

# Evidence Brief: Autism

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Produced by the Knowledge Management team Evidence Briefs offer an overview of the published reports, research, and evidence on a workforce-related topic.

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# Key publications – the big picture

## 10 Year Health Plan for England: fit for the future

Department of Health and Social Care, July 2025

The 10 Year Health Plan is part of the government's health mission to build a health service fit for the future. It sets out how the government will reinvent the NHS through 3 radical shifts:

- hospital to community
- analogue to digital
- sickness to prevention

See Chapter 2: From Hospital to Community

## Oliver McGowan code of practice

Department of Health and Social Care, June 2025

Sets out standards for training on learning disability and autism for Care Quality Commission (CQC)-registered health and social care providers and their staff.

## Embracing neurodiversity in the workplace

NHS Employers, May 2025

Access guidance to help you support neurodivergent colleagues in the workplace.

## Autism policy and services: health and social care

House of Commons Library, April 2025

Autistic people experience health inequalities. This briefing describes government and NHS policy on health and social care for autistic people.

## Autism policy and services: UK legislation and strategies

House of Commons Library, April 2025

The Autism Act 2009 requires the government to publish an adult autism strategy for England. There are separate strategies for other parts of the UK.

## Neurodiversity at work: Understanding neurodiversity

Acas, March 2025

Neurodiversity describes the natural differences in how people's brains behave and process information.

Neurodiversity refers to the fact that we all:

- think, learn and act differently
- have different strengths and things we find challenging

## Tackling inequalities in care for people with learning disabilities and autistic people

SCIE, January 2025

This guidance document brings together learning from our discussions and work with commissioners, service providers and people with learning disabilities. We recognise that some of the challenges that people with learning disabilities and autistic people experienced during and after the pandemic are not new. Many of those challenges were prevalent before the COVID-19 pandemic, an example of this is the winter pressures on the wider system.

## Reasonable adjustments for neurodivergent staff

Social Partnership Forum, September 2024

Examples of reasonable adjustments for neurodivergent staff, compiled in partnership with the West Midlands SPF.

## "Neurodiversity is an afterthought at the moment": results from a pan-London survey of frontline staff's views about working with autistic people experiencing homelessness: autism and homelessness report about practitioner confidence, system barriers and training needs

Transformation Partners in Health and Care, September 2024

Presents the findings of research that explored the views of 186 practitioners working with people experiencing homelessness in London on the topic of autism and homelessness. Notes that practitioners included hostel workers, substance use

practitioners and practitioners from specialist homelessness mental health teams. Reports that recent research suggests that 12.3% of people experiencing homelessness are autistic. Looks specifically at: how confident frontline staff supporting autistic people experiencing homelessness felt in working with this client group; the drivers of this confidence level; the extent to which frontline staff felt the needs of autistic people experiencing homelessness are being met; and the perceived gaps in system provision. Outlines the systematic changes that were suggested to better support autistic people experiencing homelessness.

### Empowering individuals with learning disabilities and autism: a path to inclusive workforce and healthcare

NHS Confederation, May 2024

Fergus Hamilton highlights the individual and societal benefits of employment for people with learning disabilities and autism.

### Internships for staff with learning disabilities

NHS Employers, May 2024

Find out how you can support people with learning disabilities into the workplace through supported internships.

### The rapidly growing waiting lists for autism and ADHD assessments

Nuffield Trust, April 2024

With as many as 1.2 million autistic people in England, as well as up to 2.2 million people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), providing the right support is no small ask. Jessica Morris assesses the data to reveal what is happening to referrals for autism assessments and prescriptions for ADHD medication in England, and looks at what might lie behind any recent changes.

### The Buckland Review of Autism Employment: report and recommendations

Department for Work & Pensions, February 2024

A report of research and recommendations led by Sir Robert Buckland KC MP, supported by Autistica, with secretariat provided by the Department for Work and Pensions.

### The disability employment gap for graduate: research on barriers & interventions throughout the job-seeking journey

Shaw Trust, February 2024

This qualitative study brings the voices of disabled graduates to the forefront.

We set out to understand how students' career expectations are affected by their disability, how and why students choose to share information about their disability with employers, and what impact disability has on their transition into work. The research therefore focused on the initial career journey of disabled graduates in the UK, starting while they are still studying and moving through the job search, application, interview and negotiations process.

### National guidance to support integrated care boards to commission acute mental health inpatient services for adults with a learning disability and autistic adults

NHS England, November 2023

This guidance will support integrated care boards (ICBs) to commission acute mental health inpatient services for adults with a learning disability and autistic adults. It is national guidance for ICBs to follow as they commission for their populations and sets out minimum standards and expectations to consider when commissioning high quality inpatient care.

### LeDeR Report 2022

King's College London, November 2023

The Learning from Lives and Deaths – people with a learning disability and autistic people (LeDeR) programme, funded by NHS England and NHS Improvement, was established in 2017 to improve healthcare for people with a learning disability and autistic people. LeDeR aims to:

- Improve care for people with a learning disability and autistic people.
- Reduce health inequalities for people with a learning disability and autistic people.
- Prevent people with a learning disability and autistic people from early deaths.

### Supporting disabled staff in the workplace

NHS Employers, May 2022

Our understanding disability infographic provides an explanation of what a disability is, some of the associated health conditions and key statistics. It also includes a list of actions for organisations and managers which can help address some of the barriers that disabled staff may experience in the workplace. Not all disabilities are visible: some are not obvious and can make everyday life demanding for so many people. Hidden disabilities are a wide range of physical and mental conditions that range from a speech impediment, reduced sight, bipolar, chronic fatigue syndrome, colitis, autism, depression, and many others.

'Right to be heard': The Government's response to the consultation on learning disability and autism training for health and care staff November 2019, Department of Health and Social Care

The majority of respondents agreed that the training should reflect the Core Capabilities Framework for Supporting People with a Learning Disability and the new Core Capabilities

Framework for Supporting Autistic People. These frameworks identify the different levels of skills and knowledge staff need to support people with a learning disability and autism. Most respondents also agreed that employers should assess the level of training their staff need and ensure that their staff received this training. Frequently cited concerns included the need for employer support and time and cost pressures potentially leading employers to opt for the most basic level of training.

