



# Youth mental health plan

For a fairer society

All New Zealanders will, at different times in their lives, face ups and downs. The Green Party will help equip people with the skills and resources they need to make it through the tough times, as well as support the mental health system for when people need more acute intervention.

New Zealand has some of the worst rates of youth suicide in the world, with serious impacts on people, families, schools, and communities. There is an urgent need to address the despairs and hopes of young people, and save lives.

The Green Party will:

1. Introduce free counselling for under 25s, and work towards extending this to all adults.
2. Increasing funding for youth mental health services.
3. Fund more community initiatives in the health and education sector.
4. Begin a mental health inquiry and re-establish the Mental Health Commission.

## Solutions

The Green Party will increase funding to youth mental health services by \$263 million a year.

Every suicide is a tragedy. The Green Party believes that suicide is preventable and we want to work towards zero suicide within our health care system. Integrating a zero-suicide philosophy is a bold goal, and an aspirational challenge. It is time to take practical steps towards reducing New Zealand's suicide rate by properly funding our mental health system, implementing effective policies to help, and de-stigmatising and normalising talking about mental health. With a well-funded and better-coordinated strategy, we can do this.

## **Free counselling**

The Green Party will ensure that counselling and other evidence-based psychological therapies are free for everyone under 25, as a first step towards free counselling for anyone of any age who wants it. As part of this, we commit to restoring funding to Lifeline.

Improving access means making counselling easier to find and understand, and provided in ways that children and young people feel comfortable with. Based on the UK's experience, this could cost \$116 million, if five percent of 5-14 year olds and 10 percent of 14-24 year olds access free counselling as expected by the Ministry of Health.

## **More funding for youth mental health services**

The Green Party will address under-staffing in youth mental health, with more psychiatrists in our hospitals, more nurses in acute mental health wards, and more support staff, with a \$100 million overall annual funding increase.

The waiting times for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) are a national shame. A third of under 20 year olds who seek appointments (4,940 people in 2016) have to wait longer than three weeks after being referred to a mental health specialist. Youth Crisis services are variable around the country. We will ensure there is funding available for 24 hour youth Crisis Assessment Teams in regions that need them.

## **Community initiatives**

The Green Party will integrate mental wellness into the school curriculum, teaching young people the skills they need to navigate life's ups and downs, strengthening their identities, and building understanding of their place in the world. This will involve working with parents and whānau so that they can recognise the signs of mental distress in their children, and know what action to take. We will also implement a training programme to empower young leaders in the school community to deliver mental health training to others.

School guidance counsellors are the main mental health practitioners in schools, acting as a first point of contact for young people seeking assistance. The Green Party will ensure that schools have a guidance staffing entitlement specifically for a trained professional school guidance counsellor, with one counsellor for every 400 students.

## **Strengthening government oversight**

The Green Party is committed to ensuring that mental health policy, planning, and service delivery is well aligned. There will be an independent Mental Health Commission, empowered to act as an advocate for the interests of people with mental illness and their families, to monitor mental health systems, and to reduce the stigma New Zealanders with mental illness face. The Green Party will initiate a full nationwide mental health inquiry to identify the systemic issues in mental health, the strengths to build on, and the improvements needed to ensure the delivery of effective and comprehensive solutions.

[www.greens.org.nz/youth-mental-health-plan](http://www.greens.org.nz/youth-mental-health-plan)

The logo for the Green Party, featuring a stylized green leaf icon to the left of the word "Green" in a white, serif font.

Authorised by James Shaw, Parliament Buildings, Wellington