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Preparing for the Mental Health Act 2025: insights from SCIE's Advisory Groups

A sector-led view of what organisations need to
effectively implement reform





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About SCIE

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) is an independent social care charity with deep experience of bringing partners and people with lived experience together to collaborate and innovate to improve people's lives (e.g. national government, DHSC, local authorities, care providers, academics, foundations). Working across social care, health and related services such as housing, for adults, children and families, we contribute to the development and implementation of better care, support and safeguarding at local and national level.

As we are not-for-profit, our income goes towards improving social care. We deliver four main offers, across all of which we support the DHSC annually:

- **SCIE Consultancy** – working with local and national organisations to identify and implement improvements
- **SCIE Insights** – research, evidence and policy insights to drive improvements and innovation, and influence national policy and practice
- **SCIE Training** – bespoke online or face-to-face learning and development, including safeguarding, co-production and strengths-based approaches
- **SCIE Resources** – guidance and tools to support best practice, co-production and innovation.

Co-production with people with lived experience of social care underpins and informs what we do, and with over 20 years' experience we bring a wealth of trusted, evidence-based expertise to work together to help transform care. Our staff – former practitioners in social care, researchers, experts in training – bring immense depth of experience and passion for the cause, based on frontline work, using the best available knowledge about what works in practice.

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About this report

The Mental Health Act (MHA) 2025 introduces significant reforms designed to strengthen dignity, autonomy and least-restrictive practice for people with mental health needs. As organisations begin preparing for implementation, the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) convened three co-produced advisory groups with frontline practitioners, leaders and approved mental health professionals (AMHPs) to understand early reactions and concerns, and what support will be required. There were 27 participants, with additional insight gathered through a wider-sector poll.

While the reforms were broadly welcomed, the overall mood was mixed. Alongside hope and optimism, many described feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and scepticism – particularly relating to timescales, expectations, workforce pressures and the capacity of community services. **Over half of poll respondents also reported a lack of confidence in preparing for implementation.**

From the analysis, three overarching themes emerged: **readiness** (clear communication, knowledge and equitable access to training); **strategy** (coherent, realistic and sustainable planning); and **culture** (psychological safety, shared values and emotionally-supported workforces). Cutting across all themes was the need for sufficient **resourcing**.

These findings will shape the next phase of SCIE's work, as we develop practical, evidence-informed support to help organisations build confidence, strengthen planning and implement the Act safely and meaningfully.

Background

The MHA 2025 marks a significant reform of the MHA 1983. The 1983 Act had long been recognised as outdated, lacking cultural sensitivity and no longer aligned with the expectations of a more progressive health and social care system – one in which people drawing on care and support are treated with respect and have their voices centred in decisions about their treatment. Following the [Wessely review](#) in 2018 the need for meaningful reform became obvious, with clear recommendations for maximising choice and dignity, and supporting people in their recovery with the least restriction.

The '[Reforming the Mental Health Act](#)' White Paper (2021) and subsequent Bill tabled in 2024 outlined four guiding principles: **choice and autonomy**; **least restriction**; **therapeutic benefit**; and **the person as an individual**. The Bill achieved Royal Assent in December 2025. Codes of practice are being developed throughout 2026, as organisations begin to consider how they might prepare for implementation of the Act.

The window between Royal Assent and the publication of further guidance offers an important opportunity for us all to listen closely to the organisations responsible for implementing these changes and to understand what practical help they will need in order to do this as robustly and confidently as possible.

This first phase of work aimed to hear people's thoughts and feelings about the legislative changes, and their predicted impact. The resulting findings and learning will inform any future phases of support for those responsible for planning and delivering the changes, in turn improving the experiences of people who receive support.

What we did

To take an open, discovery-based approach to shaping SCIE's support offer, we set up three advisory groups, co-produced with SCIE's Co-production Steering Group and the National Co-production Advisory Group (NCAG). This format was intentionally designed to provide guided yet open discussion that would enable participants to share their apprehensions, hopes and needs.

Throughout January 2026, we hosted the three groups, each representing different parts of the workforce: frontline workers, health and social care leadership and a dedicated group for AMHPs, given the high level of interest and their specific responsibilities under the Act. Twenty-seven people took part from local authorities, the NHS, voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations, specialist providers and social care consultancy. Of the participants, 15% also indicated having lived experience alongside their professional role.

A follow-up briefing, providing a snapshot of some key observations from the advisory groups, was shared publicly alongside a poll to invite wider participation from the sector. A reflexive thematic analysis approach was used to uncover the main themes and form the findings of this report.

Sensing the mood – reactions to the Act

Sharing and processing our emotional responses when faced with change is key to enhancing psychological safety that in turn can drive engagement, spark innovation and foster collaboration. It was important that the advisory groups offered a held space to explore early reactions to the legislative changes, and allow a full picture of the feelings, apprehensions and hopes to emerge.

How are people feeling?

