KNOW YOUR RIGHTS, OWN YOUR LIFE

Nurseline Community Services

Rights exist to protect and guide people. When we know how and when to use them, we gain the clarity to make decisions with confidence and the strength to act when it matters.

Knowing our rights can change our lives. It gives us the tools to make decisions that define our future.

THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR AUTISTIC CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS 2021–2026

What You Need to Know and How It Can Help You

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OVERVIEW

The National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults 2021–2026 sets out the UK government's vision for improving the lives of autistic people and their families. It extends previous adult-focused strategies to include children and young people, marking the first all-age autism strategy for England. It is issued under the powers of the **Autism Act 2009**, which remains the only disability-specific legislation in England.

The strategy envisions by 2026:

- A society that **understands and accepts autism,** ensuring inclusion and equality.
- Autistic people having **better access to education, employment, health, and community life.**
- **Autistic people and families feeling supported, with improved systems for diagnosis, care, and everyday participation.**

It builds upon lessons from the **COVID-19 pandemic,** highlighting challenges (loneliness, barriers to care) and opportunities (more virtual engagement, flexible support). Over £34 million from the government's pandemic fund supported voluntary sector initiatives for autistic people during this period.

The strategy is based on six key priorities:

1. **Improving understanding and acceptance of autism in society.**
2. **Improving education access and transitions into adulthood.**
3. **Supporting more autistic people into employment.**
4. **Tackling health and care inequalities.**
5. **Building the right community support and reducing inpatient care reliance.**
6. **Improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems**

To ensure delivery, the **Department of Health and Social Care** and the **Department for Education** established a refreshed governance structure, including an **Executive Group involving autistic people, families, and professionals to monitor progress and hold agencies accountable.**

GUIDANCE FOR FAMILIES AND AUTISTIC PEOPLE

Early Diagnosis and Support

- Families can expect improved systems for early identification of autism.
- The government is investing **£10.5 million** to reduce diagnosis waiting times for children and young people.
- This investment addresses **pandemic backlogs** and focuses on **identifying those at risk of crisis.**
- A further **£2.5 million** will improve **diagnostic and post-diagnostic pathways for adults,** ensuring consistent quality and quicker access to care.
- An **early identification pilot in schools** enables **joint assessments between education and health professionals,** helping families receive earlier support.
- Understanding your **rights under the SEND Code of Practice (2015)** ensures that **local authorities and schools provide the right educational support for autistic children.**

Education and Transitions

By 2026, the aim is for every autistic child and young person to access the right educational support within inclusive learning environments. The government is committed to **opening 37 new special free schools, including 24 specifically designed for autistic pupils, starting from 2022.**

Autistic children and families can benefit from:

- **£600,000 for autism-specific staff training** in schools and colleges.
- A new **anti-bullying programme** to make schools more inclusive.
- **Mental Health Support Teams** and training for senior leads to improve wellbeing.
- Support for early years professionals to identify autism and promote emotional health.

Families are encouraged to engage in **Parent Carer Forums,** supported by **£8.6 million** in funding to enhance collaboration between parents and local services.

Employment and Life Skills

For young adults, pathways to employment are being strengthened through Supported Internships, apprenticeships, and traineeships, as well as the establishment of local Supported Employment Forums connecting employers, educators, and families. These initiatives aim to help autistic young people prepare for adulthood, find meaningful work, and develop independence.

Families can help by:

- Participating in local transition planning.
- Encouraging their child's school to discuss preparation for adulthood early.
- Using local employment forums to advocate for inclusive work opportunities.

Health and Well-being

Health inequalities will be tackled through new **autism health checks, LeDeR reviews** (examining the deaths of autistic adults to improve future care), and **digital health record flags,** ensuring professionals make reasonable adjustments.

Knowing their rights, families can:

- **Request reasonable adjustments in healthcare.**
- Use NHS resources such as the **Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training** framework to understand care expectations.
- **Seek community support groups** funded by the strategy to reduce isolation.

This is how knowing our rights can change lives.

When families and young people understand what support they're entitled to, they can make informed choices, access the right services, and create new possibilities for their future. An inspiring example is Ben, who is autistic and has Pathological Demand Avoidance. He once avoided the outside world, but through personalised clinical support, he gained confidence, began exploring new activities, and rediscovered joy - bringing a sense of relief and renewed connection with his mother.

MORE

OBLIGATIONS AND DUTIES FOR COMMISSIONERS, PUBLIC BODIES AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The strategy aligns with **statutory duties** under:

- **The Autism Act 2009**
- **The Care Act 2014**
- **The Children and Families Act 2014**
- **The Children Act 1989**
- **The Equality Act 2010**

Local authorities and NHS bodies **must work collaboratively** to identify and support autistic people of all ages. The statutory guidance requires local areas to maintain **Autism Partnership Boards** and **joint commissioning arrangements** across education, health, and social care.

Commissioning and Workforce Development

Commissioners are expected to:

- Develop **autism-inclusive services** that meet local needs.
- Undertake **training through the LGA, Skills for Care, and ADASS qualification programme,** extended to 120 commissioners nationwide.
- Use new **commissioning guidance** (published with the strategy) to identify service demand and shape provision.
- Recruit **Autism and Learning Disability Champions** within Integrated Care Systems (ICS) to lead implementation efforts.

These duties ensure public accountability and stronger community support structures for autistic people.

Building the Right Support and Preventing Institutionalisation

Local authorities will receive:

- **£25 million** to strengthen 7-day multidisciplinary crisis support.
- **£15 million** for keyworkers supporting children and young people with complex needs.
- **£21 million** through the Community Discharge Grant to accelerate inpatient and community-based care transitions.

Commissioners are tasked with embedding dynamic support systems that prevent crises and promote independence. The use of restrictive practices is strictly limited to last-resort scenarios, monitored under **Seni's Law (Mental Health Units Use of Force Act 2018)**

Data, Accountability, and Governance

Local and national agencies must:

- Improve **data collection** on autism diagnosis and service use.
- Contribute to **bi-annual accountability reviews** led by ministers.
- Implement **Task and Finish Groups** to drive specific outcomes, ensuring representation from autistic people and families.

This transparency allows individuals and families to hold systems accountable under the law, ensuring that statutory duties are not overlooked.

HOW INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES CAN TAKE PART AND BENEFIT FROM THE ACT

Know Your Rights

Families can reference the **Autism Act** and **SEND Code of Practice** when requesting support from local authorities, ensuring timely assessments and tailored services.

Engage Locally

Join **Parent Carer Forums** or Autism Partnership Boards to influence local policy and share lived experiences.

Access Funded Services

Use **new community programmes, employment forums, and autism-inclusive health initiatives** launched under the strategy.

Request Reasonable Adjustments

The Equality Act gives autistic people the right to request adjustments in education, healthcare, and workplaces.

Stay Informed

Progress and implementation plans are publicly available through the **Department of Health and Social Care** website, allowing families and advocates to monitor government accountability.

Original Sources:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60f72556e90e0764c6eb39f5/the-national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026.pdf

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