

Building the Right Support Action Plan – User guide

The Government's '[Building the Right Support Action Plan](#)' intends to make it easier for autistic people and people with a learning disability to access the support that they need, at the right time. It has been developed with the aim of bringing together, in one place, actions across government and public services to strengthen community support and reduce overall reliance on mental health inpatient care. It is hoped that the measures in the Action Plan will prevent more people from reaching a point of crisis and ending up with an inappropriate hospital admission where they may not always receive the right care.

The plan talks about new changes as well as others that have already been set out in other places like the '[Autism Strategy](#)', the '[NHS Long Term Plan](#)' and the planned '[Mental Health Act Reform](#)'.

The actions in the plan are for professionals that might be involved with supporting autistic people and people with a learning disability. This includes:

- People that work in health care, social care, education, housing, and criminal justice.
- Local government leaders and people that work for Integrated Care Boards (NHS organisations that can decide the best way to look after people's health)
- Voluntary and community organisations.

How will progress be measured?

The Building the Right Support Action Plan is overseen by the Department of Health and Social Care. It has a Delivery Board responsible for making sure that the steps in the plan are taken and monitoring their progress.

Delivery Board

The Building the Right Support Delivery Board is made up of different government departments along with other partners that are able to make the changes needed.

Different representatives from expert groups are also part of the Delivery Board. This includes Baroness Hollins Professor of psychiatry of learning disability and Anne Longfield OBE chair of the Learning Disability and Autism Children and Young People's Steering Group.

The Building the Right Support Delivery Board will formally review progress regularly.

Advisory Group

It is important that the plan fully considers the opinions of the groups that it aims to help. To do this, the board's advisory group involves people with personal experience and their families.

Stakeholder update forum

Those that are not part of the Delivery Board or Advisory Group can be updated on progress through the 'Stakeholder update forum' which takes place four times per year. This also provides another opportunity for feedback.

You can find an 'Easy Read' version of the Action Plan [here](#).

What does the Building the Right Support Action Plan mean for autistic people and people with a learning disability?

This Guide reflects the content in the Building the Right Support Action Plan that was published in July 2022.

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Patients in mental health hospitals

Mental health law

Autism is not a mental health condition and mental health hospitals are not the right place for the vast majority of autistic people, but the 1983 [Mental Health Act](#) (MHA) defines autism and learning disabilities as mental disorders. This has meant that autistic people and people with a learning disability have been wrongly detained in mental health hospitals. As a result, some spend many months, even years, in hospitals many miles from their families. The Government's draft Mental Health Bill proposes changes to the Mental Health Act that if passed will:

- Mean that autistic people and people with a learning disability cannot be detained under section 3 of the Mental Health Act if they do not have a co-occurring mental health condition. This should help to prevent the wrongful detention of autistic people and people with a learning disability who do not have a mental health condition.
- Introduce a duty for councils, NHS England and local health decision makers to provide more of the right community services for autistic people and people with a learning disability. It is hoped that this will prevent some from reaching crisis point, and having to stay in hospital because there is nowhere else for them to go.
- Make sure that autistic people and people with a learning disability in mental health hospitals have regular Care (Education) and Treatment Reviews to talk about how things are going, whether anything about their treatment needs to change and how they can be best helped to leave hospital.
 - Changes to the Mental Health Act will make sure that these [Care \(Education\) and Treatment Reviews](#) take place at least every 3 months for children and young people, every 6 months for adults in a non-secure mental health hospital, and every 12 months for adults in a secure mental health hospital. Any suggestions and recommendations agreed in reviews should be listened to and carried out by clinicians.

Hospital treatment

If an autistic person or person with a learning disability has to go to a mental health hospital, certain things should be in place to make it easier for them to leave when they are ready to. This includes:

- Having a Care (Education) and Treatment Review to make a plan that describes everything needed for them to be able to leave hospital. This is something that an individual can ask for themselves at any point before or during an admission. This might include things like where they will live and what support might be needed in the community.
 - The plan should be created as soon as it is decided that the person needs to go to hospital or as soon as they arrive. The plan should be reviewed regularly to make sure that all of the information is up to date.
- The commissioner for the person in hospital should visit every 8 weeks to decide whether hospital is the best place for them or whether they should be discharged.

