

Our 2026–2029 strategy

**Building a better world together
for everyone affected by bipolar**



Dedication and thanks



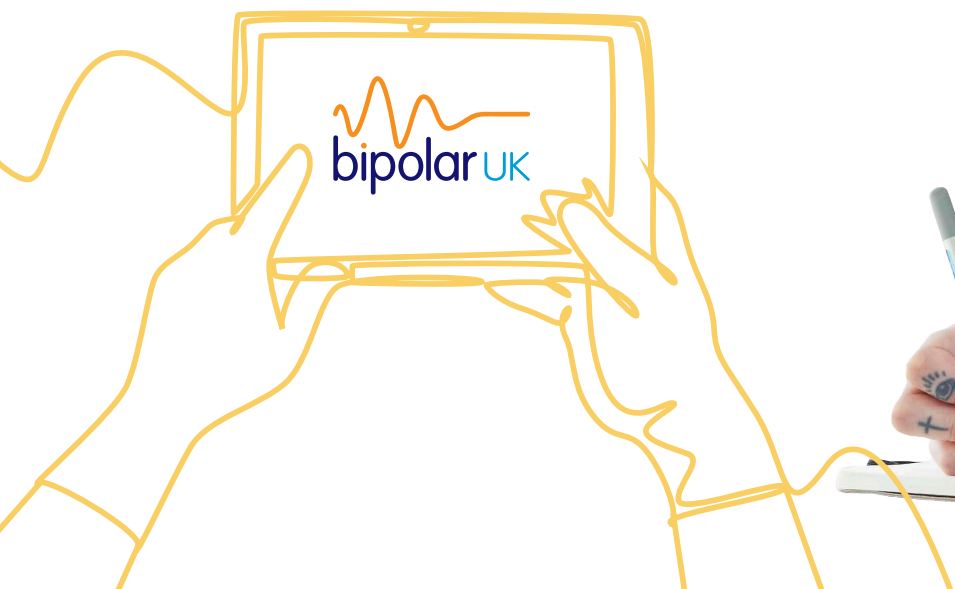
Thank you to the nearly 500 people affected by bipolar who trusted us with their experiences. And to the Bipolar UK volunteers who stand alongside them every day.

This strategy is dedicated to you. Your insights have set the direction, and our actions will continue to be guided by you all.

Together, we're building a better world for everyone affected by bipolar.

Contents

- 04 Foreword
- 05 The scale of the issue
- 06 Developing a strategy that meets our community's needs
- 07 Our vision
- 08 Our mission
- 09 Our values
- 10 Strategic priorities:
 - 1. Engage
 - 2. Support
 - 3. Research
 - 4. Advocate
- 16 Running the charity
- 17 Working in partnership
- 18 Help us make it a reality



Foreword

This strategy begins with a clear and urgent reality: bipolar is lifelong, complex, and profoundly misunderstood. Too often, the systems meant to support people only step in at moments of crisis. The result is late diagnosis, inconsistent care, and harm that could have been avoided.

For many people, symptoms are missed or misinterpreted for years. They are left trying to make sense of a fragmented system alone, searching for answers without clear or consistent guidance. Families, friends and carers shoulder enormous responsibility, often with little to no help themselves. Too many people fall into the 'missing middle': not in crisis, but at real risk of relapse, without access to the bipolar specific support that could help them stay well.

None of this is inevitable. These outcomes reflect systems that have not been built around how bipolar is *actually* lived – as a journey, not a series of isolated episodes.

Within Bipolar UK, people affected by bipolar are not only those we support, but they are also part of our workforce, our volunteers, and our leadership. Lived experience sits at the heart of who we are. It guides our decisions, informs our priorities, and keeps us grounded in what genuinely makes a difference to people's lives..

This grounding gives us clarity about our role: to be a trusted guide, a partner in recovery, and a leader in community-based support shaped by lived experience. To do this well, we must reach more communities and reflect the full diversity of experiences of bipolar across the UK.