### The adult social care workforce supporting people with learning disabilities and/or autism

Skills for Care, December 2018

This report provides an overview of the adult social care workforce supporting people with learning disabilities and/or autism. This report shows that there were an estimated 665,000 jobs in the adult social care learning disabilities and/or autism workforce in 2017/18. 57,600 were in the local authority sector and 575,000 were in the independent sector.

### Learning disabilities: making a difference toolkit

NHS England Workforce Training and Education (formerly Health Education England), 2014

This toolkit brings together a range of resources to promote understanding about what it's like to live with a learning disability, allowing healthcare professionals to adjust the care they deliver and helping people with a learning disability access the services they need.

## Case Studies

### Reciprocal mentoring for neurodivergent colleagues

West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership, 2023

In January 2023, we commenced reciprocal mentoring pilot with 10 staff. The group represented a variety of roles across the NHS Trusts, VCSE and the Integrated Care Board (ICB). The pilot ran from January to November 2023. Delivery included an initial training session, with materials co-produced with our neurodivergent colleagues to ensure that they were accessible. All colleagues completed an 'about me profile' sharing some information about themselves and how they prefer to work and communicate. Learning Partners then met throughout the pilot, attending a mid-review in July and final review in November.

### 'Real life' scenarios

Health Education England, no date

We believe that by providing accessible 'real life' scenarios that many people encounter with applied understanding of the potential impact for someone on the autistic spectrum that it will raise awareness, reduce the stigma and promote greater equality for people on the autistic spectrum to live fulfilling and rewarding lives. They scenarios are not intended to be an education resource on autism rather a tool to support greater awareness when thinking about how to support someone with autism and /or their families in practical ways.

### Supporting people with a learning disability or autism to have positive personal relationships

Skills for Care, April 2023

The training covers topics including why relationships are important, what it means to have capacity to consent, gender and sexual identity, and how to support people to have healthy and safe relationships. The training is mandatory training for all staff and part of the induction for new-starters.

### Beyond the high fence: From the unheard voices of people with a learning disability, autism or both

NHS England, February 2019

This report is for NHS England, specialist commissioners, clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), local authorities and anyone working in the criminal justice system. It was co-produced with people with a learning disability and autistic people with the help of Pathways Associates and NHS England.

### Learning disability and autism support in an acute setting

NHS England, January 2019

The Clinical and Nursing Lead for Learning Disabilities/Autism Spectrum Disorder (LDASD) at South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust led on the implementation of the Green Light Tool Kit (2017) across the Trust. This programme has improved outcomes, experience and ensured resources are used effectively ensuring services remain focused on individuals' needs and provision of high-quality care.

## The Star for workforce redesign

More resources and tools are available if you search for "autism" in [the Star](#)

## Statistics

### Autism Waiting Time Statistics

NHS England – Digital

This is a series of publications documenting the experience of waiting times within autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnostic pathways.

# National Data Programme

Workforce, Training and Education staff can look at the [National Data Warehouse \(NDL\)](#) SharePoint site to find out more about datasets and Tableau products.

## Published Peer Reviewed Research

### Burnout

[Burnout in providers serving individuals with ASD: The impact of the workplace](#) Abstract only\*

Research in Developmental Disabilities 100, February 2020

The present study examines the relation between the six areas of work-life and burnout in staff providing direct care services to individuals with ASD. The areas of workload, reward, fairness, and values emerged as the best predictors of burnout. While workload, fairness, and values predicted emotional exhaustion, values and reward predicted personal accomplishment, and values alone predicted depersonalization. Lower levels of training satisfaction and frequency of supervision were related to burnout. Findings provide direction regarding which aspects of the workplace may be most relevant for this workforce and how these areas may be targeted for change.

[Predictors of Burnout, Job Satisfaction, and Turnover in Behavior Technicians Working with Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)

Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders 6, May 2019

Identifying predictors of turnover may be beneficial to service providers as it gives providers areas to address proactively to reduce turnover. Pertinent information may be gleaned from

research on predictors of turnover and burnout in other demanding professions, like child welfare workers (DePanfilis and Zlotnik 2008; Kim and Kao 2014), direct-care staff in services for individuals with intellectual disability (ID) and DD (Gray and Muramatsu 2013; Hatton et al. 2001), and special education teachers (Billingsley 2004; Brunsting et al. 2014); however, working specifically with individuals with ASD poses unique challenges. For instance, teachers working with children with ASD have been found to experience greater levels of burnout in comparison to teachers working with children with ID and children who are deaf (Zarafshan et al. 2013).

### Career Pathways and Progression

[Career progression for autistic people: A scoping review](#)

Autism 28(11), 2024

Many autistic people are unemployed. Of those who are employed, many are in roles that do not reflect their skills, qualifications and/or capabilities, and little is known about how autistic people progress throughout their careers. This study aimed to review and synthesise the existing evidence about career progression for autistic people. In total, 33 studies met the criteria for inclusion, though no study directly aimed to explore the topic. Our findings suggest that underemployment is common within the autistic population.

