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# Commissioning services for autistic people

A cross-system framework for commissioning social care,  
health and children's services for autistic people



In partnership with:



# Introduction

This framework is for commissioners who work in social care, health, education and children's commissioning services for autistic people, to help them to make informed commissioning decisions and improve the outcomes for autistic people and their families.

It explains the things that you need to **analyse**, the things that you need to **do**, and who/what organisations you should **engage** with, as well as links to **useful guidance** and information, to help you to identify and plan the changes needed to improve your commissioning practices and deliver person-centred outcomes for local autistic people.

It gives you a checklist of questions to help you to analyse your current position, and outlines what you need to do, including the services and support that you should commission to ensure that local autistic people can access the care and support that they want and need. In each section we've split the content under these headings to help you to structure your thinking:

- understanding the local population
- culture, context and management
- working in partnership
- research, learning and development.

You do not need to consider all of the questions in each section. You can use the framework to help you with specific commissioning decisions, as well as broader ranging decisions.

You could use it in your own role, with other people in your organisation and other organisations, in team meetings and as part of professional development.

In the framework we use the term 'autistic people' to include children and adults. At all times, we have developed this framework with a focus on the outcomes that autistic people want to achieve and the lives that they want to lead.

You can use the framework to ensure that wider thinking about health and wellbeing commissioning takes into account the needs of autistic people. This will also include how you jointly commission health, education and social care services that impact on the lives of autistic people.

It's been developed by Skills for Care, National Autistic Society (NAS), National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) and Autism Alliance on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), and in partnership with autistic people and organisations that are engaged with autistic people.

We'd like to share examples of good commissioning practice to support this document. If you have any feedback or examples, please share them with us by emailing [policy@skillsforcare.org.uk](mailto:policy@skillsforcare.org.uk).

# Things to analyse

## Understanding the local population

- Determine the prevalence of autism across all ages and give examples about how this is best done. Use this [population calculator](#) to help.
- How many autistic people access health and social care services in the local area, and what services do they access?
- How many autistic people do **not** access health and social care services in the local area? How do you explore the reasons why?
- What are the diagnostic pathways for children and adults, including referral rates, diagnosis rates and current waiting times?
- How many carer's assessments are carried out and how many carers access services (relating to both autistic carers and carers of autistic people)?
- What are the numbers of autistic people from the following groups: a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background, autistic people aged over 65, autistic people who identify as female, autistic people of transition age?
- How many autistic people are currently supported out of area?
- How many autistic people are referred for and/or request an assessment for social care services?
- How many autistic people have an allocated social worker?
- How many autistic people have person-centred care plans?
- How many autistic people are in inpatient provision, in and out of the local area?
- How many autistic people access screening for common co-occurring conditions? How do you assess and measure the accessibility of pathways?
- How many people are waiting for an assessment? So, people with suspected autism.
- How many of these are already accessing other services?
- How many autistic people waiting for assessment have had crisis while on the waiting list?
- How many out of area assessments are requested, e.g. patient choice?
- NHS Digital is measuring diagnostic waiting times through the [Mental Health Services dataset](#) using the 'Forward Model' (from referral to first care contact), and the 'Reverse Model' (from diagnosis looking back to the first referral). These are experimental statistics, with the methodology for data collection being improved following each data publication. This data also shows average waiting times for each provider using these statistics (with the caveat that the data quality/completeness is not yet where we would like it to be).
- Hard to reach groups should include the homeless, and gender should not only include female.
- Are people on the waiting list for an autism diagnosis supported for any presenting needs before the point of diagnosis?

...Click [here](#) to access more things to analyse

**Working in partnership** See next page...

## Culture, context and management

- Is there a commissioning lead for autism in health, social care and children's services?
- Is autism included in the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)?
- Is autism included in the Strategic Transformation Plan/Integrated Care Services or local partnership plan?
- What is your local Transforming Care Pathway/Plan?
- Are the recommendations in the '[Autism Quality Standard](#)' (NICE) implemented in full? (If no, what are the barriers?)
- Is there an integrated forum for social work, social care and health leads?
- How do you monitor and review the cost of autism diagnostic assessments, pre-diagnostic support and post-diagnostic support? (What is available and what is the pathway for those NOT diagnosed with autism?)
- What post-diagnostic support programmes and/or services are funded locally for autistic children and adults, and families?
- Have you explored the way in which transition from children's to adult's services impacts on autistic people in your area?

...Click [here](#) to access more things to analyse

## Research, learning and development

- Do you have a plan that outlines how you deliver learning and development to the local workforce that supports autistic people?
- Does learning and development meet the standards outlined in the '[Core Capabilities Framework for Supporting Autistic People](#)'?
- Does your learning and development plan cover staff that work in all services that autistic people might use?
- How do you ensure that learning and development is kept up-to-date in line with current standards, policy and best practice?
- How do you measure and ensure that staff are confident and knowledgeable about autism and how to support autistic people?
- How much awareness is there of local innovation, improvement projects and initiatives?
- What are your methods for identifying their outcomes and impact of learning and development for:
  - health staff
  - social care staff
  - children's services staff?

