

## Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2156: Improve access to ADHD diagnosis and treatment across Scotland, lodged by Terence Lloyd

### Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

[PE2156](#) calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to urgently address undiagnosed and untreated ADHD in Scotland. It highlights the recent increase in waiting times for ADHD diagnosis in Scotland and notes the withdrawal of diagnostic services in some regions. The petition calls for a new national ADHD strategy, which would include standardisation of diagnostic pathways across Scotland, funding of services to reduce waiting times and improve capacity, and provision of better post-diagnostic support.

### Background

[Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder](#) (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition, in which a person's selective neurocognitive functions (such as regulating emotions and social behaviours) fall outside the normal range. ADHD is characterised by a group of behavioural symptoms that includes difficulty in concentrating, hyperactivity and impulsiveness. [Research indicates](#) that ADHD affects around 5% of school-aged children and between 2.5-4% of adults. This suggests that there are between 150,000 and 220,000 people living with ADHD in Scotland as of 2023. In addition, males are [three to four times more likely](#) to be diagnosed with ADHD than females, although this may be [due to under-diagnosis](#), rather than true prevalence rates.

Therapeutic and pharmacological treatments can often help to relieve the symptoms of ADHD. Therapy options include cognitive behaviour therapy and occupational therapy, both of which can [improve focus and social skills](#) of people with ADHD. The most commonly prescribed medication for ADHD is [methylphenidate](#) (a stimulant that allows the person to focus better), although sleep medication such as [melatonin](#) is also sometime prescribed.

### ADHD standards and diagnosis in Scotland

The standards of care for children and young people in Scotland with neurodevelopmental conditions are set out in the [National Neurodevelopmental Specification](#). This is designed to support children with neurodevelopmental needs who do not meet the criteria to access [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services](#) (CAMHS). No such standards are published for adults with neurodevelopmental conditions, and in many places these patients are only assessed for ADHD if they meet local criteria for accessing secondary mental health care. A range of [third sector support](#) is also available to children and adults with ADHD in Scotland.

[There has been an effort](#) to incorporate ADHD assessment into an overarching framework of 'neurodevelopmental pathways'. In this approach, practitioners move away from assessing for single neurodevelopmental conditions and instead provide a holistic profile of a patient's neurodevelopmental needs. This reflects the fact that [ADHD often co-occurs](#) with other neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism, dyslexia and developmental coordination disorder (DCD).

However, there is currently no standardised national pathway for ADHD assessment in Scotland. Instead, the model of delivery of these pathways varies across the country. In some regions, neurodevelopmental pathways are delivered by the territorial NHS health boards, whereas in other areas these are delivered by the local Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs). [As of May 2021](#), ADHD pathways (or neurodevelopmental pathways that included ADHD assessment) for children were present in all fourteen health boards. Only NHS Lothian and NHS Lanarkshire had fully operational adult ADHD pathways in place at this stage, although some have since been developed and implemented. For example, [NHS Highland](#) implemented an adult ADHD pathway in October 2022; however, this service stopped taking new referrals in October 2023 due to overwhelming demand. Nonetheless, there are regions (e.g. NHS Dumfries & Galloway and NHS Borders) where it is not possible to obtain an adult ADHD assessment through the NHS, unless the patient has a co-occurring mental health condition and is therefore eligible for secondary mental health care.

In addition, some health boards have recently withdrawn their neurodevelopmental/ADHD assessment services. In February 2025, Aberdeenshire HSCP [announced](#) that it was closing its Adult Autism Assessment team, and in March 2025, [NHS Forth Valley did the same](#). Both these teams were also responsible for ADHD assessments. Finally, in the same month, [NHS Tayside stopped taking referrals](#) for child neurodevelopmental assessments, unless the patient met the criteria for referral to CAMHS.

As a result, in many regions the only way of obtaining an ADHD diagnosis medication is through a private assessment. [These can cost up to £1,200](#) and patients may also have to pay for any medication privately as well, at [costs of between £500 and £2,000 per year](#). Patients who obtain a private ADHD diagnosis may ask for this to be recognised by their GP and to enter a Shared Care Agreement. Under such an agreement, the medication is [prescribed by the GP](#) and funded by the NHS but administered and managed by the private consultant. However, [GPs may not always recognise a private diagnosis](#), leaving the patient to pay the full cost of the medication.

## **Waiting times and data**

Data concerning waiting times for ADHD diagnosis is not routinely available, since [neurodevelopmental cases are excluded](#) from CAMHS waiting times reporting. Data concerning waiting times specifically for neurodevelopmental assessment has only been made available via Freedom of Information requests and one-off publications. For example, in 2024, adults and children

[in NHS Lothian](#) were waiting an average of 101 and 68 weeks respectively for assessment. NHS Tayside [reported](#) an average waiting time of 37 weeks for the period September 2024-December 2024. These data show only snapshots of the situation for a given year, and no information on the long-term trends in waiting times is routinely published.

## Scottish Parliament Consideration

A number of Parliamentary Questions have been asked in relation to ADHD in recent months. [Question S6O-04617](#) on the subject of waiting times for ADHD assessment was asked by Clare Adamson MSP on 30 April 2025. She asked the Scottish Government:

“what support is currently available for those experiencing long waiting times for an ADHD assessment”.

The question was answered by Maree Todd MSP, Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport, who said that:

“This year, we are providing funding of £123.5 million to national health service boards to support improvements across mental health services, including neurodevelopmental services. I expect each board to have arrangements in place to ensure that people who are waiting for an ADHD assessment are signposted to appropriate support. Since 2020, local authorities have received more than £65 million to deliver community mental health and wellbeing support and services for children, young people and families, and £16 million a year to ensure that every secondary school has access to school counselling services. Our £1 million autism support fund for adults funds organisations that support people with ADHD, especially where it co-occurs with autism.”

A similar answer was given to question [S6F-039FF](#), asked by Murdo Fraser MSP in March 2025.

This petition also links to petition [PE2141](#) which called on Scottish Government to support the neurodiverse community by providing funding for psychoeducation. In its response, the Scottish Government’s Neurodivergence and Learning Disabilities Unit highlighted work undertaken by NHS Education for Scotland to enable training across the mental health workforce, particularly with regard to ADHD.

## Scottish Government actions

- The [National Neurodevelopmental Specification for Children and Young People](#) was published in 2021, setting out national standards of care for children and young people with neurodevelopmental conditions.
- The Scottish Government has funded the [National Autism Implementation Team](#), a team of academics and practitioners that works to implement evidence-informed neurodevelopmental practice across Scotland. Their work includes a [National Clinical ADHD](#)

[Pathway Feasibility Study \(2021\)](#), a [Children's Neurodevelopmental Pathway Practice Framework \(2024\)](#), and an [Adult Neurodevelopmental Pathways report \(2023\)](#), as well as resources and guidance for practitioners.

- People with ADHD were included in the proposed Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodiversity (LDAN) Bill that was introduced in 2022. While [consultation work](#) for this bill was carried out in 2023-2024, the Scottish Government announced that the bill would not be introduced in 2024-2025, and that draft provisions were to be published instead.

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15 May 2025

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@parliament.scot](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

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