- Staff should follow the '12-point discharge plan' for everybody in a mental health hospital. This is a checklist of actions to be completed before somebody can leave hospital. This includes measures like making sure referrals to community services have been made and there is a crisis/deterioration plan in place for the patient.
- A Senior Intervenor pilot ran until the end of March 2023. Senior Intervenor are health and social care experts, they are independent from any hospital or service. They can help to come up with solutions to things that prevent an autistic person or person with a learning disability from leaving hospital.
- Once somebody has been admitted to hospital they can ask about having access to an advocate. Changes to the Mental Health Act will mean that everybody in a mental health hospital will have to right to an Independent Mental Health Advocate (IMHA). This includes voluntary patients who are not detained under the Mental Health Act. IMHAs are able to support patients to make decisions about their care and treatment.

There are also ways to make sure that treatment given in hospital is helpful and right for the individual:

- In 2018 a [new act](#) was passed that means every care provider must have a plan in place for reducing forceful methods like staff pinning down patients. Hospital staff must report back on the use of force regularly so that progress can be measured and statistics can be published at the end of every year
- The [CQC](#) (Care Quality Commission) is responsible for making sure that health and social care services in England provide good care to people. To do this, the CQC visits different hospitals to see what is going well and what isn't. The CQC will now trial new tools when inspecting different services. This includes using '[Talking Mats](#)' a communication tool that allows people to communicate their feelings and opinions through pictures. This may make it easier for some autistic people and people with a learning disability to share their opinions.
- NHS England have said that autistic people and people with a learning disability should not be sent to a hospital that has been rated as inadequate, unless the individual and their family feel that it is in their best interest. This will also apply to anybody that needs to move from a unit that is closing. The numbers of autistic people and people with a learning disability admitted to inadequate settings will now be monitored to see if this advice is properly listened to.
- If admission to a setting rated as inadequate is seen as the best option for an autistic person or person with a learning disability, there should be extra measures in place to monitor the patient's safety and treatment.
- [HOPE\(S\)](#) is a national training model that aims to reduce the use of segregation for autistic people and people with a learning disability. The NHS will be rolling this out across services in England.

- If an autistic person or person with a learning disability has had a negative experience it can be difficult to know how to raise concerns. 'Ask, Listen, Do' resources aim to make it easier for autistic people, people with a learning disability and their families and carers to give feedback, or make a complaint and for organisations to learn from this. These resources can be found [here](#).
- Autistic people and people with a learning disability are more likely to be given medication in hospital but there are measures in place to make sure that medication is only given if it is helpful. '[STOMP](#)' and '[STAMP](#)' teams work with health professionals and the person receiving treatment to decide whether medication is right for them.
 - You can find resources to share with professionals [here](#).

Community support

To prevent autistic people and people with a learning disability from ending up in mental health hospitals, good community support must be available. The following measures have been introduced to try to improve community services:

- The '[What Good Looks Like](#)' project has been set up to look into what positive community support looks and feels like for autistic people and people with a learning disability. The project will involve autistic people and people with a learning disability as well as their families and carers. The results of this will be used to help work out what changes are needed to improve community services.
- Health professionals that work in the community will get more training on understanding autism and how to make sure that the right support is offered.
- By April 2023 community learning disability teams and intensive support teams should have had the opportunity to complete advanced and consultant level practice training.
- There will also be training opportunities for commissioners and senior leaders to improve understanding and support of autistic people and people with a learning disability.
- NHS services must make '[reasonable adjustments](#)' for autistic people and people with a learning disability but many find accessing this support challenging. At the moment, NHS England are working on ways to make this easier including introducing a 'digital flag' to health records that will make it clearer when somebody might need reasonable adjustments. Reasonable adjustments include things like appointment letters that are easier to read and going straight into appointments without sitting in a waiting room.
 - Reasonable adjustments can be asked for at any time and can be changed or updated to suit the individual. You may have a clear idea about what would help or it may be easier to ask for an open conversation about different options.
- The Mental Health Act confirms that health and social services must provide free services to people that have been detained under certain sections of the Act once they leave hospital.