...Click [here](#) to access more things to analyse



## Working in partnership

- Does your local area have an autism partnership board?
- What are your mechanisms for engaging with local autistic people and families, councils, health organisations, education and the voluntary and independent sector?
- How do you review your engagement with local autistic people and families?
- What are your mechanisms for engaging with social workers, education professionals, social care and health practitioner leaders and staff working with autistic people?
- How do you review your engagement (at least annually) with local services to identify if they're feeling included and heard?
- Is there a local autism strategy group that meets on a regular basis?
- Have you explored the assets that exist in the local community and how they can improve outcomes for autistic people?

...Click [here](#) to access more things to analyse

# Things to do

## Understanding the local population

- Ensure that your organisation has a clear diagnostic assessment pathway, including pre and post diagnostic support and information, for:
  - children and young people
  - adults with a learning disability
  - adults without a learning disability.
- Ensure that autistic people have access to a Care Act assessment. This assessment needs to be holistic and strengths-based and completed by a competent assessor.
- Ensure that there are adequate mainstream and specialist services to meet the wants and needs of local autistic people.
- Ensure that autistic carers and carers of autistic people have access to a carer's assessment.
- Ensure that there is a capacity plan for autism services, that addresses the needs of people with and without a learning disability.
- Ensure that autistic people and their families can access a holistic assessment, which includes sensory and communication differences and co-occurring conditions.

## Culture, context and management

- Review the culture of your organisation – autism awareness should be reflected in workplace support and all engagement with the local population.
- Review the diversity of staff groups within your organisation to include autistic staff and those with a learning disability.
- Ensure that everyone understands the importance of co-production and how it works in practice, and that your workplace culture supports this.
- Work with your local autism partnership board.
- Develop a joint commissioning plan for autism that addresses the needs of people with and without a learning disability.
- Develop a local autism strategy and delivery plan that encompasses people of all ages.
- Deliver your local autism strategy.
- Review and update commissioning and delivery plans, at least, annually and update accordingly.

## Working in partnership

- Establish an autism partnership board that meets, at least, quarterly.
- Provide autism-specific employment guidance and support to enable more autistic people to access work.
- Contact all local autistic people to inform them how to access an autism diagnosis, as standard.
- Engage with your local community and enable autistic people to participate in their local community.
- Engage with prison healthcare providers and commissioners, local Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and social care providers to support offender health, and ensure a clear assessment, diagnostic and support pathway.
- Attend meetings and networks with other commissioners and services for autistic people to share experiences and good practice.
- Develop low-level preventative services addressing practical life skills, social engagement, therapeutic support, employment and advocacy.
- Develop a strategy to engage hard to reach groups, people from BAME backgrounds, older adults and those with a learning disability.

## Research, learning and development

- Provide specialist training, in line with the 'Core Capabilities Framework for Supporting Autistic People', for social care, health and other key staff including:
  - social care staff undertaking community care assessments
  - health care staff undertaking continuing healthcare assessments
  - service staff supporting people in their home and placement settings.
- Involve autistic people and families in the creation and delivery of all learning and development.
- Establish an ongoing local programme of learning and development so that health and social care staff can recognise autistic people and take action to support them.
- Ensure that there is in-depth training for all other public sector staff who might support autistic people, including social workers, police staff, fire staff, nurses, doctors and office based staff.
- Provide [Mental Capacity Act](#) training for all health and social care staff.
- Use the '[Workforce outcomes measurement tool](#)' to measure the impact of learning and development on the lives of, and outcomes for, autistic people.

Commissioning  
autism services:  
things to do

# Who to engage

## Understanding the local population

- What self-advocacy support and services are available for autistic people, carers and families?
- Is there a broad range of community and social groups for autistic people, carers and families, of all ages?
- Do you have an autism hub and/or one-stop-shop?
- What type of low-level, community-based support could be put in place to help autistic people and their families in their daily lives and prevent escalation when they are struggling so having to access more formal and higher tier services?

## Culture, context and management

- Do you have a multi-disciplinary assessment and diagnostic service for autistic people?
- Does the assessment and diagnostic service include:
  - pre-diagnostic support?
  - short-term post-diagnostic support?
  - ongoing low-level preventative support?
- Do you have a specialist autism service that includes health and social care?
- Are there established links between local autism services, social care services, commissioning services and the Health and Wellbeing Board?
- Do you ensure that meetings and forums are accessible for autistic people to attend? What methods do you use?
- Are providers confident to make reasonable adjustments to services with autistic people?
- Are managers and senior leaders confident in their understanding of autism and committed to improving the lives of autistic people?