[Access to employment: A comparison of autistic, neurodivergent and neurotypical adults' experiences of hiring processes in the United Kingdom](#)

Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice 27(6), 2023

LAY ABSTRACT: Autistic people are less likely to have a job than non-autistic people. One reason for this may be that hiring processes (e.g. job applications, interviews) can be challenging for autistic people. To better understand the experiences of



hiring processes in the United Kingdom, we asked 225 autistic, 64 neurodivergent (but not autistic) and 64 adults with no reported area of neurodivergence questions about their experiences using an online survey. We found a range of similarities and differences in responses. For example, participants in all three groups were frustrated with the focus on social skills in recruitment and said they wanted more practical methods (e.g. work trials) that help them show their skills and abilities. Autistic and otherwise neurodivergent participants discussed the importance of the environment (e.g. the interview/assessment room) in improving experiences

### Education and training

#### Navigating medical school with autism: a systematic review exploring student experiences & support provision in the United Kingdom

BMC Medical Education 25(1), 2025

Background: Medical education is inherently demanding, requiring students to navigate academically challenging courses, high-stake assessments, clinical training and interpersonal interactions within high stress environments. Autistic medical students can experience profound differences academically and professionally if their support needs are not identified and addressed by specific pedagogic adaptations. This systematic review aims to explore the experiences and support provision for autistic undergraduate medical students in the United Kingdom, through a critical interpretive review of the literature.

#### Training and Educational Pathways for Clinicians (Post-graduation) for the Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Scoping Review Abstract only\*

Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders 55(1), 2025

This review aimed to identify the post-graduation training pathways available for both clinicians and trainers in the

assessment and diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The study was guided by two research questions: What is known about ASD-specific educational, training, or other pathways available to support clinicians of any discipline, post-graduation, to meet the required expertise relevant to assessments of ASD concerns? What is known about the educational pathways available to clinicians seeking to provide training to other clinicians, post-graduation, in the assessment of ASD concerns?

#### Online-formatted training for ABA practitioners: a systematic review

International Journal of Developmental Disabilities 71(4), 2025  
Practitioners working in the field of applied behavior analysis (ABA), play a vital role in meeting the needs of individuals with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disorders. Due to the lack of highly qualified practitioners required to provide ABA-based interventions, particularly in rural areas, many individuals are not receiving adequate services. Online training utilizing internet-based technology can provide staff training in a cost and time-effective way. This systematic review evidence synthesis examined the reported research on online-formatted training for ABA practitioners.

#### Strategies for supporting neurodivergent nursing students in practice placements Abstract only\*

Nursing Standard, 2025

Neurodivergent conditions include autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia. An increasing number of people with these conditions are entering higher education. Neurodivergent nursing students may experience increased challenges during their practice placements and require reasonable adjustments to be made. Despite the best intentions of staff, these students' placement experiences and outcomes can be adversely affected, and without appropriate



support they may become less likely to engage with some learning opportunities.

### Building Capacity: A Systematic Review of Training in the Diagnosis of Autism for Community-Based Clinicians

Autism Research 18(4), 2025

In an effort to reduce the "waitlist crisis," researchers have developed training programs to educate community-based clinicians in best-practice autism diagnostic assessments. This systematic review aims to synthesize the effectiveness and implementation outcomes of such trainings.

### Autistic Students' Experiences of Employment and Employability Support while Studying at a UK University Abstract only\*

Autism in Adulthood 7(2), 2025

Background: Studying at a university can provide students with better opportunities of employment. However, autistic people are more likely to be unemployed after graduating than their non-autistic peers. Many university programs include integral internships/placements that require students to engage with the world of work including recruitment and selection processes. While it is known that autistic people often face difficulties in workplace settings generally, this study sought to explore how autistic students at a high-ranking UK university experienced work and employment processes and settings.

### Effects of learning disability and autism training on healthcare professionals' perspectives and practice: a scoping review

Abstract only\*

Learning Disability Practice 27(4), 2024

It has been identified that healthcare professionals' knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in practice are significant factors in the health inequalities experienced by people with learning disabilities and autistic people. Lack of awareness of the adjustments that may be required in communication and to

support autonomous decision-making can lead to suboptimal treatment outcomes and avoidable deaths. This article presents a scoping review that aimed to examine the research on learning disability and autism education and training for healthcare professionals and how this may affect their perspectives and practice.

### Time to level up: A systematic review of interventions aiming to reduce stigma toward autistic people Abstract only\*

Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice 28(4), 2024: LAY ABSTRACT: How non-autistic people think about autistic people impacts autistic people negatively. Many studies developed trainings to reduce autism stigma. The existing trainings vary a lot in terms of study design, content, and reported effectiveness. This means that a review studying how the studies have been conducted is needed. We also looked at the quality of these studies.

### Contributing to an inclusive education for neurodivergent students: sharing reflections, practices, and experiences

Abstract only\*

FEMS Microbiology Letters 371, 2024

It is estimated that one in seven individuals, more than 15% of the population in the UK, are neurodivergent. In recent years, there has been a notable increase in university students disclosing disabilities, specific learning difficulties, or mental health conditions. Despite this, students with disabilities and learning differences often experience lower levels of well-being compared to their peers, and their completion rates are significantly lower. Two years ago, I was tasked with creating a training program for academic staff to enhance their support for neurodivergent students. In this commentary, I share reflections on what I have learned while developing this training, and I outline effective strategies and approaches that can be implemented in the design and delivery of educational content.

### Disability Education for Health Personnel and Impact on Health Outcomes for Persons with Autism: A Scoping Review Abstract only\*

Teaching and Learning in Medicine, 2024

Autism manifests in various progressive, fluctuating, or static differences that may be disabling. This requires healthcare staff to provide individualized, culturally competent care for autistic people (AP). However, staff are underprepared since disability curricula are not universally implemented, which may exacerbate health disparities for AP. The Alliance for Disability in Health Care Education (ADHCE) delineated staff competencies to address disparities. The purpose of this review was to describe what is known about disability education initiatives and health-related outcomes for AP.

### The pillars of inclusive education for students with ASD: a scoping review based on the case of Spain

International Journal of Developmental Disabilities 70(8), 2024

The inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has been a complicated, controversial and widely discussed issue amongst the countries of the Western world. The aim of this scoping review is to explore the topic of inclusion of students ASD in Spain as this is illustrated in the international literature. Empirical studies conducted in Spain in the past two decades, which are published in international peer-reviewed journals, were reviewed.

