

Commissioning autism services

Draft for consultation



Introduction

This guide is primarily for commissioners who work in social care, health and children's commissioning for autism services. It explores the key questions that you need to answer, to make informed commissioning decisions. It explains the things you need to measure, the things you need to do, and who to engage, as well as links to useful guidance and information.

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

This is an initial version of the guide, published in April 2019, for consultation, debate and discussion. Between now and summer 2019, we want to know what you think about the guide, including:

- if it's useful and if it works in this format
- what else needs to be in it
- what doesn't need to be in it.

To get involved and tell us what you think, visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/commissioningautismservices.

How to use this guide

This guide explains what you need to consider, and do, when you're commissioning autism services. It covers:

- the things you need to measure - to understand where you are now
- the things you need to do - when designing and delivering commissioning
- who to engage with - when designing and delivering commissioning services
- sources of support.

In each of these sections, we've split the guide up under these headings:

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

Things to measure

Understanding the local population

- What is the prevalence of autism, across all ages?
- What are the diagnostic pathways for children and adults including referral rates, diagnosis rates and current waiting times?
- How many carers assessments are carried out and how many carers receive services?
- What are the numbers of autistic people classified as BAME, older people, women and girls, and transition age?
- What is the number of autistic people who 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 plans?
- What is the number of autistic people in inpatient provision, both in and out of the local area?
- How many young autistic people have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)?
- Consider how accessible and tailored local pathways are, for common co-occurring health issues in the autistic community (in particular, pathways for mental health problems, heart disease and epilepsies).

Culture 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?
- What is your local Transforming Care Pathway/Plan?
- Are the recommendations in the 'Autism Quality Standard' (NICE) implemented in full?
- Is there an integrated forum for social work, social care and health leads?
- Do you monitor and review the cost of autism diagnostic assessments, pre-diagnostic support and post-diagnostic support?
- Consider how accessible and tailored local pathways are for common co-occurring health issues in the autistic community (in particular, pathways for mental health problems, heart disease and epilepsies).
- What post-diagnostic support programmes and/or services are funded, locally, for autistic children and adults, and families?

Working in partnership

- What are your consultation mechanisms for engaging with local autistic people and families?
- What are your consultation mechanisms for engaging with social workers, social care and health practitioner leaders and staff working with autistic people?
- Is there a local autism strategy group that meets on a regular basis?
- Do you review your engagement (at least annually) with local services to identify if they're feeling included and heard?
- Do you review your engagement (at least annually) with local autistic people and families?

Learning and development

- Do you have an autism training plan?
- How confident and knowledgeable are health and social care staff about autism?
- What are your methods for identifying the outcomes and impact of training for:
 - health staff
 - social care staff
 - children's services staff?
- Does your training meet the 'Autism skills and knowledge list' (Skills for Care and Skills for Health)?

**Commissioning
autism services:
things to
measure**

Things to do

Understanding the local population

- Ensure you have a clear diagnostic assessment pathway for:
 - children and young people
 - adults with a learning disability
 - adults without a learning disability.
- Ensure autistic people have access to a community care assessment.
- Ensure carers have access to a carers assessment.
- Make sure there's a capacity plan for autism services, that addressed the needs of people with and without a learning disability

Culture and management

- Review the culture of your organisation – autism awareness should be reflected in workplace support and engagement with the local population.
- Ensure there's an autism-specific component to your organisational infrastructure, and that all planning and changes are considered and monitored for impact on autistic people.
- 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.
- Monitor your transition process.

Working in partnership

- Establish an autism partnership board that meets, at least, quarterly.
- Provide employment guidance and support to enable more autistic people to access work.
- Contact all local autistic people to inform them of their right to an assessment, as standard.
- Engage with NHS England, local Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), and social care providers to support offender health, and ensure a clear assessment, diagnostic and support pathway.
- Attend regional autism meetings to share experiences and good practice.
- Develop low-level preventative services addressing:
 - practical life skills
 - social engagement
 - therapeutic support
 - employment
 - advocacy.

Learning and development

- Provide specialist training 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.
- Establish an ongoing local programme of training for health and social care staff so that they can recognise autism and refer individuals to the diagnostic pathway.
- Ensure there is in-depth training for all other public sector staff who make decisions relating to autistic adults, including police staff, fire staff, nurses, doctors and office based staff.
- Provide Mental Capacity Act training for all health and social care staff.
- Involve autistic people and families in the creation and delivery of all training.

**Commissioning
autism services:
things to do**

Who to engage

Understanding the local population

- What self-advocacy support and services are available for autistic people and families?
- Is there a broad range of community and social groups for autistic people and families, of all ages?
- Do you have an autism hub and/or one-stop-shop?
- Are staff who work in local information, advice and drop-in services trained and enabled to support autistic people and families?

Culture 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
 - social care?
- Are there established links between autism services, social care services, commissioning services and Health and Wellbeing Boards?
- Do you ensure meetings and forums are accessible for autistic people to attend?
- Are managers and senior leaders confident in their understanding of autism, and are they committed to improving the lives of autistic people?

Working in partnership

- What focus groups and consultation 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, prisons)
 - housing and accommodation,
 - psychological therapies (IAPT)
 - 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 and families?
- Is autism identified as a priority within local area housing strategy and planning?
- What employment support projects and services enable autistic people to access work?

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 the following people involved in commissioning and delivering training:
 - autistic people
 - families and carers
 - local autism lead(s)?

Commissioning
autism services:
who to engage

Sources of support

Understanding the local population

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

Culture and management

Government (2014), [‘Think Autism’: an update to the government adult autism strategy](#)

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

NICE (2014), [Support for commissioning for autism](#)

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

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

CQC Commissioning Principles

Autistica, [Discover network](#)

This is a national network for autism research, connecting researchers with autistic people, families and professionals.

Working in partnership

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

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

National Autistic Society (2016), [Implementing the adult autism strategy](#)

Learning and development

NICE (2014), [Quality standard](#)

Skills for Care and Skills for Health (2011), [Autism skills and knowledge list, for workers in generic social care and health services](#)

National Autistic Society (no date), [Getting needs assessments for autistic adults right from the start: a guide for local authorities in England on training social care professionals](#)



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