



Act now for autistic rights

**National Autistic Society Scotland's
Holyrood Election Manifesto 2026**



Our manifesto ask

The next Scottish Government must introduce the *Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill (LDAN Bill)* to Parliament as soon as possible.

The importance of the *LDAN Bill* in tackling the inequalities faced by autistic people and their families cannot be underestimated. Despite many good laws and strategies in Scotland, there remains a gap between the support people should receive and what they actually receive. This means that autistic people and their families are continually driven into crisis.

From the outset, the primary objective of the Scottish Government has been to create something that can better respect, protect and champion the rights of autistic people, people with learning disabilities and neurodivergent people and to deliver a fairer Scotland for everyone. But autistic people are still waiting for these changes to be made, and they shouldn't have to wait any longer. We must act now for autistic people's rights, to ensure that autistic people across Scotland receive the support they need.

We're calling on the next Scottish Government to:



Act now for diagnosis and support

An autism diagnosis can often be life changing, if not lifesaving, for many people. It can mean the difference between getting support and struggling to cope due to a lack of understanding or help. However, it can be very difficult, if not impossible, for people to access an autism assessment.

We frequently hear of children and young people waiting months, or even years, for an assessment. Autistic adults will often struggle to get a referral in the first place because some NHS Boards do not offer adult autism assessment unless you have a learning disability or a mental health problem. Finally, after receiving a diagnosis, many autistic people are left without any support at all.

What needs to change?

We want to see the *LDAN Bill* tackle this problem by focusing on improving waiting times through a new national autism strategy and local strategies. We also want waiting times to be published to provide a clearer idea of the national picture, and a guarantee through the Bill to at least one year of post-diagnostic support.



Act now for accessible healthcare

A lack of understanding in the health care system means that many autistic people struggle to access support, which can lead to poorer health outcomes.

Autistic people have a lower life expectancy than the general population and are more likely to die by suicide. We hear from autistic people and their families that they often find it very difficult to access healthcare. Autistic people speak to us about traumatic experiences of denial, misdiagnosis and a general lack of support and understanding. This can make autistic people vulnerable and reluctant to ask for help when they need it.

What needs to change?

We want to see the *LDAN Bill* tackle this problem by introducing mandatory autism training for health and social care staff to improve their understanding of autism. Health appointments should also be made more accessible for autistic people by introducing flexible options for booking and attending appointments, to ensure that autistic people are able to access the healthcare system in a way that works for them.



Act now for support in schools

School can be a cause of profound stress and anxiety for autistic learners. Whilst pupils have a right to access support in education, the reality is that autistic children and young people are being forced to experience trauma and fail at mainstream school before support is offered.

Too often, the challenges that autistic young people face in school are addressed using exclusion or part-time timetabling, which limits their access to education and leaves them isolated from their peers. We hear regularly from autistic young people about their negative and traumatic school experiences, which is deeply concerning, and we know that many of them end up being absent from school on a long-term basis or forced out of school completely.

What needs to change?

We want to see the *LDAN Bill* tackle this problem by introducing mandatory training on autism for teachers and other relevant school staff. We also need guidance for education authorities and schools on how to make our school buildings more inclusive, and greater sustainability of funding in education so that additional support is available to all pupils who need it.



Act now for inclusive communities

Autistic people face various barriers which can prevent them from being able to participate fully in their communities. These barriers can cause social isolation, loneliness, poor mental health and trauma.

For some autistic people, insufficient support in their community means that they find themselves at risk of being locked in institutional settings far away from their families and friends. For others, a lack of understanding from the public means that they face daily discrimination and can't access basic services in their community, like sports facilities, job centres and GP practices. The stigma and discrimination faced by autistic people also means that many find themselves struggling in the workplace or simply unable to find a job. In fact, the employment rate for autistic people is estimated to be as low as 29%.

In general, a lack of understanding of autism across Scotland often means that autistic people feel isolated in their own communities, which can negatively impact their physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing.

What needs to change?

We want to see the *LDAN Bill* tackle this problem by ensuring that autistic people are able to live independently in homes that they have chosen, which meet their needs, and are close to their families and friends. We also want a national strategy on autism, as well as local strategies which outline the support and services people should get to enable them to participate in their communities as equal citizens. Finally, the Bill should include an autism and learning disability employment plan for the public sector, ensuring it leads by example in creating inclusive workplaces for autistic people.

About autism

Autism influences how people experience and interact with the world. It is a lifelong neurodivergence and disability. Autistic people are different from each other, but for a diagnosis, they must share differences from non-autistic people in how they think, feel and communicate.

About the National Autistic Society Scotland

The National Autistic Society Scotland advocates with autistic people, and their families, to help create a society that works for autistic people. We have done this across Scotland for over 25 years. We know that at least one in 100 people are autistic, which means there are at least 56,000 autistic people living in Scotland, supported by 225,000 people in families and support networks.

