

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 18 June 2025
11th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE2156: Improve access to ADHD diagnosis and treatment across Scotland

Introduction

Petitioner Terence Lloyd

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to urgently address undiagnosed and untreated ADHD by:

- developing a funded national ADHD strategy
- standardising ADHD diagnostic pathways
- reducing waiting times
- ensuring equitable access to ADHD diagnosis, treatment, and support across Scotland.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2156>

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 14 April 2025.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 1,409 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received a submission from the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport which is set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
June 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2156: Improve access to ADHD diagnosis and treatment across Scotland

Petitioner

Terence Lloyd

Date Lodged

14 April 2025

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to urgently address undiagnosed and untreated ADHD by:

- developing a funded national ADHD strategy
- standardising ADHD diagnostic pathways
- reducing waiting times
- ensuring equitable access to ADHD diagnosis, treatment, and support across Scotland.

Background information

Scotland faces a growing ADHD crisis, with years-long waiting times for diagnosis and treatment or no access at all due to regional funding disparities. Some areas have halted assessments entirely, leaving thousands in crisis. A postcode lottery has been created.

Untreated ADHD impacts mental health, relationships, and life opportunities. Testimonies reveal years of being passed between services, job losses, and severe mental health crises.

The Scottish Government must act urgently to:

- standardise diagnostic pathways for equitable access across Scotland
- fund services to reduce waiting times and improve capacity
- provide post-diagnostic support, including therapy and medication
- develop a national ADHD strategy to address the societal and individual impact of untreated ADHD.

Untreated ADHD is a social justice issue. Many cannot afford private diagnosis or care, making urgent action essential to end this postcode lottery and ensure fair access to ADHD services.

Annexe B: SPICe briefing on PE2156



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 sometimes 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.

Ben Adam
Researcher, SPICe
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

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C: Written submission

Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport written submission, 12 May 2025

PE2156/A: Improve access to ADHD diagnosis and treatment across Scotland

1. Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask[s] of the petition to be practical or achievable? If not, please explain why.

Some of the asks are achievable within current Scottish Government action plans. Funding is provided to health boards and universal services (such as educational services), but it is not specific to ADHD. The Scottish Government expects local services to provide support to people with ADHD within this funding envelope. It is worth noting that the Scottish Government's approach focuses on wider neurodivergent conditions, which includes ADHD.

- standardise diagnostic pathways for equitable access across Scotland

We are working to implement Adult Neurodevelopmental Pathways to increase access to pre and post diagnosis support and tools and standardise diagnostic pathways. The public consultation on the proposed Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill included discussion on statutory strategies, including national ones, on learning disabilities and neurodivergence, which if implemented would include ADHD.

Additionally, the Scottish Government's National Neurodevelopmental Specification for Children and Young People aims to ensure that children and families receive the support and access to services that meet their needs at the earliest opportunity, based on the GIRFEC approach. It sets out seven standards for services to support children and young people who have neurodevelopmental profiles with support needs and require more support than currently available.

2. What, if any, action the Scottish Government is currently taking to address the issues raised by this petition, and is any further action being considered that will achieve the ask[s] of this petition?

- **fund services to reduce waiting times and improve capacity**

This year, we are providing funding of £123.5 million to NHS Boards to support improvements across mental health services, including neurodevelopmental services. The Scottish Government expects each Board to have arrangements in place to ensure people waiting for an ADHD assessment are signposted to appropriate supports, and for Boards and children's services partners to work together to implement the National ND Specification.

We also provided a further almost £250,000 in 2024/25 to fund a range of individual projects aimed at improving neurodevelopmental assessment and support for children and young people.

Scottish Government officials are engaging with the Royal College of GPs (Scotland) to understand more about what could be done to support GPs to enter into voluntary

or shared care agreements. In response to a letter from officials in March, the Royal College has made a number of suggestions. Officials are currently considering these proposals.

- **provide post-diagnostic support, including therapy and medication**

The Scottish Government's £1 million per annum Autistic Adult Support Fund funds organisations that provide pre- and post-diagnostic support to adults with ADHD, especially where this co-occurs with autism. The current fund is due to run until October 2028.

- **standardise diagnostic pathways for equitable access across Scotland**

The Scottish Government has commissioned the National Autism Implementation Team (NAIT) to work with Health Boards to build a neurodevelopmentally informed workforce in Scotland. NAIT also listen to and work in partnership with neurodivergent people.

NAIT host an Adult Neurodevelopmental Pathway Professional Network to support clinical teams and have hosted a national 'learning from pathfinders event'. These forums highlight developments and innovation in relation to working towards stepped care pathways to meet the needs of autistic adults and those with ADHD, building on learning from 4 pathfinder sites funded by the Scottish Government and supported by NAIT.

NAIT also deliver professional learning and learning conversations through webinars, workshops, in-person training sessions, developing written resources, guidance and key messages.

- **develop a national ADHD strategy to address the societal and individual impact of untreated ADHD.**

The Scottish Government does not currently have any plans to develop and implement a specific national ADHD strategy.

However, we are currently continuing the development of proposals for a Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence (LDAN) Bill. We understand that ADHD is a form of neurodivergence. The Bill will aim to ensure that the rights of LDAN groups are better respected, protected and championed. One of the proposals consulted on is a national statutory LDAN strategy, supported by local statutory LDAN strategies and statutory guidance.

The next step for the Bill is to publish draft Bill provisions. These provisions will take into account insights and views gathered through the consultation process and a second phase of development with the three Bill Advisory Panels (including lived experience representation), which is currently underway.