Access to diagnosis, care and support varies widely depending on ethnicity, culture, gender, age, geography and income. If we are serious about reducing inequality and improving outcomes, our services, partnerships and communications must be inclusive by design, culturally aware and genuinely accessible to all.

Together, we can build a system that recognises bipolar earlier, supports people between crises, strengthens families and communities, and helps people affected by bipolar not just survive, but live well.

Guy Paisner, Chair of trustees

The scale of the issue

Over 1 million people in the UK live with bipolar, making it the most common severe mental illness, and yet...

People wait

9.5 years

on average for a diagnosis



Life expectancy is up to

20 years shorter

50%

attempt suicide at least once, as many as **1 in 5** die by suicide



What this means

The system is failing people with bipolar.

They are left waiting nearly a decade for answers, dying younger, and becoming poorer; with unemployment doubling in the last 10 years. Despite global suicide rates falling, those related to bipolar have not declined.

Bipolar cannot be cured, but it **can be managed**. With the right support, **people can and do live well**.

Developing a strategy that meets our community's needs

This strategy started with listening.

Bipolar UK asked almost 500 people affected by bipolar what daily life is really like for them, and where support is lacking.

Through surveys, one-on-one interviews, and collaborative workshops, we learned about the challenges of getting the right care and the importance of ongoing support – not just at the point of crisis – to prevent relapse and stay well.

We also heard about the unique needs of family and friends, who play a vital role but are often overlooked.

To identify how we could make a difference, we considered Bipolar UK's strengths and opportunities for improvement. These insights have sharpened our vision, expanded our mission and shaped our roadmap for the next three years.

A phased approach

Our strategy is designed to grow carefully and responsibly. Over three years, we will build on what already works, test and learn, and then embed the support that makes the greatest difference.

Year 1

Foundation and focus

Strengthening what works

We will prioritise the services people already value, improving how they connect and how we deliver them. Alongside this, we will build our **internal capability**, so we are able to grow.

Year 2

Scale and influence

Testing and adapting

We will test innovative ideas and ways of working, learning from what works and what doesn't. We will expand the approaches that show promise and deepen partnerships to extend our reach and influence.

Year 3

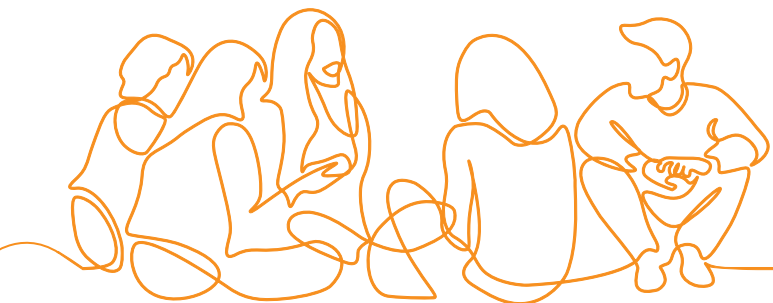
Embed and sustain

Developing more of what's needed

We will grow and embed the support that has the greatest impact, focusing on long-term resilience. This includes influencing systems beyond our organisation to help create lasting change for people affected by bipolar.

Guided by lived experience

The voices of our community echo throughout this strategy, and their experiences will continue to guide our decisions and shape what we do next.



Our vision

Everyone living with bipolar is able to live well and fulfil their potential.

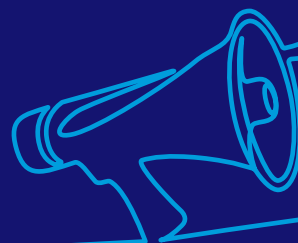


Our mission



To deliver trusted, lived experience-led support, research and campaigns that empower people to manage bipolar across their lives, **not just in crisis.**

To deliver on our mission, we need to be a strong and sustainable organisation. Read more about how we will do this in **Running the charity.**



Our values

Our values define who we are and how we work.

We are...