### Medical student perceptions of autism education: A qualitative study

Frontiers in Rehabilitation Sciences 4, 2023

Background: The global prevalence of autism is reported to be at least 1% and is rising. Autistic people have a range of comorbidities resulting in a high use of health services. Doctors of nearly all specialties are likely to encounter autistic people in their practice. Autistic people report dissatisfactory care and

encounter disproportionately worse health-related outcomes than non-autistic people, which in part has been attributed to a lack of skill and awareness in the medical workforce. At present, autism education is not always included in undergraduate medical curricula. In England, the Department of Health and Social Care has mandated that autism education should be included in all undergraduate medical curricula but current evidence relating to the delivery and receipt of autism education is poor.

### Autism Training for Law Enforcement Officers: A Scoping Review Full text available with NHS OpenAthens account\*

Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders 53(10), 2023

Law enforcement officers are the primary individuals called and who respond to situations of heightened concern. They make split-second observations and decisions based on how best to react to given safety situations and those involved.

Characteristics of autism spectrum disorders (ASD), if not properly understood and reacted to, may quickly escalate a law enforcement officer call in a negative way, making autism training for law enforcement officers imperative. To ascertain what is known about autism training for law enforcement officers, a scoping review was conducted. Five studies met final inclusion criteria.

### Development, delivery, and evaluation of a training program for the early identification of autism: Monitoring of Social Attention, Interaction, and Communication

Frontiers in Neurology 14, July 2023

The early identification and support of Autistic infants and children is critical as it can result in improved outcomes for children and families (10, 20, 39, 40). This paper describes how the study team designed the MoSAIC program to train the entire Victorian MCH workforce to: improve competency in the early identification of autism; use an autism specific early identification tool – the SACS-R; initiate conversations about autism screening

and a child's 'likelihood' for autism; and refer infants and children with a high likelihood of autism for supports, services, and further assessment.

### Knowledge of autism gained by learning from people through a local UK Autism Champion Network: A health and social care professional perspective

Autism 27(8), May 2023

This study has highlighted the value professionals who work with autistic people and their families place on developing different kinds of knowledge to improve their practice. In particular, the benefits of learning from people, colleagues and autistic individuals, were emphasised. In order to develop a real understanding of the impact of day-to-day living with autism, interacting with autistic individuals outside the therapeutic relationship was the most powerful. Therefore, developing knowledge of autistic people above developing knowledge of autism is what appeared useful. To accommodate this, engagement in an Autism Champion Network such as this could be considered as an adjunct to traditional training and e-learning on autism for Tier 2 and above.

### Medical student perceptions of autism education: A qualitative study

Frontiers in Rehabilitation Sciences 4, February 2023

Background: The global prevalence of autism is reported to be at least 1% and is rising. Autistic people have a range of comorbidities resulting in a high use of health services. Doctors of nearly all specialties are likely to encounter autistic people in their practice. Autistic people report dissatisfactory care and encounter disproportionately worse health-related outcomes than non-autistic people, which in part has been attributed to a lack of skill and awareness in the medical workforce. At present, autism education is not always included in undergraduate medical curricula. In England, the Department of Health and Social Care

has mandated that autism education should be included in all undergraduate medical curricula but current evidence relating to the delivery and receipt of autism education is poor. [...] This qualitative study sought to explore the perceptions of autism education in final year medical students at a medical school in South-East England.

### Developing an e-learning curriculum to educate healthcare staff in the acute hospital setting about autism

British Journal of Nursing 31(17), September 2023

When attending acute hospital settings, autistic children and adults rely on health professionals and ancillary staff to interact with them appropriately to facilitate accurate diagnoses and management of health concerns. Health outcomes for autistic people are adversely affected by comorbidities as well as difficulties in accessing and navigating acute healthcare environments. These factors demonstrate a need to develop targeted education for healthcare staff working in the acute hospital setting. This article discusses the background to the project, including the results of a literature review that highlighted some of the difficulties this patient group experiences in accessing health care.

### Developing undergraduate autism education for medical students: a qualitative study

BMJ Paediatrics Open 6(1), August 2022

Background: Autistic adults and children experience considerable health inequalities and have high rates of premature mortality, hospital admissions and emergency department visits. This is in part due to a lack of autism awareness in the healthcare and social care workforce. A new educational programme, Time for Autism (TfA), for medical students is being developed to address this challenge. This qualitative study was undertaken to support the development of the new programme in order to (1) understand the medical care

experiences of parents of autistic children and (2) assess their views on the acceptability of the new TfA programme and willingness to be involved.

Assessing Interdisciplinary Trainees' Objective and Self-Reported Knowledge of Autism Spectrum Disorder and Confidence in Providing Services Full text available with NHS OpenAthens account\*  
Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders 52, March 2021  
The importance of accurate identification and high-quality intervention for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is indisputable. Clinicians from multiple professions need adequate knowledge of ASD to make appropriate referrals to specialists, conduct thorough evaluations, and provide effective interventions. ASD knowledge development for many professionals may start at the pre-service training level.

Examining unconscious bias embedded in provider language regarding children with autism Abstract only\*  
Nursing & Health Sciences 22(2), June 2019  
In healthcare settings, language used by healthcare providers can influence provider-patient encounters with individuals with autism spectrum disorder, impacting feelings of stigma and marginalization. This study highlights the unconscious biases healthcare providers might have regarding their patients with autism spectrum disorder and how those beliefs are articulated.

Healthcare Providers' Experiences with Autism: A Scoping Review Full text available with NHS OpenAthens account\*  
Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders 49, February 2019  
Gaps in research knowledge exist regarding patient-provider interactions with individuals with autism in healthcare settings. To address this, a scoping review was conducted focusing on

the experiences of healthcare professionals working with individuals with autism.

An Interprofessional Education Initiative for Allied Health Students Preparing to Serve Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders Abstract only\*  
Journal of Allied Health 47(2), June 2018  
The need for effective services for persons with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is driving efforts to better prepare teams of allied health professionals. To address this need, an interprofessional graduate course was piloted with students from three allied health professions: physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech-language pathology. The course aims were to address knowledge and competency in the field of ASD and to promote interprofessional abilities during entry-level preparation.

