Learning disability and autism, and the NHS Long Term Plan

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Health and care leaders have come together to develop a Long Term Plan to make the NHS fit for the future, and to get the most value for patients out of every pound of taxpayers’ investment. Our plan has been drawn up by those who know the NHS best, including frontline health and care staff, patient groups and other experts.

For people with a learning disability, autism or both, the NHS Long Term Plan will:

- Take action on health inequalities by delivering more annual health checks, reducing over-medication, and sustained effort to reduce preventable deaths.
- Deliver hearing, sight and dental checks for children and young people in special residential schools, working with partners.
- Continue investment in community support, including 7-day specialist services and crisis care in every area by 2023/24, reducing the number of people needing hospital care to less than half of 2015 levels.
- Test the most effective ways to bring down waiting times for autism diagnoses.
- Ensure children and young people with the most complex needs have a named keyworker.
- Improve training and awareness amongst all NHS staff so services are more inclusive.

The NHS has a crucial role to play in helping people with a learning disability, autism or both to lead longer, happier, heathier lives, and the NHS Long Term Plan confirms our commitment to do so.

Progress made over the last three years to boost care options in the community, which has seen a 20% reduction in the use of hospital care, will continue.

We will give more people greater say over the care they receive through personal health budgets, and every area should have enough of the right services in place so that the use of inpatient care will have reduced by 50% by March 2024.

Where hospital care is needed, we will make sure it meets the Learning Disability Improvement Standards, and is for as short a time as possible, with a discharge plan in place.

To ensure children and young people have the best start in life, those with the most complex needs will have a named keyworker to support their family in navigating services.

We will also test ways of speeding up the diagnosis of autism, and pilot hearing, sight and dental checks for children and young people in residential schools for disabled children.

To make sure that people’s physical and mental health needs are met, we will improve the uptake of annual health checks and pilot them for autistic people, and expand our programme to reduce inappropriate overmedication.

And we will also make all services more accessible by providing information and training on learning disability and autism for all NHS staff, and ensure local services make reasonable adjustments for people’s needs.

Case study

The Ealing Intensive Therapeutic and Short Breaks Service has shown that an intensive support approach prevents children being admitted into institutional care.

Health, mental health, social care and education services are all in one building, working together to ensure young people with a learning disability and distressed behaviour can live well in their community.

This includes a large staff of psychologists in a children and adolescent mental health services and learning disability team. It also includes the Intensive Therapeutic and Short Breaks Service.

The service has prevented a number of residential placements for young people with a learning disability and distressed behaviour, as well as saving money.