



Thrive LDN update on evidence, research, and insights

For many Londoners, the COVID-19 pandemic has been the most challenging period of our lives, taking a heavy toll on mental health and wellbeing. The uncertain nature of the virus and the restrictions in place have impeded on natural and usual resources for wellbeing, as well as coping mechanisms and opportunities for social interaction.¹

Thrive LDN has established a public mental health research and community insights [function](#) to analyse and present findings from available data, intelligence, and capture insights from Londoners to inform Thrive LDN engagement and activities and wider stakeholders involved in public mental health across London.

Now, over eighteen months after the pandemic has emerged and London moves into a new phase of recovery and growth, balanced with the uncertainty of the outlook for the Omicron variant we have taken stock of how Londoners' mental health and wellbeing have been impacted in a nuanced and complex manner.

The following intelligence outlines the evidence, research and insights captured across a range of areas through Thrive LDN's research and community insights function. Information has been synthesised and summarised to give a current view of public mental health in London and anticipate what lies ahead. For a more detailed and comprehensive view of mental health and wellbeing in the capital, please see our [series of briefings](#) across a range of topics.

How has the pandemic impacted Londoners' mental health and wellbeing?

- Overall, trends in population mental health appear to broadly follow trends of the virus and restrictions in place to control it². This is likely to continue as restrictions remain precautionary, but challenges for mental health may remain invisible for some time.
- The impact of COVID-19 on mental health has not been the same for everyone. The Beyond the Data³ report provides clear evidence that Londoners who were already experiencing poorer social, economic and health outcomes, have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.
- Demand for specialist services and more complex cases, such as young people with eating disorders, and self-harm, has increased.
- COVID-19 itself has a direct impact on mental health both for survivors of the illness, and those bereaved by it.

¹ Thrive LDN Research & Insights Function (2021) <https://thrivedn.co.uk/research-and-insights/>

² Population Mental Health (2021) <https://thrivedn.co.uk/resources/population-mental-health/>

³ Beyond The Data (2020)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892376/COVID_stakeholder_engagement_synthesis_beyond_the_data.pdf

- The economic impact of the pandemic has affected Londoners' mental health and wellbeing, and will continue to do so.
- More Londoners are vulnerable to suicide. Although the official statistics on suicide rates during the pandemic have yet to be released, there is a recognition that due to the extreme challenges posed by the pandemic more Londoners will be considered vulnerable to suicide, leading to an increased risk of suicides across the city.

Anticipating the future and the long-term impact

The pandemic has exposed, exacerbated and solidified existing inequalities in society. It has also made some individuals and communities even more vulnerable than before.

- **The prevalence of poor mental health is expected to increase.** Forecasting models indicate that the prevalence of poor mental health is expected to increase and that this could impact on demand for mental health services over the next three years. Research from the King's Fund⁴ suggests that up to 75% of the population will experience distress that should resolve with the right support but could escalate if left unaddressed. The Centre for Mental Health⁵ has developed a forecasting tool that can be used to calculate local increases in mental health needs that will result from the COVID-19 pandemic to help providers, boroughs and ICSs to think through the specific demographics of their communities and determine the services that may be required
- **The mental health impacts are falling unequally across society.** Some groups, including front-line workers, young people and Londoners with pre-existing mental health conditions, have been experiencing more critical mental health concerns, with the effects more likely to persist.
- **The people experiencing poor mental health, and the frequency they are seeking support, has changed.** The psychological effects of COVID-19 together with the adaptations of mental health services has created a significant shift in the characteristics and experiences of people with poor mental health. The frequency of those experiencing distress that does not meet the threshold for accessing specialist mental health services has increased, with more people seeking support from friends, faith leaders, and school and further education services.
- **The easing of restrictions has had a positive impact on most Londoners, but health and social anxiety remain an issue.** This is likely to be amplified by the introduction of precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the new COVID-19 Omicron variant in the UK
- **Coping with uncertainty is now the norm.** The lives of the clinically vulnerable, those who shielded in the first and second waves, frontline workers, those whose resilience has been worn down over time, have changed profoundly since the start of pandemic. The uncertain outlook for the Omicron variant and the changing the behaviour of the virus with regards to vaccines, treatments and transmissibility will have a knock-on effect for Londoners mental health and wellbeing particularly those experiencing reduced social interaction, changing work conditions, and loss of work and income.

⁴The King's Fund (2021) Covid-19 recovery and resilience: what can health and care learn from other disasters? <https://features.kingsfund.org.uk/2021/02/covid-19-recovery-resilience-health-care/>

⁵Centre for Mental Health (2020) Forecast Modelling

Toolkit: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/forecast-modelling-toolkit>