Led by lived experience

Lived experience runs through our staff, volunteers and trustees, and is a defining strength in how we support and empower people affected by bipolar.

Compassionate

We communicate with respect and respond with empathy to everyone we support and work alongside.

Inclusive

We value difference and make accessibility a priority, removing barriers so more people can get the support that's right for them.

Innovative

We explore bold ideas and technology to work in ways that last and can grow, shaped by the different perspectives of our community.

Trustworthy

We act with integrity, honesty and transparency, and are accountable for our impact.



Our four strategic priorities (2026-2029)

To build a better world together for everyone affected by bipolar, we will focus on four strategic priorities:



1. Engage

Improve awareness and understanding, so more people know what bipolar is and where to turn for information or support.



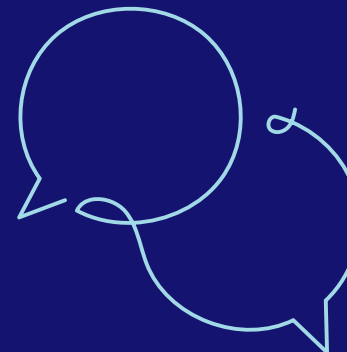
2. Support

Strengthen our trusted, lived experience-led services to help people with bipolar live well, not just survive crises.



3. Research

Lead and support research that reflects real experiences and focuses on what matters most to people affected by bipolar.



4. Advocate

Push for earlier diagnosis, fair access to specialist treatment, and greater investment in research, with and on behalf of our community.

1. Engage

Awareness, inclusion and reach

People are looking for accurate information and guidance about bipolar, but it's hard to know who and what to trust, and access is not equal for everyone.

Our goal

Build and strengthen our role as the trusted charity for people affected by bipolar.

We want to reach and engage more people – particularly those who are isolated or disillusioned – with clear, trustworthy guidance about bipolar.

Our aims

- 1 Create clearer entry points into Bipolar UK support**
By 2027, 12,000 people a month are using our Start Here support, with three guided pathways (newly diagnosed, staying well, supporting someone).
- 2 Reach people who are currently being missed**
By 2028, we work with four major partners to reach more underserved groups, including people affected by inequalities linked to race, gender identity, age, and issues such as unemployment, debt, addiction and homelessness.
- 3 Increase awareness of bipolar and Bipolar UK**
By 2029, 100,000 more people have completed the bipolar test through our Maybe it's bipolar? campaign, and 1 in 5 people have heard of Bipolar UK.

What success looks like

- More people recognise the signs of bipolar earlier and feel confident asking for help.
- People living with bipolar experience less stigma at home and at work.
- Information is more accessible for everyone, regardless of who they are or where they live.



2. Support

Helping people navigate the system, stay well and feel connected

People affected by bipolar often face fragmented support, limited help to prevent relapse, and barriers to connecting with people who really understand.

Bipolar UK's role is not to provide clinical or crisis care, but to offer clear, lived experience-led support that helps people navigate the system, stay well beyond crisis, and feel less alone.

Our goals

1. **System navigation:** Empower people affected by bipolar to understand what support exists and what to do next.
2. **Recovery and staying well:** Support people to stay well through early intervention and recovery.
3. **Connection and community:** Create safe, lived experience-led spaces for meaningful connection for people living with bipolar, and their family and friends.

We want to make sure support is easier to access, more responsive and better connected. We don't want anyone, whether they're living with bipolar or supporting a loved one, to have to work it out alone.



Our support aims

System navigation

1 Provide timely, supportive first contact

By 2027, we will respond to first-time callers within one working day and provide call-backs within three working days, delivering 1,500 transformational lived experience calls in year one.

2 Equip families and friends with trusted support, information and practical tools

By 2028, create a dedicated support programme for family and friends, helping them understand bipolar, navigate the system and support someone living with the condition.

3 Offer guided support across a person's journey with bipolar

By 2029, develop clear support pathways for key points in someone's journey, from being newly diagnosed, to staying well, planning for crisis, and supporting someone.

