingly, in the context of the debate about the Online Safety Bill, only one in ten Britons (9 per cent) hold social media companies responsible for improving mental health support. That is not to say that the public are not worried about the mental health impacts of social media – previous More in Common research found that over a quarter worry about the mental health impacts of social media, while six in ten think the government is not doing enough to regulate these platforms.<sup>12</sup>

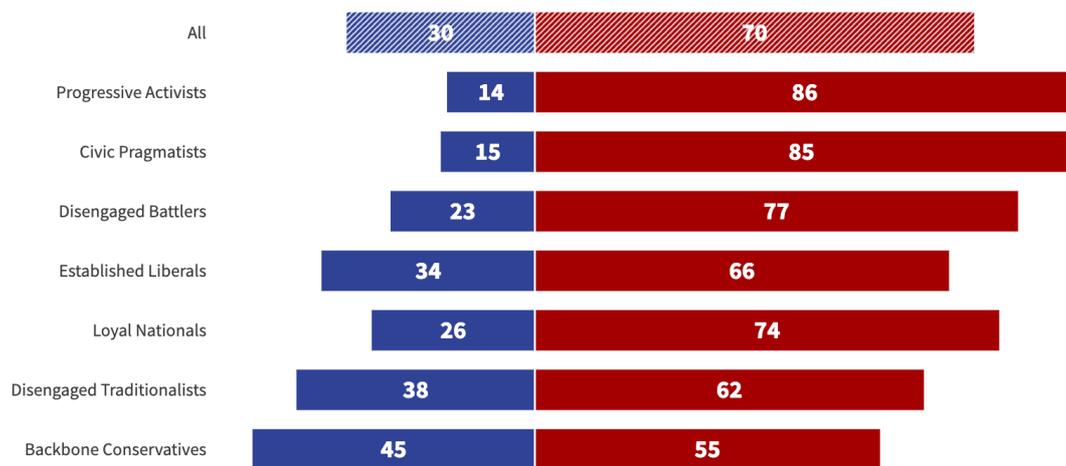
<sup>12</sup> More in Common Polling, July 2022

**Figure 28**

### Most people hold the government rather than the NHS responsible for improving mental health support

Who do you hold more responsible for improving support for people with mental health problems and mental illnesses?

● The NHS ● The government



Source: More in Common, June 2023

#### A cross-government approach

While the public are more likely to prioritise the government rather than the NHS as most responsible for improving mental health support, more than seven in ten Britons (73 per cent) want to see a cross-government approach and say that improving support for people with mental health problems and mental illnesses requires more action from across public services, and not only the NHS – a view that is again shared by clear majorities in every segment.

Unsurprisingly, most (76 per cent) see the Department of Health and Social Care as the department most responsible for mental health support, though around a quarter (26 per cent) also see a role for the Department of Education and the Department of Work and Pensions (23 per cent). These views are held more strongly among those who know someone with mental health problems.

