

the 1990s, the number of people with a mental health problem has increased by 50% (Mental Health Foundation 2000). The prevalence of mental health problems in the UK is estimated to be 10% (Mental Health Foundation 2000).

There is a growing awareness of the need to address the needs of people with mental health problems. The Department of Health (2000) has published a strategy for mental health care, which aims to improve the lives of people with mental health problems and to reduce the stigma and discrimination that they often experience. The strategy is based on the following principles:

- People with mental health problems should be treated as individuals, with their own needs and strengths.
- People with mental health problems should be given the opportunity to participate in decisions about their care and treatment.
- People with mental health problems should be supported to live their lives in the community, wherever possible.
- People with mental health problems should be given the opportunity to work and to contribute to society.

The strategy also sets out a number of targets for the improvement of mental health care. These include: reducing the number of people with mental health problems who are admitted to hospital; increasing the number of people with mental health problems who are living in the community; and improving the quality of life of people with mental health problems.

The strategy is a landmark document in the history of mental health care in the UK. It represents a commitment to the improvement of mental health care and to the support of people with mental health problems. It is a document that should be read and acted upon by all those who are involved in mental health care.

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