### Lived experience

"I am afraid of being treated badly if I show it": A cross-sectional study of healthcare accessibility and Autism Health Passports among UK Autistic adults  
PloS One 19(5), 2024  
BACKGROUND: Autistic people are more likely to experience stigma, communication barriers and anxiety during healthcare. Autism Health Passports (AHPs) are a communication tool that aim to provide information about healthcare needs in a standardised way. They are recommended in research and policy to improve healthcare quality., AIM: To explore views and experiences of AHPs among Autistic people from the UK who have been pregnant.

How healthcare systems are experienced by autistic adults in the United Kingdom: A meta-ethnography  
Autism 28(9), 2024  
Autistic adults are at increased risk of both mental and physical

health difficulties, and yet can face barriers to accessing healthcare. A meta-ethnographic approach was used to conduct a review of the existing literature regarding autistic adults' experiences of accessing healthcare. Four databases were systematically searched for qualitative and mixed-method studies reporting on the experiences of autistic adults without a co-occurring learning disability accessing adult healthcare services within the United Kingdom. Fifteen studies met the inclusion criteria, and seven steps were used to systematically extract the data and then generate novel themes. Three superordinate themes were identified: Professionals' lack of knowledge can be damaging, Need to reduce processing demands and Adaptation to improve engagement. This review highlights the wide-reaching damaging impact misdiagnosis, inadequate or inappropriate treatment, overwhelming environments and inaccessible systems can have on the well-being and ability of autistic adults to engage with treatment. The lack of autism knowledge and understanding experienced in interactions with healthcare professionals, along with autistic adult's own communication and sensory processing differences, demonstrates the need for widely delivered training co-produced with autistic adults alongside bespoke and person-centred adaptations.

### Experiences of Sensory Overload and Communication Barriers by Autistic Adults in Health Care Settings

Autism in Adulthood 4(1), March 2022

Background: Autistic adults have an elevated risk of many health problems compared with the general population, making health care access extra critical. Unfortunately, autistic people often find health care settings quite aversive, and many medical providers report feeling unsure about how to interact with autistic patients. We aimed at characterizing specific challenges regarding sensory experiences and communicative barriers in health care settings.

### Barriers and Benefits Experienced by Caregivers Seeking Medical Care for Their Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: a Qualitative Meta-synthesis Abstract only\*

Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders 10, February 2022

Themes were generated related to caregiver challenges, positive experiences, and suggestions to improve medical care. We suggest additional training of medical professionals, an interdisciplinary approach to care, more support for caregivers, and increased adaptability of the medical environment. Implications for practice, limitations, and future research directions are discussed to ensure the highest quality care to support the needs of children with ASD and their caregivers.

### Barriers to Accessing Healthcare: Perspectives from Autistic Adults and Carers Abstract only\*

Qualitative Health Research 32(2), December 2021

Autistic adults have higher health needs compared to most, yet they continue to experience barriers to accessing appropriate healthcare. Elements such as support, responsibilities and protective factors exhibited by caregivers, may impact healthcare access for autistic adults. Results indicate the need for further research exploring interdependent factors that impact healthcare access by caregivers, so evidence-based interventions can be developed to support caregivers in the future.

### Healthcare service use patterns among autistic adults: A systematic review with narrative synthesis Abstract only\*

Autism 26(2), December 2021

Autistic adults often experience barriers to healthcare that can cause their healthcare service use to be unique from other populations. We conducted a systematic review to gather the most recent evidence about how often autistic adults use five important healthcare services (the emergency department,



hospitalization, outpatient mental health, preventive services, and primary care) compared to populations of non-autistic adults.

[“We were on our own”: Mothers’ experiences navigating the fragmented system of professional care for autism](#) Abstract only\*  
Social Science & Medicine 215, October 2018

This article draws on data from a survey of 620 parents of autistic children, including 385 written narratives, to examine the experiences of mothers as they engage with this fragmented system of professional care for children with autism. Findings suggest that engagement with treatments sent families into a complex and confusing universe of diagnosis and treatment.

### Models of care

[‘It seems like a luxury to be able to offer that’: Factors influencing the implementation of annual health checks for autistic people in England](#)

Autism 28(3), July 2023

This study identified a series of potential barriers and facilitators to the implementation of autism-specific annual health checks (AHCs), as well as possible interventions that could encourage implementation. The barriers and facilitators outlined in phase 1 were categorised within five theoretical domains: environmental context and resources; knowledge; memory, attention and decision processes; skills and social and professional role and identity. Findings from phase 2 confirmed the perceived salience of these domains, and the potential utility of interventions targeting these issues. Indeed, while participants in phase 2 were generally enthusiastic about autism-specific AHCs, concerns were shared about the practical aspects of implementation, including a perceived limited capacity, and a lack of knowledge about autism. Based on these findings, we make recommendations for policy elements that cut across the

identified TDF domains to either circumvent barriers or unlock facilitators to providing autism-specific AHCs.

[Autistic SPACE: a novel framework for meeting the needs of autistic people in healthcare settings](#)

British Journal of Hospital Medicine, April 2023

Autistic people experience significant health disparities and reduced life expectancy. Barriers to accessing healthcare are associated with adverse health outcomes. Autism training and healthcare professionals' knowledge about autism is variable, and heterogeneity among autistic people leads to additional educational and clinical complexities. Autism remains nebulous for many practitioners, who are unclear about communication differences, access needs or life experiences common to autistic people. Healthcare environments can be challenging for all patients but autistic people may require specific accommodations to allow equitable access.

[Identifying Components of Autism Friendly Health Care: An Exploratory Study Using a Modified Delphi Method](#) Abstract only\*

Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics 44(1), January 2023

Autistic individuals report lower health care satisfaction. However, there is currently no set of "best practice" standards about caring for autistic individuals. In this exploratory study, we aim to identify features of Autism Friendly practice according to a sample consisting of mainly professionals whose interests include autism using a modified 3-round Delphi-a method that identifies a consensus view across subject participants.

