



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

AUTISM INTERIM STRATEGY 2021-2022

Summary Version

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Department of Health

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AUTISM – INTERIM STRATEGY 2021-2022

Introduction

The interim Autism Strategy sets out priorities for action throughout 2021-2022 with the focussed aim of improving the lives of people with autism, their families and carers by enhancing access to service provision and support, increasing understanding of their specific needs and strengthening partnership working within our communities.

The actions which will be delivered as a result of this strategy are based upon the key priorities that you have told us can make a difference. We recognise that the success of implementing actions can only be determined through the influence of the people to which they apply, therefore it is essential that the development of actions will provide opportunity for collaborative working and co-production. Underpinning this will be our vision for the interim autism strategy:

To respect, to listen, to involve.

The Strategy seeks to demonstrate a societal commitment to supporting and understanding the needs of autistic people, their families and carers and will also be used to inform comprehensive planning of service provision across the wider public sector and partnerships beyond, and for anyone with a role to play in leading and implementing change with the aim of improving outcomes for autistic people, their families and carers.

This document has been created as a shortened version of the Autism - Interim Strategy 2021-2022 which can be viewed on the Department of Health Website.

STRATEGIC OUTCOMES 2021-2022

To respect, to listen, to involve.

Strategic Outcome 1

A healthy life with access to services on an equal and timely basis.

We will provide improved pathways of care enabling timely access to early intervention and support which best meets emotional and wellbeing needs for individuals and families.

Strategic Outcome 2

A life with opportunities to live as an active citizen.

We will support autistic people, their families and carers as they participate in all aspects of community and society through continued support in education and employment and as they transition throughout life stages.

Strategic Outcome 3

An independent life supported by greater societal understanding and choices.

We will provide opportunity for autistic people to live safe and independent lives within our communities and have equal access to services where they are met with respect and understanding.

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 1

A HEALTHY LIFE WITH ACCESS TO SERVICES ON AN EQUAL AND TIMELY BASIS

We will provide improved pathways of care enabling timely access to early intervention and support which best meets emotional and wellbeing needs for individuals and families.

What you told us:

- That there should be standardised regional services with equity of access across the Health and Social Care sector;
- Early intervention and personalised support for families is a key support and should not be based upon diagnosis;
- There should be equity in provision of Adult Autism Services across the region; and
- Good mental health is critical to autistic people and their families and services must be more accessible.

This is what we will do:

- We will implement a new framework of care to deliver a proactive, integrated and streamlined pathway for children and young people across the region and provide a range of early intervention approaches and support to meet their needs and that of their families and carers;
- A review of Adult Autism Services will be undertaken to determine how future, sustainable provision of care and support can be standardised across the regions; and

- Mental Health service pathways and structures will be improved following the implementation of a new ten year mental health strategy. This will provide better access to support for autistic people, their families and carers throughout their lives.

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 2

A LIFE WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO LIVE AS AN ACTIVE CITIZEN.

We will support autistic people, their families and carers as they participate in all aspects of community and society through continued support in education and employment and as they transition through life stages.

What you told us:

- Greater integration between education and health is needed;
- Our education sector must be equipped with a greater understanding of the needs of autistic people and how they react to the environment around them;
- A wider range of choices for education and employment post 16 should be provided;
- That employers should have an understanding of the needs of autistic people and how they should be supported in their working life;
- There should be a streamlined whole life approach to transitions planning to ensure that autistic people are supported throughout their lives;
- There should be greater focus on assisting autistic people to develop life skills to support them at all stages of life; and
- Autistic people and their families should have greater involvement in the development of policy and services.

This is what we will do:

- We will support our children and young people by promoting emotional wellbeing, strengthening self-esteem and resilience with a strong focus on promotion, prevention and early intervention;
- Through the phased implementation of a new Special Education Needs (SEN) Framework we will improve participation and empowerment for all children going through the SEN assessment process. We will ensure that autistic people are supported throughout their education;
- We will deliver focussed training that will enable our workforce to respond to the specific needs of people with autism and how they view their environment;
- We will actively and meaningfully engage autistic people and their families in the co-design of new employment and skills supports;
- We will have well planned, whole life transitions to ensure that autistic people are supported throughout their lives;
- We will provide more responsive support and development of skills to enhance employment opportunity; and
- We will develop and co-produce policy and services, as appropriate, in collaboration with autistic people, their families and carers to enable lived experience to shape future services.

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 3

AN INDEPENDENT LIFE SUPPORTED BY GREATER SOCIETAL UNDERSTANDING AND CHOICES.

We will provide opportunity for autistic people to live safe and independent lives within our communities and have equal access to services where they are met with respect and understanding.

What you told us:

- Greater awareness and understanding of the needs of people with autism is required within our communities and across all sectors;
- Emphasis should be placed on signposting to services and assistance to financial support;
- More provision of supported living is required to enable autistic people to live independent lives; and
- There should be more focus on social inclusion and providing opportunity for autistic people and their families to socialise and integrate within our communities.

This is what we will do:

- We will provide training to equip the workforce, particularly those in our frontline services, with the skills to understand the needs of autistic people and how this impacts on a person's life and to provide surroundings where they can feel safe and supported within the environment;

- We will work in partnership to develop a new Supporting People Strategy to facilitate and deliver high quality housing support and promote independent living to those most in need; and
- We will provide opportunity within our communities to support autistic people and their families and enable them to experience greater social interaction and activity in an accessible way and feel connected to their environment.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

How will we know the interim autism strategy is making a difference?

- The Cross-Departmental Autism Stakeholder Forum, chaired by the Department of Health, will provide strategic oversight of the implementation of the strategy and co-ordinate a monitoring and evaluation role to ensure that actions are included in commissioning plans for the health and social care sector and in the Programme for Government Delivery Plans and that they have been implemented. Evidence of the impact they are making will be sought on an annual basis.
- Through partnership working with Health and Social Care Trust regional multi-agency autism fora, comprised of multi-disciplinary clinicians, government departments, and autistic people and carers, the Department will attend forums on a quarterly basis as a reporting mechanism to seek views from stakeholders on the implementation and delivery of actions and the impact this is making on the lives of autistic people, their families and carers;
- The Special Educational Needs (SEN) Steering Group, jointly chaired by the Department of Education and the Department of Health will provide an oversight role and governance arrangements in monitoring implementation of the new SEN Framework and associated strategies and linkages to the development and implementation of the autism strategy throughout the period 2021-2028;
- The Department will provide an update report highlighting progress to the Committee for Health and to the All Party Group on Autism on an annual basis; and
- An evaluation of the implementation of the actions in the interim strategy will be undertaken, in consultation with autistic people, their families and carers, after a period of two years. This will ultimately inform a Progress Report to be presented to the Minister for Health to lay before the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2023 and will be shared on the Department of Health website.