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Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2267: Guarantee NHS Shared-Care Pathway for Accredited Private ADHD Diagnoses in Scotland, lodged by Richard Kinnear

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

Petition PE2267 calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to create a national attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) shared care pathway. Additionally, the petition calls for clear guidance to support NHS Scotland and GP practices in accepting privately obtained ADHD diagnoses.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in Scotland

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder, a condition arising from the functioning of the brain. It presents as a group of behavioural symptoms including hyperactivity, difficulty concentrating and paying attention, and impulsiveness. It is estimated that 5% of school-aged children and 2.5-4% of adults in Scotland are affected by ADHD.

ADHD is diagnosed by specialists such as psychiatrists or ADHD nurses, rather than GPs. A GP can refer a patient for assessment by a specialist if ADHD is suspected. Similarly, ADHD treatment is usually arranged by a specialist, although a patient's condition can be monitored by their GP.

ADHD can be treated using a combination of medication and therapy. Not everyone diagnosed with ADHD will choose to take medication. Some ADHD medications are first administered at a lower dosage, before being gradually increased to find the optimal dosage for the patient. This process is known as titration.

Long waits for ADHD assessment through NHS pathways have led a growing number of patients to seek private assessment and diagnosis. When a patient receives a prescription from a private specialist, and has completed titration of their ADHD medication to determine the appropriate dosage, they may wish to ask their NHS GP to prescribe their medication and monitor their condition, rather than continuing to pay privately for their treatment. This is known as a shared care agreement.

Shared care agreements for ADHD treatment

The decision to enter into a shared care agreement, for ADHD and other conditions, is made at the clinical discretion of a GP. These decisions are sometimes made at GP practice or local level, and can be informed by NHS Board policies.

GPs must consider shared care agreements carefully. They may have concerns about issues such as the quality and accuracy of private diagnoses, particularly when a private diagnostic service is only assessing patients for one condition, and

may therefore miss other potential conditions that could be causing or exacerbating the patient's symptoms. They may also wish to confirm with a specialist that the recommended medication would not interact with any other medications the patient is receiving. The medication monitoring processes followed by private diagnostic service providers may also differ from NHS recommendations, potentially creating a difficult professional situation for a GP.

As such, if a GP or practice has concerns about entering into a shared care agreement, they may decide to refer a patient to the relevant NHS pathway for ADHD diagnosis, and to ensure that any treatment prescribed is in accordance with NHS guidelines. The National Autism Implementation Team published guidance on considering entering into a shared care agreement to aid clinicians in this decision-making process.

Scottish Government actions

As the Scottish Government acknowledged in its written response to the petition, issues related to ADHD diagnosis and treatment were the subject of considerable scrutiny during the previous Parliamentary session. Some of the relevant work undertaken by the Scottish Parliament is outlined in the subsequent section of this briefing.

The Scottish Government's written response to the petition outlined its work to improve access to diagnosis and treatment for neurodivergent people. The response stated that the Scottish Government intends to publish its Adult Neurodevelopmental Route-Map in November 2026, and will work with relevant partners and stakeholders to support its implementation.

During Session 6 of the Parliament, the Scottish Government proposed a Learning Disabilities, Autism, and Neurodivergence Bill. However, the Government has since confirmed that this Bill will not be taken forward in Session 7. In a statement to the Parliament on 7 October 2026, the Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol, and Drugs clarified that the Government had decided to take more immediate action to support neurodivergent people through policy reform, service improvement and targeted investment, rather than the introduction of new legislation.

Scottish Parliament actions

During Session 6 of the Scottish Parliament, the Health, Social Care, and Sport Committee held an inquiry into autism and ADHD assessment pathways. In its inquiry report, the Committee called on the Scottish Government to work with Healthcare Improvement Scotland, health boards and GPs to address problems with shared care agreements and to develop a more consistent approach to their use. The Committee's report also highlighted that the current long NHS waiting times risk creating a two-tier system, in which ADHD diagnosis and care is more accessible to those who can afford to pay for private care.

Similarly, the Session 6 Equalities, Human Rights, and Civil Justice Committee held an inquiry into neurodivergence in Scotland, and published its report in March 2026. The report echoed the Health, Social Care, and Sport Committee's calls for the Scottish Government to work with relevant partners to address the issues with shared care agreements. The report also encouraged the Government to make swift

progress with the creation of national guidelines to ensure a standardised approach to ADHD assessment across the public and private sector.

In its written response to the petition, the Scottish Government confirmed that the recommendations from both inquiries are informing its ongoing policy and improvement activity in this area.

Key Organisations and relevant links

- SPICe briefing on neurodevelopmental pathways and waiting times in Scotland
- The National Autism Implementation Team
- ADHD Scot resource for patients on shared care agreements for ADHD

Sarah Swift
Researcher
3 November 2026

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

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