



The current NICE guideline on Generalised Anxiety Disorder and Panic Disorder in Adults is not fit for purpose

Anxiety is a significant public health issue. According to a 2023 survey by the Mental Health Foundation, 60% of UK adults have experienced anxiety that interfered with their daily lives over a two-week period. In 2022-23, NHS Talking Therapies received 498,650 presenting complaints of either anxiety or stress related disorders. Of those, 253,649 were specifically presenting complaints of generalised anxiety disorder, and 35,122 were presenting with mixed anxiety and depressive disorder.

With rates of anxiety rising across the UK, NHS mental health services have struggled to keep pace to deliver timely, high-quality care to every person in need of support. NHS Talking Therapies are hitting the target for people receiving the first treatment appointment within six or 18 weeks of referral, however only 53% of people finish their course of treatment and 47% reliably recover. Increasing engagement and treatment options so that everyone can receive appropriate and effective care will alleviate some of the pressure on services by reducing the need for further treatment, moving people faster through the system and freeing up capacity for other patients. In addition, there are 650,000 people claiming Personal Independence Payments (PIP) for anxiety and mood disorders and it is estimated that mental ill health costs £300bn every year through economic and human costs. As government research shows there are over a million people who could enter the labour market if their health improved, guaranteeing that everyone can access effective treatment for generalised anxiety and panic disorder will support a system where people, the NHS, and the economy can flourish.

If the various concerns are not adequately addressed, the treatment recommendations cannot be relied on and will be misleading, invalid and impede the care of millions of people in the UK, significantly limit patient choice and potentially cause clinical harm.

In summary, our concerns are that:

- The guideline has **not been meaningfully updated since 2012**, resulting in incongruity with the recently updated NICE guideline for depression in adults. This guideline demonstrates its age through references to **out-of-date** diagnostic manuals, a **contradiction** between the guidelines in how to treat comorbid depression and anxiety, and little to no discussion of a **collaborative approach** to treatment with patients.
- The current guideline does not reference **barriers to access** for marginalised and hard-to-reach populations or any methods to promote access and uptake.
- Evidence for recommended interventions is treated inconsistently, resulting in a **bias** in favour of existing recommendations which prevents updating of the guideline.
- Evidence from randomised controlled trials (RCTs) is weighted heavily, whilst evidence from **service user experience**, long-term or follow-up studies is neglected.
- Only **two therapies** are recommended, despite well-established evidence that other talking therapies are effective in treating anxiety. There is high quality evidence that many other talking and creative therapies can be used to treat anxiety.
- The guideline poses a **serious threat to patient choice** and will result treatments being offered which may not have the best chance of addressing the root cause of anxiety (which in turn will contribute to poor cost effectiveness in the long term).

Our position, therefore, is that a full and proper revision of the guideline must take place allowing sufficient time to properly address the concerns listed in this statement.

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See full position statement here: <https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/policy-and-research/public-policy/nice-anxiety-guideline-campaign/>

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