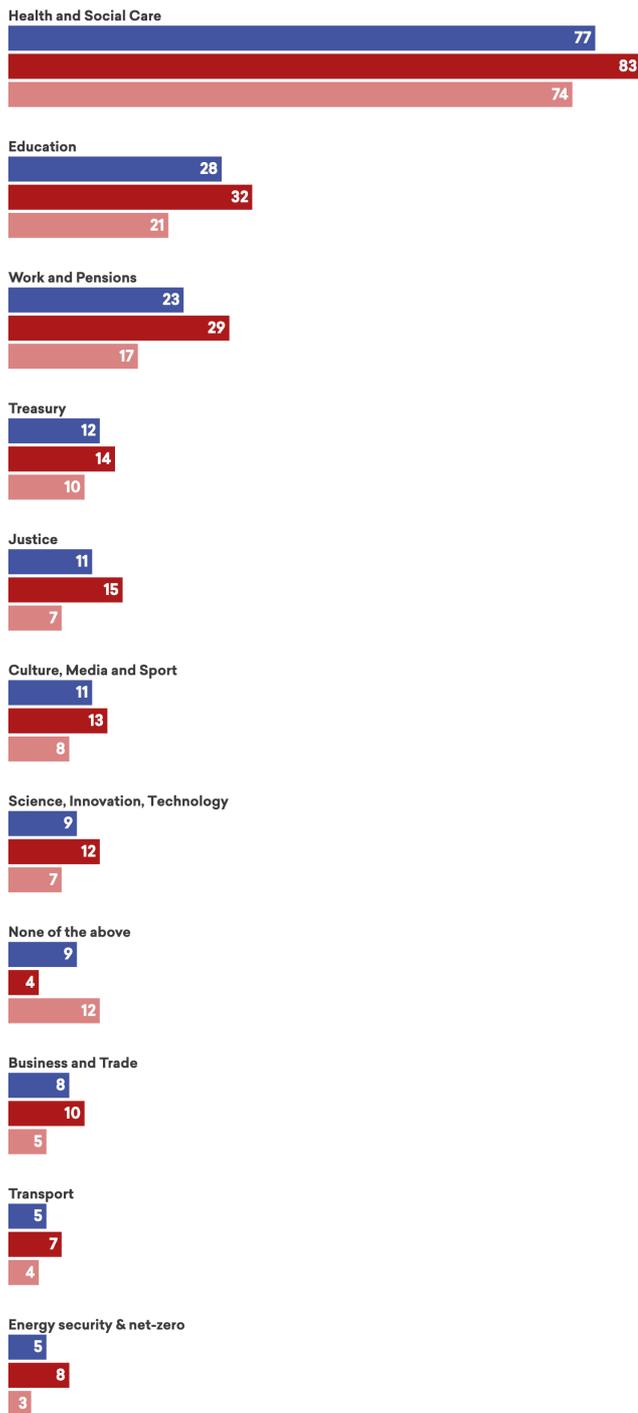
**Figure 29**

**Public think departments for Health and Social Care, Education and Work and Pensions have responsibility for mental health**

Those who know someone with mental health problems are more likely to hold a range of departments responsible for mental health

Which, if any, of these government departments do you think should have some responsibility for the issue of mental health? Select all that apply.

■ All ■ Know someone with mental health problems ■ Don't know someone with mental health problems



### Individuals' own responsibility

What can often get missed in the policy conversation about mental health is that the British public see individuals themselves having both the agency and the responsibility to make decisions to better support their own mental health. Britons put 'individuals themselves' as one of the top three groups responsible for improving mental health support in the UK.

Indeed, previous polling by More in Common finds that the public are more likely to think that individuals making better choices will make the country healthier (55 per cent) than government investment in the NHS (45 per cent). Progressive Activists are the only segment who believe government action is more likely to make the country healthier over individuals' own actions.

The public's views on individual responsibility on mental health are nuanced – they hold the government and the NHS responsible for having the right system in place but believe it is the individual's responsibility to use those services well and make decisions to help themselves for both their mental and physical health. Campaigners and policy makers can do better to reflect these perspectives in their campaigning, advocacy and policy design.

## Section Five – The British Seven segments and mental health

In 2020, More in Common introduced the British Seven Segments – a new model to better understand the British public. The segmentation draws from six areas of social psychology, mapping Britons according to their values and core beliefs, rather than relying on demographic characteristics. It provides a fresh lens through which to understand public opinion, moving upstream to look not only at the public's attitudes to specific issues, but also at the drivers which shape those views (see Annex A for further information on the methodology).

The mapping identified seven distinct groups and a new lens through which to think about public opinion and mental health.



### Progressive Activists

Progressive Activists are a passionate and vocal group for whom politics is at the core of their identity, and who seek to correct the historic marginalisation of groups based on their race, gender, sexuality, wealth, and other forms of privilege. They are politically engaged, critical, opinionated, frustrated, cosmopolitan, and environmentally conscious.

Progressive Activists are often outliers on values – unlike other groups, they primarily see the world through the moral foundations of care and fairness and have a much lower reliance on the moral foundations of purity, loyalty and authority. Compared to other groups, Progressive Activists feel less threatened in the world and in their community. They think that outcomes in life are more defined by social forces and less by personal responsibility. Although they are a higher earning segment, many of them consider this to be down to good luck than individual effort. They have the lowest authoritarian tendencies of any group.

#### Progressive Activists' starting points on mental health

Progressive Activists are driven by their determination to fight against the inequalities they see in society. Their attitudes towards mental health reflect this, as they perceive mental health as one more issue that has been neglected by those with the power to change things – they are the most likely to say the health system is performing poorly on mental health. Their high level of engagement also means they are the most aware of the issues around mental health and to most likely to prioritise it as an electoral issue. Their strong sense of care means they take a highly compassion-driven view towards those affected by mental health problems. They are also one of the segments least likely to think that those talking about mental health are using it as an excuse, and most likely to think that the health system is performing poorly on mental health.