Commissioning  
autism services:  
who to engage

## Working in partnership

- What focus groups and engagement processes do you have to connect with local autistic people and families?
- Are the following sectors involved in your autism partnership board and groups:
  - criminal justice, including, police, probation and prison services as well as prison healthcare providers and commissioners and Liaison and Diversion healthcare services operating within police custody and the courts
  - housing and accommodation
  - psychological therapies
  - mental health services
  - Jobcentre Plus and employment support?
- Are young people and carers involved in designing the local special educational needs (SEN) offer?
- How do you engage and enable the voluntary sector to develop support for autistic people, carers and families?
- Is autism identified as a priority within local housing strategy and planning?
- What employment support projects and services enable autistic people to access work?

## Research, learning and development

- Are autism training requirements included in commissioning contracts?
- Do you support public sector organisations to pool resources and budgets for training requirements?
- Are staff who work in local information, advice and drop-in services trained and enabled to support autistic people and families?
- Are the following people involved in commissioning and delivering learning and development:
  - autistic people
  - families and carers
  - local autism lead(s)?

# Sources of support

## Understanding the local population

**Skills for Care (2019), [Autism population calculator](#)**

This calculator will help you to understand the local population of autistic people.

**NHS England (2017), [Developing support and services for children and young people with a learning disability, autism and both](#)**

This document explains how the national service model from '[Building the right support](#)' applies to children and young people with a learning disability and/or autism.

## Culture, context and management

**Skills for Care (2018), [Culture for care toolkit](#)**

This toolkit explains what workplace culture is and gives practical tips and activities to help you to improve your workplace culture.

**[Autism Act \(2009\)](#)**

Up to date with all changes known to be in force on or before 15 June 2021.

**Government (2015), [Adult autism strategy: supporting its use](#)**

This information is for local authorities and NHS organisations about how to support the implementation of the autism strategy.

**SCIE (2017), [Commissioners of autism services](#)**

This webpage outlines some general pointers for commissioners about what makes services accessible to autistic people.

## Working in partnership

**QORU (no date), [Commissioning services for adults with learning disabilities or autism: the views and experiences of commissioners](#)**

This report outlines the findings of research with commissioners of learning disability and autism services, about what information they use to make commissioning decisions and challenges to commissioning effective services.

**National Autistic Society (2009), [Supporting adults with autism: a good practice guide](#)**

This guide shares how different local authorities are working to identify and meet the needs of autistic adults.

## Research, learning and development

**Skills for Health, Skills for Care and Health Education England (2019), [Core Capabilities Framework for Supporting Autistic People](#)**

This framework explains the core capabilities that staff working with autistic people need. It supports the development and planning of the workforce and informs the design and delivery of education and training programmes.

**National Autistic Society (2017), [Getting needs assessments for autistic adults right from the start: a guide for local authorities in England on training social care professionals](#)**

This guide will help local authorities to improve the skills and knowledge of their social care assessors and gives examples of good practice.



# Relevant NICE guidelines

NICE guidelines make evidence-based recommendations on a wide range of topics.

They set out the care and services that are suitable for most people with a specific condition, need or in a particular circumstance/setting, ways to promote and protect good health, the configuration and provision of health and social care services and/or how public sector organisations can improve the quality of care services.

The relevant guidelines can help you to understand what good care looks like and shape the health and social care market for autistic people. They can inform service planning and provision, quality improvement and the development of education and training initiatives.

Here are some of the key guidelines for commissioners who work in social care, health, education and children's commissioning services for autistic people.

- [Autism spectrum disorder in adults](#) (guideline CG142)
- [Autism](#) (quality standard QS51)
- [Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s](#) (guideline CG170)
- [Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s: recognition, referral and diagnosis](#) (clinical guideline, CG128)
- [Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s: diagnosis and management](#) (clinical guideline, CG142)
- [Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s: support and management](#) (clinical guideline, CG170)
- [Learning disabilities and behaviour that challenges: service design and delivery](#) (guideline NG93) (includes autism)
- [Learning disability: behaviour that challenges](#) (quality standard, QS101) (includes autism)
- [Adult social care: improving people's experience](#) (guideline NG86)
- [People's experience using adult social care services](#) (quality standard QS182)
- [Transition between inpatient mental health settings and community or care home settings](#) (guideline NG53)
- [Transition between inpatient mental health settings and community or care home settings](#) (quality standard QS159)
- [Transition between inpatient hospital settings and community or care home settings for adults with social care needs](#) (guideline NG27)
- [Transition between inpatient hospital settings and community or care home settings for adults with social care needs](#) (quality standard QS136)
- [Transition from children's to adults' services for young people using health or social care services](#) (guideline NG43)
- [Transition from children's to adults' services](#) (quality standard QS140)
- [Decision-making and mental capacity](#) (guideline NG108)

Each guideline includes a baseline assessment tool and resources to help you to implement the standard.

