



[Home](#) > [Parliament](#) > [Briefings and responses](#)

# The National Strategy for Autistic People, Children and Young People 2021 to 2026

The Government has published the new national strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults.

23 Jul 2021

## Key points

The Government has published the new national strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults. This includes an implementation plan for year one.

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how people perceive, communicate and interact with others, although it is important to recognise that there are differing opinions on this and not all autistic people see themselves as disabled.

The strategy sets out a vision for what the Government wants autistic people and their families' lives to be like in 2026 across six priority areas, and the steps national and local government, the NHS and others will take towards this within the first year of the implementation plan (2021 to 2022).

The implementation plan will be refreshed for subsequent years of the strategy, setting out further actions to take across Government, working in partnership with local authorities, the

NHS and the voluntary sector, as well as autistic people, to enable us to move closer towards the vision. By the end of this strategy, the government state that they 'want life to be fundamentally better for autistic people, their families and carers'.

The new strategy builds on and replaces the preceding adult autism strategy **Think Autism** [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/think-autism-an-update-to-the-government-adult-autism-strategy>], which was published in April 2014 and related to adults.

It extends the scope of the strategy to children and young people for the first time, in recognition of the importance of ensuring that they are diagnosed and receive the right support as early as possible and across their lifetime.

This new strategy aligns with the existing statutory guidance on implementing the **2009 Autism Act** [<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/15/contents>] for Local Authorities and NHS organisations **Statutory guidance for local authorities and NHS organisations to support implementation of the Adult Autism Strategy (2015)** [[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/422338/autism-guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/422338/autism-guidance.pdf)] which sets out local authorities' and NHS organisations' duties to support autistic adults and remains in force, which means that local systems must continue to deliver on existing requirements, including having Autism Partnership Boards in local areas. This guidance will be reviewed in subsequent years of the strategy, to ensure it aligns with actions of implementation plans for years 2 and beyond.

For children, **the Special Educational needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (2015)** [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>], continues to place duties on local authorities, NHS organisations and schools in respect of autistic children and young people.

## Funding

£74.88 million has been announced for the first year of the strategy. This includes:

**£40 million** through NHS Long Term Plan

investing **£25 million** into building the capacity and capability of seven-day specialist multidisciplinary and crisis services supporting autistic people and those with a learning disability

investing **£15 million** in keyworker pilots and early-adopter sites to support children with the most complex needs in inpatient mental health settings, as well as those at risk of being admitted to these settings

this is in addition to the **£2.5 million** from the Long-Term Plan for children and young people's autism diagnosis

**£31 million** through mental health recovery action plan to tackle inequalities and build the right support in the community

**£600,000** to fund training for staff in early-years settings, schools and colleges, to improve the experience of autistic children in the education system and prepare them for adulthood.

**£600,000** for the extension of the early-identification programme developed in Bradford

**£180,000** for the understanding autism campaign.

View the [government press release about the funding \[https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-landmark-strategy-to-improve-the-lives-of-autistic-people\]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-landmark-strategy-to-improve-the-lives-of-autistic-people).

## Priority areas of focus of the strategy

 Print  Top

The strategy outlines actions under six priority areas and three enablers:

## **1. Improving understanding and acceptance of autism within society**

To significantly improve the public's understanding and acceptance of autism and show that autistic people feel more included and accepted in their communities. For the public to understand how autism can affect people differently, including the difference in how autistic women and girls present, and to help change people's behaviour towards autistic people and their families. For many more businesses, public sector services and different parts of the transport system to become more autism-inclusive, so that autistic people can access these spaces and services, just like everyone else.

## **2. Improving autistic children and young people's access to education, and supporting positive transitions into adulthood**

For the SEND system to enable autistic children and young people to access the right support, within and outside of school. Schools to provide better support to autistic children and young people, so they can reach their potential, and to show that fewer autistic children are permanently excluded or suspended from school due to their behaviour. Improvements to be made to the support autistic people get in their transitions into adulthood, so that more autistic people can live well in their own communities, find work or higher education or other opportunities. This is important in preventing more young people from avoidably reaching crisis point or being admitted into inpatient mental health services.