[Views about primary care health checks for autistic adults: UK survey findings](#)

BJGP Open 6(4), December 2022

The findings suggest strong support from autistic people for a health check and provide useful information for its design and



delivery in primary care. The majority thought a health check should be available for all autistic people, irrespective of intellectual ability, and include consideration of personalised reasonable adjustments to improve access to health care, with flexible delivery methods to maximise acceptability.

### For autistic persons by autistic persons: Acceptability of a structured peer support service according to key stakeholders

Health Expectations 26(1), November 2022

Introduction: Social support is a protective factor in the mental health of autistic people. Furthermore, prejudice regarding autistic people is a constraint for the development of social support programmes by autistic peers. Methods: The objective of this study is to describe the anticipated acceptability of structured peer support programmes for and by autistic persons. Fifteen key stakeholders (six autistic adults, four caregivers and five service providers) participated in in-depth semistructured interviews. A qualitative thematic analysis of the content of the verbatim was carried out.

### Co-design of an NHS primary care health check for autistic adults

Autism 27(4), November 2022

Autistic people are on average more likely to experience poor health than people who are not autistic. Health checks have been shown to improve access to effective healthcare. This study investigated people's views about a primary care health check for autistic adults. We held discussion groups and interviewed autistic adults, adults with intellectual disabilities, supporters and health professionals. People wanted the health check to look at a person's physical and mental health, and how they were doing socially.

### Models of community based integrated care for people with a learning disability and/or autism: evaluation findings from a national implementation programme

International Journal of Integrated Care, August 2019

The evaluation has directly engaged people with lived experience and their families through workshops and focus groups and has also sought perspectives from local and national representative groups and forums. We found that despite common endorsement of the integrated service model, there are continued gaps in care and support: receiving integrated care was not a common experience of most people and their families.

## Ways of working

### Strategies used by the nursing team in the care of autistic children and adolescents: An integrative review Abstract only\*

Journal of Pediatric Nursing 82, 2025

PROBLEM: Nurses play a crucial role in monitoring children's growth and development and play a vital role in healthcare facilities, where their presence is constant, providing uninterrupted care and support. The aim of this review to identify the strategies used by the nursing team in caring for autistic children and adolescents.

### To understand the experiences of autistic counsellors: A United Kingdom phenomenological study

Counselling and Psychotherapy Research 25(2), 2025

Aim: The study was designed to explore the experiences of autistic counsellors living and working in the United Kingdom (UK). The research question was split into four aims: exploring presenting differences, strategies and modalities preferences, challenges and barriers, and training and support needs.

### [A survey of assessment practices among health professionals diagnosing females with autism](#)

Research in Developmental Disabilities 135, April 2023

This study has identified a number of potential issues with the assessment process which may be contributing to the challenges of diagnosing females with autism. The most commonly used measures to assess females with autism by health practitioners have been informed by an understanding of the male autism phenotype (Kreiser & White, 2014), and training in the assessment of autism in females is limited or non-existent during University studies which undermines confidence in early career health professionals. This combination of factors has helped sustain the phenomena of misdiagnosis and under-identification of autism in females. Further development of screening tools such as the CAT-Q (Hull et al., 2019) or the Q-ASC (Ormond et al., 2018) may help assist in the assessment process if their ability to identify female-specific autistic traits can be established.

### [Expectations and Concerns about the Use of Telemedicine for Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Cross-Sectional Survey of Parents and Healthcare Professionals](#)

Journal of Clinical Medicine 11(12), June 2022

Telemedicine has recently been used for diagnosis and interventions inpatients with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), traditionally performed in-person, but little attention has been paid to user expectations prior to its use. The aim of this study is to compare the expectations and concerns of 50 healthcare professionals and 45 parents of children with ASD regarding the use of telemedicine for diagnostic or treatment purposes

### [Recognising autism in healthcare](#)

British Journal of Hospital Medicine 82(12), December 2021

Recognition of autism and the associated co-occurring physical and mental health issues has increased over recent years. However, undergraduate and postgraduate curricula take time to

adapt and to impact on what is delivered in training so healthcare professionals, including doctors, report little training on these topics. Doctors need to know when someone might be autistic in order to respond to them appropriately. This article sets out the reasons why recognition of autism is important and the positive impacts of recognising and understanding autism on health outcomes, service delivery and patient experience. The negative consequences of not recognising autism or understanding the impact of autistic traits on the person are also explored. A companion article then covers how practice can be made more appropriate for autistic people to improve outcomes.

### [Development and preliminary evaluation of a novel physician-report tool for assessing barriers to providing care to autistic patients](#)

BMC Health Services Research 21(873), August 2021

Background: Individuals on the autism spectrum face significant disparities in health and physicians often report difficulties in providing care to autistic patients. In order to improve the quality of care autistic individuals receive, it is important to identify the barriers that physicians experience in providing care so that these may be addressed. This paper reports the initial development and preliminary evaluation of a physician-report 'Barriers to Providing Healthcare' measurement tool.

### [How to improve healthcare for autistic people: A qualitative study of the views of autistic people and clinicians](#) Abstract only\*

Autism 25(3), 2021

Research has shown that on average, autistic people are more likely to die earlier than non-autistic people, and barriers can stop autistic people accessing healthcare. We carried out a study where we interviewed healthcare professionals (including doctors and nurses), and held discussion groups of autistic people. Our results highlighted several key points: seeing the same professional is important for autistic people and clinicians;

both clinicians and autistic people think making adjustments to healthcare is important (and often possible); autistic people process information in a different way and so may need extra support in appointments; and that clinicians are often constrained by time pressures or targets.

