

NICE Anxiety Guideline Campaign

Background

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) produces recommendations for care in the NHS. The NICE guideline for generalised anxiety disorder and panic disorder in adults was initially published in 2011. According to NICE, the anxiety guideline will only be updated if there is “new evidence that is likely to change the recommendations.”

There has yet to be a substantive update to the anxiety guideline since their initial publication.

Campaign overview

We are calling for an urgent and comprehensive update to the anxiety guideline that includes meaningful stakeholder engagement. This will be achieved by sending two joint letters to NICE, with one containing policymaker signatures and the other signed by organisations in the mental health sector.

Key concerns with the anxiety guideline



Out of date

- Despite previous scheduled reviews, the guideline has not been meaningfully updated in the decade since it was published.
- The guideline is not in line with updated NICE guideline for depression in adults, with contradictions between the two guidelines and comparatively less emphasis on the importance of patient choice and a collaborative approach to treatment.



Accessibility for marginalised and hard-to-reach groups

- Does not reference barriers to access for marginalised and hard-to-reach populations or any methods to promote access and uptake. This is out of date when compared with the guideline for depression.
- Studies show that difficulties in access will be similar when individuals seek support in many mental health services for various conditions, including anxiety disorders.



Unscientific bias

- Evidence is not evaluated consistently, resulting in a systematic bias that favours current recommended treatments (CBT and applied relaxation).
- Overemphasises randomised controlled trials, while neglecting evidence from service user experience, long-term or follow-up studies.
- Stakeholder input has been systematically devalued during previous scheduled reviews.



Choice of therapy

- Only two therapies are recommended (CBT and applied relaxation), despite well-established evidence that other talking therapies are effective in treating anxiety.
- Patient choice is restricted to deciding between therapy or prescribed drugs, not the right to choose between different types of talking therapies.

Key asks

We are calling for NICE to:

- 1 **Meet with key stakeholders** from the coalition to discuss the concerns raised by the campaign and agree on next steps
- 2 Conduct a **multi-step review of the whole guideline** that includes a representative range of stakeholders and evidence
- 3 **Make changes to the guideline** so that it is up to the standard of the depression guideline

This will result in a guideline that:

- 1 Recommends a **wider variety** of therapies
- 2 Recognises the importance of **patient choice**
- 3 Highlights **barriers to access** for marginalised groups
- 4 Is **easily readable** and accessible for clinicians
- 5 Includes a **collaborative approach** to care