## **3. Supporting more autistic people into employment**

To make progress on closing the employment gap for autistic people, ensuring that more people who are able and want to work can do so and that those who have found a job are less likely to fall out of work. For more employers to be confident in hiring and supporting autistic people, and to improve autistic people's experiences of being in work.

## **4. Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people**

To reduce the health and care inequalities that autistic people face throughout their lives, and to show that autistic people are living healthier and longer lives. In addition, to have made significant progress on improving early identification, reducing diagnosis waiting times and improving diagnostic pathways for children and adults, so autistic people can access a timely diagnosis and the support they may need across their lives.

## **5. Building the right support in the community**

 [Print](#)  [Top](#)

To achieve the targets set out in the NHS Long Term Plan to reduce the number of autistic people and people with a learning disability being admitted into inpatient mental health services. To do so by improving the treatment of autistic people in mental health legislation to prevent people from being avoidably admitted to inpatient care and improving the provision of community mental health and crisis support. To also improve the suitability and availability of housing support and social care. In addition, for people who do need to be in inpatient mental health settings, the quality of care will be better and more tailored to their individual needs and people will be discharged back into their communities as soon as they are well enough to leave.

## **6. Improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems**

To build a clearer understanding of how autistic people come into contact with the criminal and youth justice systems, and the type of support they may need across court, prison and under probation supervision. To improve the police and wider criminal and youth justice system staff's understanding of autism so that autistic people are more able to receive the right support, adjusted to their needs, as well as ensuring that different parts of the justice system – from prisons to courts – become more autism-inclusive.

The **[Autism strategy implementation plan: 2021 to 2022 \(Annex A\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026/autism-strategy-implementation-plan-2021-to-2022-annex-a)**

**[\[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026/autism-strategy-implementation-plan-2021-to-2022-annex-a\]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026/autism-strategy-implementation-plan-2021-to-2022-annex-a)** with a detailed list of actions.

**In year one of the strategy, the Government says it will focus on putting in place the three enablers required to deliver on the strategy and demonstrate progress on actions.**

## **The three enablers**

**The three enablers are as follows:**

- 1. Improving research, innovation and examples of best practice**

2. Improved data collection and reporting to drive system improvement
3. Strengthened governance, leadership and accountability

The Department for Health and Social Care, in partnership with the Department for Education, will establish a refreshed national Executive Group to monitor the delivery of the actions set out in the implementation plan, and hold action owners to account on progress. The new group will build on the existing Autism Strategy Executive Group, but will cover all ages, and will continue to include self-advocates, families and carers. The LGA currently sits on the Executive group and will continue to represent local government.

The strategy has been informed by independent research commissioned from the Policy Innovation Research Unit into **the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on autistic people and their families** [<https://piru.ac.uk/projects/current-projects/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-autistic-people-in-the-united-kingdom.html>].

The Government also commissioned Skills for Care, the National Development Team for Inclusion and the National Autistic Society to produce a **guide to help commissioners to identify local demand and develop the right services and support for autistic people** [<https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Learning-development/ongoing-learning-and-development/autism/Autism.aspx>], which is published alongside this strategy.

## Recommended next steps for councils

Review the membership of your Autism Partnership Board to ensure membership reflects the extension of the scope to children and young peoples and beyond health and social care issues.

Note that the Autism Act states that this guidance **“is to be treated as if it were general guidance of the Secretary of State under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (c. 42)”**

Further information about autistic people and **[LGA support for the work of councils on this topic.](https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/sector-support-offer/care-and-health-improvement/autistic-and-learning-disabilities/autistic)** **[\[https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/sector-support-offer/care-and-health-improvement/autistic-and-learning-disabilities/autistic\]](https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/sector-support-offer/care-and-health-improvement/autistic-and-learning-disabilities/autistic)**

## You may also be interested in

**[Support for autistic people](/our-support/sector-support-offer/care-and-health-improvement/autistic-and-learning-disabilities/autistic)** **[/our-support/sector-support-offer/care-and-health-improvement/autistic-and-learning-disabilities/autistic\]](/our-support/sector-support-offer/care-and-health-improvement/autistic-and-learning-disabilities/autistic)**