Dealing with mental health matters most to Progressive Activists – they are the most likely to say that action on mental health will be important for deciding which party they will vote for at the next General Election. Occasionally, Progressive Activists' passion to tackle injustice around mental ill-health means they are often not the most effective advocates for persuading others to take mental health seriously, as some more persuadable groups can be put off by their activist messaging and campaigning.



## Civic Pragmatists

Civic Pragmatists are a group that cares about others, at home and abroad, and who are turned off by the divisiveness of politics. They are charitable, concerned, community-minded, open to compromise and socially liberal. Civic Pragmatists have a similar values foundation to the Progressive Activist group in prioritising care and fairness, but they channel their energies into community and voluntary work instead of political activism. They are also set apart from Progressive Activists (and some of the other segments) by their high-than-average levels of threat perception.

### Civic Pragmatists' starting points on mental health

Civic Pragmatists approach issues of mental health, as Progressive Activists do, starting from a place of compassion and care. Along with Progressive Activists, they are the least likely group to think that those who talk about their mental health are often using it as an excuse and are one of the groups who feel most comfortable talking about mental health. Their approach to mental health is shaped more by their personal experiences than their politics – they are more likely than any other group to often or sometimes worry about the mental health of their friends and family. As a group that is much more community-oriented than others, they are more likely to have found the impact of the pandemic detrimental to their mental health. As a group that tends to think about social issues in a more considered way and like to avoid what they see as unnecessary conflict, they can often be powerful advocates for convincing others of the need to talk about and prioritise mental health. For mental health charities in particular, Civic Pragmatists are important, as one in four of them (28 per cent) have donated to mental health charities in the past year – making it one of the top causes they support.



## Disengaged Battlers

Disengaged battlers are a group that feels like they are just keeping their heads above water and therefore have less time to engage with their communities, let alone stay politically engaged. They tend to believe their struggles are a result of an unfair, rigged system. They are insecure, disillusioned, disconnected, overlooked but also tolerant and socially-liberal. They are a low trust group with a tendency to ignore civic messaging, they are also joint most likely to have not been vaccinated for Covid-19. They see little point engaging with the broader democratic system which they largely see as broken.

### Disengaged Battlers' starting points on mental health

Mental health is a top three issue for Disengaged Battlers – they are more than twice as average to say it is a top issue facing the country (24 per cent versus 12 per cent average). More than any other group, Disengaged Battlers' views tend to be shaped by their own day-to-day struggles. The same holds true for their views on mental health. As the most economically precarious group it is no surprise that they are the most likely to say their mental health has worsened as a result of the cost of living crisis. In focus group conversations, this group is most likely to say they have faced a choice between 'heating or eating' over the last 18 months. Having the most first hand experience of the failings of the welfare system, they are also more likely than average to believe that the system needs to be improved for those who can't work due to mental health. As such, they think that access to affordable housing, support for job-seeking, and reforms to social care should be government priorities for supporting those with mental health problems and illnesses.



## Established Liberals

A group that has done well, has an optimistic outlook, and sees a lot of good in the status quo, Established Liberals are comfortable, among the more privileged, cosmopolitan, trusting, liberal, confident and pro-market. They have low authoritarian tendencies and the lowest threat perception of any segment – which is reflected in their broad support for diversity, multiculturalism, and their sense that their local community is neither dangerous nor neglected.

### Established Liberals' starting points on mental health

Established Liberals' optimistic outlook on life means they are often the least likely to express worry or concern about societal issues. That optimism and a general sense of personal security translates into the fact they are among the least likely to feel comfortable

talking about mental health or to say that they know someone affected. While their low threat perception and social liberalism often means that they take a permissive stance on social issues, on mental health, their focus on personal responsibility and concerns about an overly expansive benefit system, makes them more likely than average to question whether people's mental health concerns are genuine.



## Loyal Nationals

A group that is anxious about the threats facing Britain and themselves, Loyal Nationals are proud, patriotic, tribal, protective, threatened, aggrieved and frustrated about the gap between the haves and the have-nots. They feel the 'care' and 'fairness' moral foundations more strongly than other groups, but unlike Progressive Activists they also have strong reliance on the moral foundations of loyalty and authority which shapes how 'care' and 'fairness' manifest themselves in their values. Their key orientation is that of group identity – belonging to a group (and particularly their nation) is important to Loyal Nationals. This strong in-group identity shapes their equally strong feelings of threats from outsiders. This in turn can drive their support for more authoritarian populist leadership.