Recovery and staying well

4 Pilot a structured Bipolar UK Self-Management Programme

By 2027, 100 people will complete the Self-Management Programme pilot.

5 Provide tools for tracking mood and lifestyle

By 2028, 100,000 people have downloaded the Bipolar UK Mood Tracker app.

6 Introduce a recovery and stability offer beyond crisis

By 2029, we want to develop a nationally scalable Bipolar Recovery and Stability Programme, covering all life stages and including support for families and friends.

Connection and community

7 Clarify the peer support offer to strengthen impact

By 2027, 80% of participants report feeling less alone or more understood after attending three group sessions.

8 Strengthen onboarding and 'step-up' / 'step-down' routes

By 2028, increase support group attendance by 30%.

9 Grow the Bipolar UK Online Community

By 2029, build a lived experience-led online community of 10,000 active members.

What success looks like

- People living with bipolar feel more confident and less overwhelmed when navigating support.
- Families and friends feel better equipped, supported and less isolated.
- More people engage earlier, reducing escalation and preventable crisis.
- Bipolar UK is seen as a trusted guide for life beyond crisis.



3. Research

Lived experience-led evidence and impact

There is not enough research into bipolar and its treatment, and existing research is often insufficiently informed by the perspectives and priorities of people living with bipolar.

Our goal

Build a lived experience-led research team that leads and supports research reflecting bipolar priorities and real-world experiences.

We want to ensure that people affected by bipolar are actively shaping research, and that stronger evidence leads to better support, treatment and outcomes.

Our aims

- 1 Put lived experience at the heart of bipolar research**
By the end of 2027, we will have successfully completed seven research studies in partnership, ensuring experts by experience are actively involved in setting priorities, and informing design and outcomes.
- 2 Connect the bipolar community with research opportunities**
By 2028, we will work in partnership with University College London (UCL) to set up a Research Community Registry, supporting the recruitment of 5,000 people affected by bipolar to take part in research and shape future evidence.
- 3 Strengthen the evidence base for improving bipolar treatments and outcomes**
By 2029, we will have completed work in partnership with the International Society for Bipolar Disorders Task Force on Suicide, delivering internationally relevant evidence and generating new insights into suicide risk, prevention, and earlier intervention.



What success looks like

- People with lived experience play a central role in shaping the research that affects them.
- Stronger, more relevant evidence leads to better care, treatment and support.
- The bipolar community is actively connected to research opportunities that drive progress and change.

4. Advocate

Influence and system change

Bipolar is lifelong and episodic, but the systems designed to support people are not. Too often, services respond only to moments of crisis, rather than supporting people across a lifelong journey.

Our goal

Champion earlier diagnosis, fair access to specialist treatment, and increased investment in bipolar research, with and on behalf of people affected by bipolar.

We want to ensure that people with lived experience shape the decisions that affect them, and that systems work consistently to help people stay well.

What success looks like

- People affected by bipolar influence the policies and systems that shape their lives.
- Support is more consistent and reflects the lifelong nature of bipolar.
- A bipolar-confident NHS.

Our aims

- 1 Increase national influence on bipolar policy and practice**
 By 2027, Bipolar UK is represented in national policy forums and has contributed to a '5 years on' report to the Bipolar Commission, ensuring bipolar stays visible in national decision making.
- 2 Extend our reach and influence in the workplace**
 By 2028, we will be acting as lived-experience consultants, delivering 50 workplace training sessions to improve understanding, reduce stigma and support people affected by bipolar at work.
- 3 Improve suicide prevention efforts for people with bipolar**
 By 2029, bipolar is explicitly included within national suicide prevention policy, recognising the specific risks and support needs of people affected by bipolar.



Running the charity

To deliver this strategy, Bipolar UK must be prepared for growth. This begins with our dedicated staff, volunteers, and trustees, whose contributions are fundamental to our success.