### A Systematic Review of Healthcare Professionals' Knowledge, Self-Efficacy and Attitudes Towards Working with Autistic People

Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders 9, May 2021

This paper systematically reviewed the quantitative literature exploring healthcare professionals' knowledge, self-efficacy and attitudes to autism and providing care for autistic people. The resulting evidence suggests that many of these professionals report only moderate levels of knowledge and self-efficacy in their practice, and often lack autism-specific training in their professional education. Although there is some variation in results between countries and the periods of diagnostic change from the early 2000s to the present day, limited knowledge and a lack of comfort and self-efficacy in working with autistic people may continue to be a significant barrier for autistic people accessing healthcare.

### Autism spectrum disorder and complex healthcare needs: The role of healthcare experiences

Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders 74, May 2020

Parents of children with an autism diagnosis frequently described the excessive costs and inordinate amount of time associated with coordinating autism – specific treatments. These ongoing sources of stress have adverse effects on parents' personal wellbeing. Findings suggest that the systems of care aimed at improving outcomes for children with autism may, in fact, negatively affect their parents. Further research is necessary to evaluate the degree to which system – level variables affect the relationship between autism severity and parental wellbeing.

### The experiences, views, and needs of health professionals who provide care to adults on the autism spectrum Abstract only\*

Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities 7(2), April 2020

The aim of this research was to describe the experiences, views, and needs of health professionals providing care to adults on the spectrum. 78 health professionals, 42 from disability-specific or autism-specific settings, across Australia completed an online survey about providing health care to adults on the autism spectrum.

### Delivering allied health services to regional and remote participants on the autism spectrum via video-conferencing technology: Lessons learned

Rural & Remote Health, July 2019

Given that overall staff attraction and retention issues are reported to be exacerbated in regional and remote areas of Australia, it is important to seek innovative ways of supporting individuals on the autism spectrum in their local communities. Technology has the potential to provide a timely and low-cost alternative that extends access to specialist services for people in remote locations.

## Workforce Planning

### Developing the allied health professionals workforce within mental health, learning disability and autism inpatient services: rapid review of learning from quality and safety incidents

BMJ Quality & Safety 34(6), 2025

BACKGROUND: Allied health professionals (AHPs) in inpatient mental health, learning disability and autism services work in cultures dominated by other professions who often poorly understand their roles. Furthermore, identified learning from safety incidents often lacks focus on AHPs and research is

needed to understand how AHPs contribute to safe care in these services.

### Expanding and developing the workforce to serve autistic people and people with intellectual disability

The British Psychological Society, 2024

This paper considers current workforce issues facing psychological professionals working in NHS services, examining the challenges, and identifying opportunities to better meet the needs of autistic people and people with an intellectual disability (PwID) across the lifespan. The aim of this paper is to identify and publicly articulate the need for a coherent approach to guide the practice of psychological professionals when helping autistic people and/or PwID. It should be noted that the scope of the paper is limited to autism and intellectual disability. In addressing these broad groups and their co-occurring conditions and needs, we anticipate that many principles could be applied to other neurodevelopmental conditions.

### Autistic nurses: do they exist?

British Journal of Nursing, February 2023

Autism spectrum disorder is an increasing diagnosis on a global scale. Despite limitations related to the diagnosis, many people with autism are active in the workforce, often within the health care sector. It is reasonable to assume that some of those are nurses. There are very few examples of nurses with autism in the literature, mostly in non-scientific contexts, and that these mention both autism-related strengths and limitations at work. A conclusion is that research about nurses with autism is almost non-existent, and it is high time to conduct explorative research in this area. If employers are given the knowledge and the ability to support the needs of nurses with autism, it is likely to benefit the health of the individual nurse, the psychosocial working climate and patient safety.

### Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental healthcare and services: results of a UK survey of front-line staff working with people with intellectual disability and/or autism

BJPsych Bulletin 46(4), May 2021

Aims and method: Mental health services have changed the way they operate during the COVID-19 pandemic. We investigated the challenges and innovations reported by staff working in services for people with intellectual disability and/or autism in National Health Service (NHS) and non-NHS sectors, and in in-patient and community settings.

### Systematic Review: United States Workforce for Autism-Related Child Healthcare Services Abstract only\*

Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry 59(1), January 2020

Across provider categories, we found that workforce availability for autism-related services was limited in terms of overall numbers, time available, and knowledgeability. The greatest unmet need was observed among minorities and in rural settings. Most studies were short term, were limited in scope, and used convenience samples.

### Barriers to Healthcare for Persons with Autism: A Systematic Review of the Literature and Development of A Taxonomy

Abstract only\*

Developmental Neurorehabilitation 23(7), January 2020

Barriers to healthcare access for persons with autism are prevalent and occur at the patient, provider, and system levels. The taxonomy developed may facilitate measurement of barriers within health-care facilities and prompt identification of areas where interventions are warranted to improve care.

### Care Coordination of Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Solution-Focused Approach Abstract only\*

Issues in Mental Health Nursing 41(2), July 2019

The expanding practice of multi-disciplinary care to address the complex nature of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) suggests that there is a need for a means of coordinating care that transcends the disciplinary distinctions of relevant ASD treatment providers. As ASD services become more specialized, there is a growing need for effective care coordination with providers across the systems of care. Nursing professionals are ideally qualified to support families affected by ASD, as they provide a necessary holistic lens of health and wellbeing to obtain the appropriate treatments. Solution-focused brief therapy has been applied to a growing number of clinical settings, indicating solution-focused techniques are applicable to the various contexts associated with ASD treatments. We provide a case presentation to demonstrate a solution-focused approach to address ASD-related concerns within the family that are generalizable to coordination of care.

### Inconsistent staffing and its impact on service delivery in ASD early-intervention Abstract only\*

Research in Developmental Disabilities 63, April 2017

Findings suggest that lacking a consistent staffing structure is problematic when attempting to provide high quality early intervention services to children with ASD and suggest that future research should investigate the extent of inconsistent staffing, impacts of inconsistent staffing on providing intervention, and develop a range of tools to help measure these effects.

## Workplaces

### How can I support a neurodivergent colleague?

BMJ 389(8460), 2025

There are many ways that you can help make workplaces feel more inclusive, hears Abi Rimmer.