- The NHS Long Term Plan sets out plans to spend money on community services including crisis support and primary care. It is hoped that this will prevent some people from reaching crisis so that they can stay out of hospital.
- Health, social care, education, and housing commissioners are responsible for making sure there are the right kinds of housing, care, and support services in their local area. Upcoming changes to the Mental Health Act will give commissioners extra duties for making sure that there are services in their area for autistic people and people with a learning disability.

Avoiding crisis

- Autistic people and people with a learning disability that are at risk of being admitted to a mental health hospital, should also be offered a Care (Education) and Treatment Review. This review should be used to check whether the person is safe, plan for the future and make recommendations for their care and treatment.
- The Mental Health Act reform will also mean that there should be a register of everybody in the area that is at risk of being admitted to a mental health hospital. It is hoped that this will provide more awareness of autistic people and people with a learning disability that are at risk of crisis.
- [Mental health crisis services](#) are open to all via 24/7 helplines, anybody can seek support from these services at any time. NHS England will share information on making the right adjustments for autistic people and people with a learning disability that might need to use these helplines.

Health Professionals and training

It's really important that health professionals have a good understanding of autism and learning disabilities so that they can provide the right support. The following things have been introduced to help with this:

- [The Health and Care Act 2022](#) states that care providers must make sure their staff receive specific training about autism and learning disabilities. The National Autistic Society has been involved in the development of [The Oliver McGowan](#) Mandatory Training package. This training will eventually be rolled out to all health and social care staff in England.
- There is a new programme for professionals that support autistic people and people with a learning disability at risk of being admitted to a mental health hospital or that are ready to be discharged.
- There will be more opportunities for professionals to receive training about autism and learning disabilities before they qualify.
- NHS England are investing £1.5million into developing autism training for professionals that work in mental health hospitals.

Housing

A lack of suitable housing for autistic people and people with a learning disability is one of the main reasons that people get stuck in mental health hospitals. A lack of enough suitable homes can also mean that people are admitted to hospital because their needs aren't being met and there is nowhere else for them to go. To tackle this the following has been or will be introduced:

- The £11.5 billion [Affordable Homes Programme](#) (2021 to 2026) includes plans to develop more supported housing.
- £15 million is available from 2022/23 for community accommodation for autistic people and people with a learning disability. It is hoped that this will help to prevent some people from needing to go into hospital in the first place and create more homes for people to go to once they have been discharged from hospital. This is for both short-term stays and permanent homes.
- Funding programmes will make it easier for new specialist and supported housing to be developed.
- [Home Ownership for People with Long-Term Disabilities](#) (HOLD) helps autistic people and people with a learning disability to live in a home close to their friends, family and support services. This is a shared ownership scheme meaning that the person will own part of the home.
- £573 million per year from 2022 to 2025 will be used to fund the 'Disabled Facilities Grant.' This grant is used to make changes to people's homes to help them to live safely and independently, for example by providing furniture that is harder to break and easier to clean. Autistic people and people with a learning disability may be entitled to use this grant.

The criminal justice system

Some autistic people and people with a learning disability in mental health hospitals are there instead of carrying out a sentence in prison. There are also measures in place to improve the care they receive and make it easier for these people to be discharged once they no longer need to be in hospital. These include:

- Introducing legislation around 'Supervised Discharge' for patients that are ready to leave hospital but may still be a risk to the public. This will mean living in the community but with some restrictions, for example being accompanied by staff when away from home.
- A 'Neurodiversity Training Toolkit' has now been published. This will help staff that work in the criminal justice system to understand neurodivergent people, including autistic people, and how to support them better.
- NHS England Health and Justice have recently published a guide on caring for autistic people and people with a learning disability for prison healthcare services. This includes information about moving from prison to hospital.