We are committed to investing in the necessary skills, tools, and culture to enable everyone to do their best work.



3 organisational priorities

- 1 **Build a resilient, well-governed organisation**, with clear safeguards for psychological safety, compliance and financial security, so we can continue to support people affected by bipolar for the long term.
- 2 **Strengthen our fundraising** to enable us to deliver high-quality services, far-reaching awareness campaigns, invest in research, and influence healthcare decision-making across the UK.
- 3 **Enhance our digital and data systems** to optimise operational efficiency, so we can do more for people affected by bipolar and confidently measure the impact we're having.

By getting these foundations right, we can respond to the rising demand for our support and focus our energy where it matters most: providing timely, lived experience-led guidance in the community and online. Stability in our operations means we can not only improve our services but also campaign for systemic change and lasting improvements for everyone affected by bipolar.

Working in partnership

Bipolar UK wants to make a difference that goes beyond the people we directly support now.

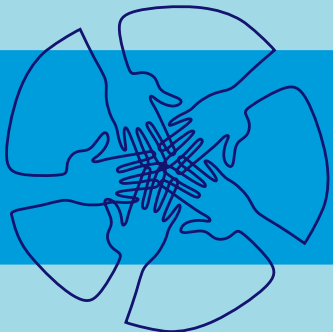
We will partner with organisations that have skills, knowledge and cultural experiences we don't, while bringing our own lived experience of bipolar into their world. By working collaboratively, we can achieve a level of impact that no single organisation could deliver alone.

This includes working with clinicians and national healthcare bodies, so people are met by professionals who are confident in recognising, diagnosing and treating bipolar.

We will build partnerships that reflect our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion. That means working with organisations who support people

currently underrepresented in our membership, including racialised communities, people experiencing homelessness, and others who face barriers to getting help because of their age, gender, postcode or income. These partnerships will help us make sure our support works for the people who need it most.

We'll also seek out brands who share our values and want to help us raise awareness of bipolar, challenge stigma, and reach new audiences. And we'll partner with employers to help create more **Bipolar-Friendly Workplaces**, so more people with bipolar can find and stay in work.



Partnerships are essential to delivering our mission and creating lasting change for everyone affected by bipolar.



Through these partnerships, we will:

- reach more people, especially those not getting the support they need now
- help people get the right diagnosis and care sooner
- increase understanding of bipolar and challenge stigma
- train clinicians to better recognise bipolar and provide effective treatment
- support employers to create more inclusive workplaces

Help us make it a reality

1 in 50 people in the UK live with bipolar.

Our strategy sets out what we will focus on over the next three years to improve the lives of everyone affected.



We need your help to make sure:



More people understand bipolar, the signs are spotted earlier, stigma is reduced, and people know where to turn for trusted support



If you live with bipolar, you can get the right information at the right time, in ways that work for you, at every stage of life



Families and friends feel informed and supported too, with the knowledge and reassurance they need to stand alongside the people they care about



People with lived experience are heard and respected, helping shape services, research and campaigns, so real voices guide everything we do



Everyone affected by bipolar, no matter who they are or where they live, has fair access to clear and reliable information, and the chance to live well.

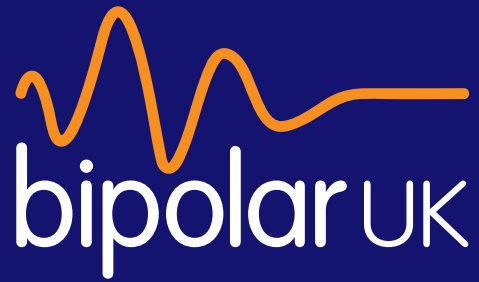


This is the hopeful future we are committed to building, one where people affected by bipolar feel informed, empowered and understood.

We are ready to lead this work, but we cannot do it alone. We need our community – our supporters, volunteers, partners and funders – to stand with us and make it happen.

Let's build a better world for everyone affected by bipolar, together.

Visit bipolaruk.org to get involved



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