### Reasonable adjustments for autistic clinicians: A qualitative study

PloS One 20(3), 2025

Autistic people experience barriers to accessing healthcare. Autistic clinical professionals may be able to help improve this situation. Previous research, however, has shown that Autistic clinical professionals experience numerous challenges in the workplace. If there is a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on the person's ability to do normal daily activities, then Autism may be considered a disability under The Equality Act 2010; the jurisdiction of which covers Great Britain. Autistic clinical professionals working in healthcare settings across England, Wales, and Scotland are therefore entitled to reasonable adjustments to aid them in their clinical practice.

### Neurodivergence among healthcare professionals and implications for midwifery: A literature review

New Zealand College of Midwives Journal 2024(60), 2024

Background: Societal awareness of neurodivergence is increasing and diagnostic pathways are becoming more accurate; more people are therefore pursuing assessments, often later in life. Health professionals, including midwives, may also be traversing this journey of self-discovery. Overseas estimates suggest that neurominorities may account for as much as 20% of the general population; this is a significant minority group. The healthcare professions require empathy and social skills, and neurodivergent (ND) people may be seen as unsuitable due to deficits in diagnostic, cognitive and



communication skills. Research bias in favour of white males, alongside pervasive stereotypes, has contributed to the underdiagnosis of ND women and gender-diverse people. As a predominately female workforce, including ND colleagues will inevitably become more relevant to the midwifery workforce in the future. Aim(s): This integrative literature review asks: what is known about the workplace experiences of ND healthcare professionals? The intention is to reflect on the possible ramifications for midwives in Aotearoa New Zealand, and to establish a rationale for future research.

Creating a diversity climate in the workplace: A mixed methods study into knowledge of autism and attitudes toward hiring autistic people in the United Kingdom Abstract only\*

Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation 61(2), 2024

BACKGROUND: Autistic individuals face challenges accessing employment, particularly as a result of limited knowledge and understanding of autism. OBJECTIVE(S): This mixed methods study aimed to measure levels of knowledge of autism and examine hiring attitudes in the workplace.

An exploration into the prevalence and experience of neurodiversity among staff at a UK high-secure psychiatric hospital Abstract only\*

Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health : CBMH 34(6),2024

BACKGROUND: Whilst there is increasing recognition and interest in how staff who have neurodivergence are represented and contribute to industry, to date, there has been very little exploration of neurodivergence among healthcare staff and none with those working in forensic psychiatric services., AIMS: To estimate the prevalence of neurodivergence among staff working in a UK high-secure psychiatric hospital and explore their experiences., METHODS: All staff were invited to complete a confidential online self-report questionnaire consisting of both closed and open questions.

Physical workplace adjustments to support neurodivergent workers: A systematic review

Applied Psychology 73(3), 2024

Derived from the concept of neurodiversity, neurodivergence is an umbrella term for various conditions such as Autism-Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD), Dyslexia, or Dyspraxia, which affect approximately 22% of the population. Sensory difficulties and overload are a common symptom. The provision of physical workplace adjustments for neurodivergent workers, such as workplace design solutions, has become popular in practice, yet their utility remains unsubstantiated. This review evaluates the evidence for physical workplace adjustments and their link to occupational longevity, performance and health/well-being in neurodivergent workers.



## eLearning

### The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism

NHS England and Skills for Care, September 2023

The training is named after Oliver McGowan. Oliver was a young man whose death shone a light on the need for health and social care staff to have better skills, knowledge and understanding of the needs for autistic people and people with a learning disability.

### Supporting Neurodivergent Learners and Staff

NHS Learning Hub, 2024

Include two courses:

- Understanding and supporting neurodivergent learners and staff
- Supporting assessment of Neurodivergent learners and staff

## Competency Frameworks

### Autism advanced practice area specific capability and curriculum framework

NHS England Centre for Advancing Practice, 2023

This area specific framework is suitable for practitioners who provide health and social care services to autistic children, young people and adults of all ages. It defines advanced practice core capabilities relevant to all those in the multi-professional team and underpins specialist areas of practice at advanced practice level. It aims to improve the lives of autistic people by co-producing a sustainable, robust and capable workforce to support autistic people to live a healthy, safe and rewarding life.

### The Capability Framework for Autism Peer Support Workers

Health Education England, July 2022

The development of new autism peer support worker roles is an exciting opportunity for health service providers to harness the skills and lived experiences of autistic people, who, as part of the workforce will offer peer support to help other autistic people to maintain their wellbeing. It is hoped that many commissioners and service providers who are developing new specialist autism teams will embrace these new roles and embed them within the fabric of future services and that this document will support them with their workforce development journey. Universities and training providers may also find this framework important and helpful in planning education and training. (See also: [Autism Peer Support Worker Curriculum](#).)

### Core Capabilities Framework for Supporting People with a Learning Disability

Skills for Health, Health Education England and NHS England, 2019

This revised framework builds on its predecessor outlining the capabilities that a whole workforce, across both health and social care, need to have to successfully enable people with a learning disability to reach their fullest potential and live meaningful lives. It covers twenty five capabilities conveniently divided into 5 domains and arranged in tiers of complexity depending on individual roles. It gives the desired learning outcomes for each topic and links to key references and documents that will be valuable to those planning training or curriculum content. Importantly it recognises and encourages transferability of knowledge and skills between sectors, encouraging the necessary integration between health and social care that this group of people particularly will benefit from.

### Core Capabilities Framework for Supporting Autistic People

Skills for Health, Health Education England and NHS England, 2019

This framework has been coproduced with autistic people of all ages and their families in a spirit of collaboration. The framework covers 19 capabilities arranged in 5 domains in tiers of complexity depending on individual roles. It gives links to key references and documents that will be valuable to those planning training or curriculum content. Importantly it recognises and encourages transferability of knowledge and skills between sectors, encouraging the necessary integration between education, health and social care that this group of people particularly will benefit from.