### Loyal Nationals' starting points on mental health

Loyal Nationals' views on mental health are shaped by both their strong reliance on the moral foundation of 'care' and their high threat perception, which combine to translate into concern that some people claiming mental health issues are cheating and burdening the system, and depriving support from those who genuinely need help. They are more concerned than average about people using mental health as an excuse for poor performance or laziness. On the other hand, their sense of community and loyalty towards their 'in-group' means that they are one of the groups most aware of mental health issues and comfortable talking about them. Perhaps this is a result of their personal experiences, Loyal Nationals are one of the groups most likely to know someone affected by mental health problems and also most likely to worry about the mental health of those close to them. Loyal Nationals' starting points on mental health and what shapes them have been further explored in section two.



## Disengaged Traditionalists

Disengaged Traditionalists are a group that values a well-ordered society, takes pride in hard work, and wants strong leadership that keeps people in line. They are self-reliant, ordered, patriotic, tough-minded, suspicious, and disconnected. They place a strong emphasis on personal responsibility and rely much more on individual rather than systemic explanations for how people's lives turn out. When they think about social and political debates, they often consider issues through a lens of suspicion towards others. They value the observance of social rules and order, but don't play an active role in their communities – they are the least likely to eat out, visit museums or go to local libraries.

### Disengaged Traditionalists' starting points on mental health

As a highly individualistic group, Disengaged Traditionalists are one of the groups who are least aware and concerned about issues of mental health – largely driven by the high premium they place on self-reliance and personal responsibility. They are the least likely to say they know someone affected by mental health problems and feel the least comfortable talking about it. They are more likely to doubt that those who talk about their mental health have genuine concerns, and are more likely to think that individuals themselves bear the most responsibility for dealing with their mental health.



## Backbone Conservatives

Backbone Conservatives are a group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain's future, and who keenly follow the news, mostly via traditional media sources. They are nostalgic, patriotic, stalwart, proud, secure, confident, and relatively engaged with politics. They want clear rules and strong leaders and rely heavily on individual explanations for how life turns out, with this shaping how they respond to questions about deprivation and discrimination in society.

### Backbone Conservatives' starting points on mental health

Backbone Conservatives' views on mental health are driven by their political identity and their outlook on personal responsibility. Their higher-than-average levels of political engagement mean that they are the most likely to consider mental health as a "woke" issue. They have the least personal experience with mental health – being the least likely to say that they know someone living with mental health problems, and the most likely to say that both the pandemic and cost of living crises had no impact on their mental health. These experiences seem to shape their scepticism of other people's mental health concerns as well as their belief that individuals bear almost equal responsibility as the government for dealing with mental health.

## Annex A: The British Seven Segments Methodology

In pursuit of a more evidence-based understanding of how we find common ground on polarising issues, More in Common launched the Britain's Choice project in 2020. This project centres its analysis of issues on the values, identity and worldview of Britons, captured in seven population segments through a methodology designed in partnership with data scientists, social psychologists and other experts. It integrates insights from six dimensions of social psychology that shape the way that people see the world and orient themselves towards society. This mapping has been carried out using multiple waves of quantitative and qualitative research, building on the approach used by More in Common in other major western democracies. The six areas of social psychology are:

- **Group identity and tribalism:** the extent to which people identify with different groups based on nationality, gender, political party, ethnicity, and other factors
- **Group favouritism:** views on who is favoured and who is mistreated in society
- **Threat perception:** the extent to which people see the world as a dangerous place
- **Parenting styles:** research suggests that basic philosophies regarding people's approach to parenting can have predictive power in explaining their attitudes towards public policies and authority more generally
- **Moral Foundations:** the extent to which people endorse certain moral values or 'foundations', including fairness, care, purity, authority, and loyalty
- **Personal agency:** the extent to which people view personal success as the product of individual factors (i.e., hard work and discipline) versus societal factors (i.e., luck and circumstance)

The 'British Seven' segments are often more useful in understanding people's views across a wide range of issues than standard ways of categorising people, such as their voting history, partisan identity or demographic characteristics such as age, income, social grade, race or gender. Understanding the specific 'wiring' of each of these groups 'upstream' allows us to better understand and predict how they will respond to different sets of issues 'downstream'.