# Appendix: more things to analyse

## Understanding the local population

- What low level preventative services are in place to help to prevent autistic people being admitted to hospital?
- What is the level of access to community mental health services for autistic people, such as suitable Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and psychological therapies?
- How satisfied are autistic people, carers and families with the level of local support and how do you measure this?
- How many families support an autistic person at home?
- How many siblings are there of autistic people?
- How many autistic adults are in work in the area? Is this paid employment or voluntary work?
- How many young autistic people have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)?
- How many autistic children are in the care of the local authority?
- How many autistic people have a personal budget and/or a personal health budget?
- How many autistic people are homeless in your area?
- How many autistic people are subject to hate/mate crime?
- How many autistic staff do you have?
- How many diagnosed autistic people have a sensory assessment and management plan?
- How many autistic people access annual health checks and/or regular checks about their physical health?
- Does your local public health department conduct a strategic needs analysis of your local population, and does it have sections on autistic people with and without a learning disability?
- What autism specific metrics are included in provider contracts?

## Working in partnership

- If your local area has an autism partnership board:
  - does it include people of all ages?
  - do the main partners from your local sustainability and transformation partnership and/or integrated care system participate?
  - does it have an autistic co-chair?
  - are autistic people, carers and family members on the board?
  - do you reimburse autistic people, carers and families for expenses and time?
  - is the agenda co-produced?
  - does it meet in an autism capable environment?
  - are the papers accessible for autistic people and sent out in enough time for people to read, understand them and ask questions?
  - is there a pre-meeting for autistic people, carers and families?
- do you have a joint commissioner/joint commissioning team that has responsibility for autism
- If so, are you able to review both the health and the social care support / services or do you need to link to someone else?
- If you need to work with someone in health commissioning do you know who that is?
- Are you the commissioner for all age or for adult social care? Do you have links with education commissioning including SEND and children's commissioning including looked after children pathways?
- Do you understand the responsibilities and guidance for health commissioners of autism services? For example, The NHS Long-Term Plan, mental health, CAMHs, and specialist commissioning including the new models of care for forensic/inpatient services and learning disability post transforming care.
- Do you know who the primary care lead is in influencing access to health checks and primary care support? (This may align with future mortality and health checks for autistic people)
- What relationship do you have with Public Health and Community Development including housing and homelessness, within the Local Authority in order to consider low-level support and greater community inclusion through access and population health and wellbeing (including recognising the pockets and localities that are deprived and have higher risk of poor health and opportunities) - This links to prevention and wellbeing outcomes.

## Culture, context and management

- Are local public health organisations fully engaged in the autism partnership board and autism strategy?
- Are local service providers, both private and health trust, engaged in the autism partnership board?
- Are other local government departments involved in the development and implementation of your local strategy?
- Do the priorities of the local sustainability and transformation partnership and/or integrated care system include autism?
- Do local housing equality and community safety strategies include autism?
- Do local and regional joint working strategies include autism?
- Does your Health and Wellbeing Board regularly monitor the local autism strategy and autism action plans?
- Do micro commissioners actively monitor placements, supported living arrangements, day opportunities and personal budget provision for autistic people?
- Do macro commissioners actively monitor contract compliance and service quality for placements, supported living arrangements, day opportunities and personal budget provision for autistic people?

## Research, learning and development

- Is the planning and delivery of your autism training fully co-produced as defined and required by the '[Right to be heard: government response to the consultation on learning disability and autism training for health and care staff](#)' (November 2019)?
- What training is available to help autistic people, carers and families to learn about and increase their skills, for example, around behaviour, social norms, contributing to meetings, social situations and positive risk taking?
- How are autistic people, carers and families meaningfully involved in the development and delivery of training?
- How do you monitor the impact of autism training on practice, for example, via sampling, observation, supervision and appraisal?
- Do contracts with providers for autism specific and non-autism specific services include minimum training requirements? Do contract managers monitor these requirements at least annually?

## Autism: Low-level Support References

[York University - Preventative co-ordinated low-level support for adults with high-functioning autism](#)

[SCIE - Early intervention and prevention in autism](#)

[Leeds University - Information, Advocacy and Signposting as a Low-Level Support for Adults with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)

[Autistica Action Briefing: Post-Diagnostic Support for Adults](#)

[DoH - Statutory guidance for Local Authorities and NHS organisations to support implementation of the Adult Autism Strategy](#)

[NHSE - Supporting people with a learning disability and/or autism who display behaviour that challenges, including those with a mental health condition](#)

[NAS / APPG - The Autism Act, 10 Years On](#)

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