

Press release

Review launched into mental health, ADHD and autism services

Government launches independent review to look at rising demand for mental health, ADHD and autism services and what is driving it.

From: [Department of Health and Social Care \(/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care\)](#) and [The Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP \(/government/people/wes-streeting\)](#)

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- Review will build clinical evidence base on mental health, autism and ADHD services
- It will examine what is driving rising demand for services including inequalities in accessing support
- Next step in government's 10 Year Health Plan commitment to transforming mental health care

An [independent review \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-into-mental-health-conditions-adhd-and-autism-terms-of-reference\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-into-mental-health-conditions-adhd-and-autism-terms-of-reference) launching on Thursday (4 December 2025) will examine how the health system currently delivers mental health, ADHD and autism services in order to help ensure children and adults can get the right support.

Lord Darzi's [independent investigation into the NHS](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-investigation-of-the-nhs-in-england)

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found that demand for mental health, ADHD and autism services has risen, and many people who are autistic or have ADHD are struggling to access the right services and support. In 1993, 15.5% of 16 to 64 year olds had a common mental health condition, compared to 22.6% in 2023 to 2024. Meanwhile, 13 times more people were waiting for an autism assessment in September 2025 compared to April 2019.

This review is the next step in the government's [10 Year Health Plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/10-year-health-plan-for-england-fit-for-the-future)

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commitment to transforming mental health care, ensuring people get the appropriate care, which will help bring down waiting lists.

This government is determined to ensure that everyone gets the care they need, regardless of their background or where they live. This review is being launched alongside extra funding of £688 million, cash that is going towards hiring 8,500 additional mental health workers, expanding NHS Talking Therapies and increasing the number of mental health emergency departments.

This work, alongside this review, will help more people get the right support and stop waiting lists further rising.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Wes Streeting, said:

“I know from personal experience how devastating it can be for people who face poor mental health, have ADHD or autism and can't get a diagnosis or the right support.

“I also know, from speaking to clinicians, how the diagnosis of these conditions is sharply rising.

“We must look at this through a strictly clinical lens to get an evidence-based understanding of what we know, what we don't know, and what these patterns tell us about our mental health system, autism and ADHD services.

“That's the only way we can ensure everyone gets timely access to accurate diagnosis and effective support.”

The independent review will look at rising demand for mental health, ADHD and autism services and what is driving it.

The increased burden on the NHS means that for too long, people with acute needs have faced long waits, had to navigate overstretched services, experienced inequalities in care and felt abandoned when support was needed most. A recent survey by Rethink Mental Illness set out how important it is to ensure people are getting the right support. For example, it found that some parents were resorting to private treatment to get their children the treatment they need, with one case study saying that the cost was leading to such severe hardship that they couldn't afford to eat regularly.

The review will explore why people are increasingly turning to the NHS and other services for support, the role of diagnosis in accessing help, and how appropriate

current interventions are.

It will recommend practical, evidence-based approaches to prevention and early intervention and will be led by Professor Peter Fonagy, a clinical psychologist and National Clinical Advisor on Children and Young People's Mental Health.

The findings, which will be published in summer 2026, will inform the government's 10 Year Health Plan commitment to tackle the mental health crisis in adults and children.

The review will appoint an advisory working group of leading academics, clinicians, epidemiological experts, charities and people with lived experience to directly shape the recommendations and scrutinise the evidence.

Professor Peter Fonagy, Chair of the independent review, said:

“This review will only be worthwhile if it is built on solid ground.

“We will examine the evidence with care - from research, from people with lived experience, and from clinicians working at the frontline of mental health, autism and ADHD services - to understand, in a grounded way, what is driving rising demand.

“My aim is to test assumptions rigorously and listen closely to those most affected, so that our recommendations are both honest and genuinely useful.

“We owe it to children and families, young people and adults to provide government with advice that is proportionate, evidence-based, and capable of improving people's lives.”

The review forms part of a wider package of action the government is taking to transform mental health care and improve support for people who are autistic or have ADHD, including:

- recruiting 8,500 additional mental health workers to boost capacity across services
- expanding NHS Talking Therapies so that 915,000 people complete a course of treatment by March 2029 - up from 670,000 last year.
- providing up to £120 million to bring the number of mental health emergency departments to around 85, supporting people in crisis
- accelerating the rollout of mental health support teams in schools and colleges to reach full national coverage by 2029, with £13 million invested to pilot enhanced training for staff
- supporting more inclusive environments for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) through the partnerships for inclusion of neurodiversity in schools (PINS) programme
- NHS England piloting 6 neighbourhood adult mental health centres open 24/7, bringing together community, crisis and inpatient care

Mark Rowland, Chief Executive at the Mental Health Foundation, said:

“We’re encouraged to see the government launch this vital review into levels of poor mental health in England. This is a key moment to understand how the social, economic and technological changes of the last decade have affected people’s mental health and how we best respond.

“Too often people - especially young people - have had to reach crisis before they get support, which is why it is welcome that this review brings a focus on the prevention of poor mental health as well as timely, person-centred interventions.”

Dr Sarah Hughes, Chief Executive of Mind, said:

“This is a huge opportunity to really understand what is driving increasing levels of mental illness, especially among our young people.

“More people need help than services can see, people’s mental health deteriorates while they wait, and when people do get access to support it is not always appropriate to their needs. We also need to be tackling the social and economic factors that are helping to drive increased demand. That’s why it’s vital that policy makers, providers and the voluntary sector are pulling in the same direction.

“We’re ready to contribute to the review, to bring people who are experts through lived experience to the table and to make sure the outcome is a system where everyone gets the right support at the right time.”

Dr Lade Smith CBE, President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, said:

“We welcome this review and the appointment of Peter Fonagy, Simon Wessely and Gillian Baird to lead it. With such leadership, we expect that the review will adequately consider the many complex reasons that more people are in need of mental ill-health, ADHD and autism support. It must also rigorously identify gaps in care, explore which methods of treatment and support already work and be led by the best available evidence.

“We have a real opportunity to ensure that millions of people receive the care they need both now and for generations to come, creating a lasting legacy of a healthy and productive population. The Royal College of Psychiatrists are ready to support this work and promote the voices of our patients who feel the effects of the challenges affecting services every day.”

Baroness Anne Longfield, Executive Chair of the Centre for Young Lives, said:

“I welcome the announcement of this important review and the commitment to carry it out rigorously and speedily. Nobody could disagree that there has been a very significant worsening of children and young people’s mental health over the last decade, that systems of support are unable to meet demand, and that serious reform is needed. We are seeing the long-lasting consequences in our schools and in the growing number of young people outside education and employment.

“This crisis cannot continue, and this review can be the catalyst for delivering vastly improved support for children, young people and their families, when they need it and where they need it.”

Mel Merritt, Head of Policy and Campaigns at the National Autistic Society, said:

“We welcome work to address the long waits and barriers to support autistic people face.

“We know autistic people face health inequalities that affect their life expectancy. Addressing these inequalities is much needed and must be informed by those with a specialist knowledge of autism and by autistic people’s lived experience.

“We need urgent action because, while we are currently seeing the number of people seeking an assessment levelling out, the average waiting time is rocketing.”

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