Many welcomed the changes in principle, with expressions of hope and optimism concerning the potential for more therapeutic and rights-based practice. However, feelings were also mixed – feelings of anxiety, scepticism and uncertainty were frequently described, often related to what the reforms mean in practice and whether the system is in a good position to do them justice.

What are the concerns?

Across all groups concerns centred around:

- **lack of clarity** – particularly concerning timescales, expectations and how to integrate the changes into current systems
- **community provision** – uncertainty about whether the current provision can meet the increase in demand and appropriate treatment needs
- **workforce capacity** – staffing levels, recruitment and retention, and development
- **funding** – doubts concerning the level of investment that will be allocated
- **unintended consequences** – the risk of competing pressures inadvertently widening inequalities.

Differences also emerged between groups:

- **frontline workers** focused on practical and relational concerns, seeking more immediate clarity to help contextualise the changes
- **leaders** highlighted strategic considerations to do with priorities, gaps in infrastructure, commissioning and governance
- **AMHPs** raised concerns about legal literacy, the weight of personal accountability and how to manage risk in line with the guiding principles.

What are the opportunities?

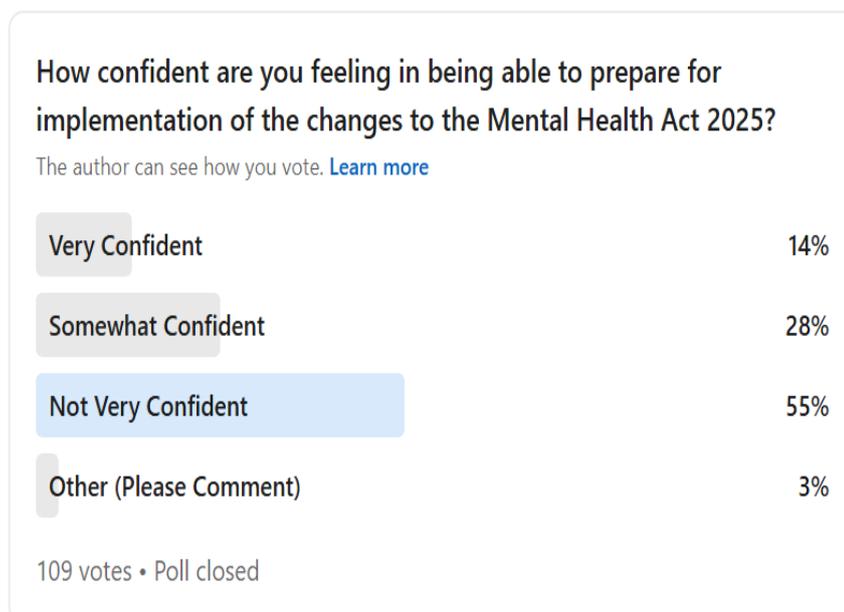
Attendees highlighted the following opportunities arising from the potential challenges ahead:

- **improved engagement** with communities and with co-production
- **innovation** concerning models of care and practice
- **collaboration** at operational and strategic levels
- **building momentum** for systemic change
- if done well, **significantly improving lives** – through increased rights, service improvements and greater visibility of, and accountability for, creating transformational services.

Follow-up poll

Following the advisory groups, in a poll shared on LinkedIn we asked the question 'How confident are you feeling in being able to prepare for implementation of the changes to the Mental Health Act 2025?'

Over 100 people responded, and the results reflect the conversations that were had in the advisory groups, with a mixture of those feeling more confident but **over half** expressing a lack of confidence.



What the sector is asking for

Advisory group members shared what they felt is needed to successfully embed the changes resulting from the MHA 2025 and where the work needs to start. Three overarching themes emerged from the analysis.

- **Readiness – feeling armed with the knowledge and confidence to engage with change.** This theme related to: the need for clear and timely communication on the changes; increasing knowledge and comprehension of the changes and what they mean in practice; creating seamless channels for information-sharing; ensuring equity in training access; and identifying gaps in, and examples of, good practice.
- **Strategy – a coherent, clear and robust plan for implementation.** Group members identified that there is time and opportunity with the rollout to: better understand the needs of the target population; embark on planning that is creative, meaningful and sustainable; and take a measured approach to system redesign.
- **Culture – giving ample time and attention to building psychological safety and cementing a shared understanding of values.** Highlighted in this area of need were: the importance of building robust cross-sector relationships; embodying a person-centred approach; supporting the workforce emotionally and practically through change; and meaningfully involving the workforce and people who receive support in the process.

A cross-cutting factor

Across all three areas, **resourcing (funding, commissioning and workforce capacity)** was described as being fundamental to successful implementation.

Final thoughts

From these initial discussions, it was made clear that providing spaces to share thinking, connect and come together was appreciated and greatly valued in being able to navigate these changes collectively. At SCIE, co-production is a core part of our approach, and we are greatly appreciative of those who took part in the advisory groups, helping to shape what comes next.

Contact information

To enquire about consultancy for your organisation or to get updates on our support offer related to the MHA 2025, please [sign up to our mailing list](#) (ticking MHA) or email info@scie.org.uk.



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