Finding and staying in employment

Autistic people and people with a learning disability face unemployment at much higher levels than the rest of the population. Often there are barriers that stop autistic people and people with a learning disability from having the same opportunities as others or the support they need to be able to stay in employment. The following things have been introduced to try to improve this situation:

- Everybody should receive good career advice in schools and colleges as part of the '[Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance](#).' The [Careers and Enterprise Company](#) (CEC) can help to make sure that this advice is given in a way that is helpful to those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). They also work with employers to encourage more work experience and internship opportunities for young people with SEND.
- The Department for Education will be using up to £18 million between 2022 and 2025 on improving internships that help young people with Education, Health and Care plans to get and keep paid jobs. There will also be more funding for '[Access to Work](#)' to help to pay for workplace adjustments.
- '[Local Supported Employment](#)' services. This will be used to help autistic people and people with a learning disability that receive social care to get work.
- The '[Personalised Employment Support programme](#)' exists to help disabled people with complex needs that want to work.

Diagnosis and support services

Knowing that somebody is autistic or has a learning disability early on in their life can help them get the help and support they need earlier. Often a diagnosis is needed to be able to receive help from support services and it can lead to more understanding from friends, family members and colleagues.

We know that often autistic people are not identified as being autistic or having a learning disability until later on in their childhood, into adulthood or sometimes not at all. This can mean that people face lots of difficulties and are not properly understood by those around them.

The following actions have been introduced to try and improve the waiting times for receiving a diagnosis.

- From 2022 to 2023 £2.5 million went towards improving children and young people's access to diagnosis.
- A pilot will take place in some schools between 2022 and 2025 to see whether schools can help to identify autistic children and young people and speed up the diagnosis process. This will involve developing tools that make it easier to identify autistic girls.

Children & young people

The action plan recognises the importance of a good start in life for autistic people and people with a learning disability. It is important that the right help and support is provided as soon as possible but for many this has been difficult to get. The plan sets out the following steps to try to improve the help available for children and young people:

- [Family 'hubs'](#) should help families who have a child with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) by showing them which services may be able to offer help and support.
- Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) are being set up in schools and colleges to help with earlier intervention and signposting children and young people to services. 183 of these teams are in place across 3,000 schools currently.
- The NHS Long Term Plan states that by 2023 to 2024 autistic children and young people and children with a learning disability that have the most complex needs should have their own keyworker. This includes those at risk of being admitted to hospital as well as those that are in hospital.
- Some children and young people are not always able to continue living at home. The Challenging Behaviour Foundation and Mencap have created the '[Keeping in touch with home](#)' guidance which can be shared with professionals. This guide provides advice to help families to stay in touch when a child is not living at home.
- Moving from children's to adults' services should involve careful planning and begin when a child is in Year 9 at school at the latest and can be requested at this point. The council is responsible for making sure there is an assessment to decide what is needed. These transition assessments can also become part of a young person's [Education Health and Care Plan](#).

Education

School can be a challenging environment for autistic children and young people, it is vital that the right support is in place to support them through their education. Recent Department for Education figures show that autistic children in England are twice as likely to be excluded from school than children with no special educational needs. Autistic students are often punished for behaviour which is a result of emotional stress due to the environment around them. The following actions are intended to provide more support for autistic pupils:

- £2.6 billion has been made available over the next three years for creating new places and improving existing schools for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- The [SEND review](#) will lead to changes in the way that children and young people are supported at school. This includes increasing available funding for children with complex needs.
- The 'Autism in Schools' project is there to work with schools to improve understanding of autism including what reasonable adjustments should be given. This is not currently available in all areas.
- An updated '[Behaviour in Schools guidance](#)' will contain more information specific to autistic people and people with a learning disability and how to make school a positive environment.
- In February 2022 the Department for Education announced funding of around £45 million for the next three years for SEND services, parents and young people's access to advice and support and for school and colleges to work with pupils with SEND