Private Firms Banned from ‘Lead Provider’ Role in Specialised Mental Health Sphere

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National leaders have banned private firms from leading new models of care for specialised mental health – following criticism of their involvement.

In a letter to all providers of specialised mental health, learning disability and autism services, NHS England states that only NHS organisations will be able to hold the contracts. Private providers are still expected to have involvement in projects, as they hold significant market share in these services.

It comes after the national commissioner wrote to NHS and private mental health providers earlier this month, to outline a major expansion of its new care models programme. This includes plans to delegate its specialised commissioning budgets to groups of providers.

There was no suggestion of private providers holding the budgets, but the plans prompted a backlash from campaigners over their inclusion and the potential for conflicts of interest.

Shadow minister Barbara Keeley sent a letter to health and social care secretary Matt Hancock, urging him to halt the new care models and guarantee private providers will have no say over commissioning decisions.

In its latest letter, NHS England clarified that any new care models would have to be “NHS led”.

It said: “This letter invites all providers of specialised mental health, learning disability and autism services to make submissions, through a regional process, to form NHS led provider collaboratives from April 2020.

“Applications are invited from a lead provider organisation, on behalf of the collaborative. The lead provider will hold the main contract with NHS England. This must be an NHS organisation with experience of delivering specialised mental health and/or learning disability and autism services.

“NHS led provider collaboratives will become an important delivery vehicle for improving specialised mental health services. These include implementing the outcomes of the service reviews in children and adolescent mental health services and adult secure services, increasing personalisation and care in community settings, and enhancing our service offer for people with learning disabilities and autism.

“NHS led provider collaboratives will be clinically led and work in partnership with people with lived experience and their families, communities, social care and the third sector to improve patient experience and outcomes.”

Providers have been asked to submit applications by 5 July.

[Prominent existing new care model projects include those run by providers in south London, and by Northumberland, Tyne and Wear Foundation Trust and Tees, Esk and Wear Valley FT in the North East.]