

## The move towards more community-based mental healthcare

When the NHS was founded, nearly 75 years ago, medical treatment for mental illness was very different from what we would expect today. If you had a severe mental illness (SMI), you would probably have become an inpatient in a large 'mental hospital' or 'institution', perhaps dating from the 19th century. These were often on the edges of towns and cities – away from most communities. You might have stayed in hospital for a very long time, whether you wanted to or not.

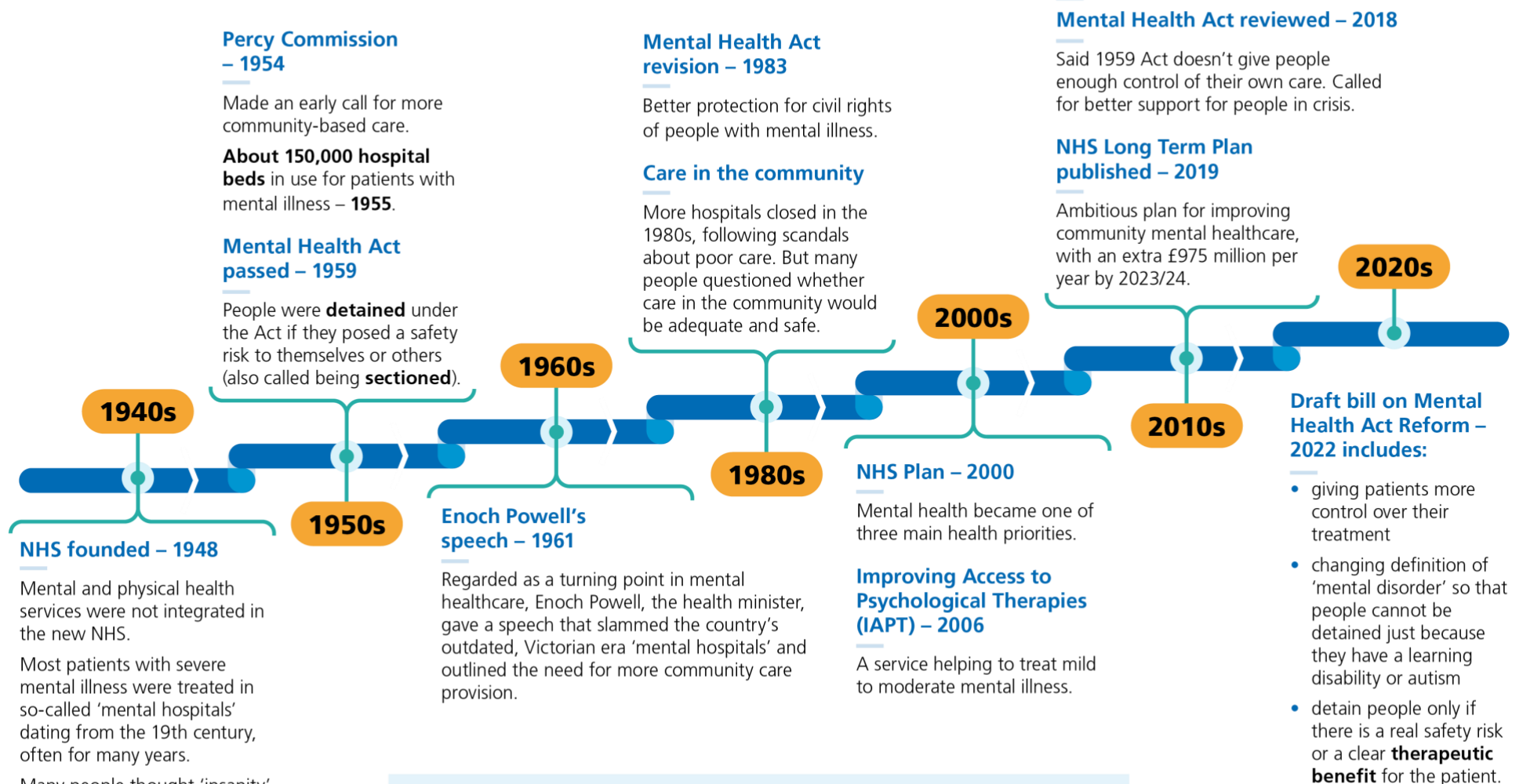
From the 1950s onwards, there have been calls for more mental healthcare and treatment to be given in communities. Medical professionals, politicians and the public all began to question whether keeping people in institutions was right, and whether it had good results.

The timeline shows that the move towards more community-based care has happened slowly, but that a huge change has taken place. In 1955, there were about 150,000 hospital beds for patients with mental illness, and by 2012 there were about 22,300.

Over the years, strong clinical evidence has built up to show that getting treatment in the community, and staying in your usual home, tends to be better for people. Staying in hospital – especially for a long time – can create further problems. It removes you from your everyday life and routines, and from family, friends or other support networks. It can sometimes mean losing a job or benefits, a place to live, and skills for daily living.

In the 2020s, a new national clinical model puts community-based care at the centre of mental healthcare. Sometimes, of course, people become so unwell that they must go to hospital. But the medical view is that hospital stays should be as short as possible – providing essential treatment and care until patients can safely go home, with continuing support in the community as needed.

# How mental healthcare has evolved over time



## Glossary

Being **detained** (in hospital) – not being allowed to leave until you are given permission.

Being **sectioned** – being detained until the Mental Health Act.

**Therapeutic benefit** – something that is helping you get better.