

The ADHD Crisis in the UK - A Call to Action

BRIEFING NOTE

WHY ARE WE FACING AN ADHD CRISIS IN THE UK?

- NHS waiting times for ADHD diagnosis can be up to 8 years, leaving children and adults without the support they urgently need.
- An estimated 2.25 million people in the UK remain undiagnosed, leading to mental health crises, employment struggles, and preventable harm.
- 25% of UK prisoners have ADHD, with untreated symptoms contributing to impulsivity, crime, and reoffending.
- ADHD is a leading factor in school exclusions, with many children misdiagnosed or left unsupported, affecting their education and future prospects.

THE FINANCIAL BURDEN OF INACTION

Failing to diagnose and treat ADHD is costing the UK billions:

- The total economic cost of undiagnosed ADHD is estimated at £6.5 billion – £11.2 billion over 10 years.
- NHS costs for untreated ADHD could rise to £5.78 billion over the next decade.
- Lost productivity, increased reliance on social services, and criminal justice costs continue to drain public funds.
- School exclusions linked to ADHD cost the education system millions annually, affecting not only individuals but the wider economy.

THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR INVESTMENT & PROJECTED RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Investing in ADHD diagnosis and treatment delivers significant economic returns:

- For every £1 invested for 15,000 patients annually, a return on investment (ROI) of 4:1 over three years and up to 16:1 over a decade could be achieved
- This represents savings of £492.84 million over three years and up to £1.92 billion over 10 years.
- Early diagnosis and treatment reduce long-term NHS dependency, lower criminal justice costs, and decrease social services expenditure.
- Wider economic benefits include higher employment rates, reduced benefit reliance, and improved workplace productivity.

THE IMPACT ON EDUCATION, JUSTICE & SOCIAL SYSTEMS

- **Education:** ADHD is a leading cause of school exclusions, lower academic achievement, and increased dropout rates.
- **Justice System:** 25% of the UK prison population has ADHD, with untreated symptoms often driving impulsivity and crime.
- **Social Impact:** Untreated ADHD is strongly linked to substance misuse, family breakdowns, and severe mental health issues.

Investing in ADHD support services improves educational outcomes, reduces reoffending rates, and strengthens family and community stability.

CALL TO ACTION – WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

- ✓ Send this briefing note and the letter template to your local MP (Find your MP [here](#)).
- ✓ Expand ADHD services and reduce waiting times.
- ✓ Ensure Right to Choose (RTC) remains fully accessible, preventing payment caps from limiting access to timely diagnosis and treatment.
- ✓ Fund ADHD diagnosis & treatment as an investment, not a cost – the economic benefits far outweigh the initial expenditure.
- ✓ Recognise ADHD's impact across education, employment, and the criminal justice system.
- ✓ Implement early intervention strategies to reduce the long-term economic burden.

LETTER TO YOUR MP

ADAPTED FROM ADHDUK TEMPLATE: <https://app.adhduk.co.uk/mp-email-page>

MY DETAILS:

MP DETAILS:

Dear _____

Re: ADHD Provision & Wider Proposed Right to Choose Changes

I am writing to raise serious concerns about NHS England's proposed change that contradicts Parliament's intent and threatens patient choice. Despite the profound impact on patients like myself, we have been excluded from the consultation process. As my representative, I urge you to intervene and advocate for patient involvement.

The Reality of NHS ADHD Assessment Wait Times

ADHD assessment wait times vary drastically. In Sheffield, the backlog extends beyond 261 years, while in other areas, patients routinely wait over a decade. Meanwhile, some regions offer assessments in under 12 weeks [BBC Verify]. Clearing the current backlog would take over eight years [BBC Verify].

Given these extreme inequalities, many patients rely on their NHS Right to Choose (RTC) to access care outside their local NHS service. However, NHS England is now proposing to restrict this right, leaving patients trapped in underperforming NHS services.

This is Not Just About ADHD – It Affects All Patients with Complex or Specialist Needs

While these changes will severely impact those waiting for ADHD assessments, they could also affect other patients with complex specialist needs, such as those awaiting oncology treatment and other elective specialist care.

The 2025/26 NHS Payment Scheme proposals suggest that NHS England will allow commissioners to cap payments for elective services, limiting the number of patients who can access alternative NHS pathways, including private providers supporting NHS backlogs.

Private providers have warned that this will make it financially unviable for them to continue treating NHS patients at scale, leading to reduced capacity and longer waiting times for both mental health and physical health services.

The Cost of ADHD Mismanagement

ADHD is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition with severe consequences if left untreated. Research has found that:

- Women with ADHD live, on average, nine years less, while men with ADHD live seven years less than their neurotypical peers.

- The risk of suicide or self-harm is six times higher in women and five times higher in men with ADHD [British Journal of Psychiatry, 2024].
- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men with ADHD will attempt to take their own lives [Large-scale Canadian study].
- The consequences of these delays are already evident, with recent Prevention of Future Deaths notices issued to NHS England due to patients dying on waiting lists.

ADHD's Economic Burden on the UK

The financial impact of untreated ADHD is enormous, spanning healthcare, education, employment, and the criminal justice system. Key findings from ADHD360 and Loop Dynamics Group Ltd's *The ADHD Crisis in the UK: A Call to Action (2025)* report include:

- Undiagnosed ADHD costs the UK economy between £6.5bn and £11.2bn over 10 years due to lost productivity and reduced household earnings
- Healthcare costs associated with untreated ADHD range from £1.33bn to £5.78bn over a decade, primarily due to crisis management and comorbid conditions
- 25% of the UK prison population has ADHD, and incarceration costs £40,000 per prisoner annually. Providing ADHD diagnosis and treatment (£2,600 per person) could save £748m per year
- Investment in ADHD diagnosis and treatment offers a 16:1 return on investment over 10 years, with potential savings of up to £1.92bn for every 15,000 patients treated annually

NHS England's Proposed Change: Rewarding Failure

NHS England is seeking to amend the NHS Payment Scheme to limit the number of patients who can use RTC in high-waitlist areas—effectively trapping patients within failing NHS services. By removing the only viable alternative for thousands of patients, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) will be rewarded for their failure to provide adequate services.

The consultation document itself admits the change “will in effect reduce the choices available to that patient”, yet it has not consulted the very patients it will impact. This rushed decision-making process, with consultation closing at the end of February and changes enacted on 1st April, is simply too fast to allow for proper impact assessments or risk evaluations.

Right to Choose is a Parliamentary Right

The Right to Choose is enshrined in two Acts of Parliament and the NHS Constitution. It was granted by Parliament, and I strongly believe that only Parliament should have the authority to change it. At the very least, any proposed restriction should be subject to a formal consultation that includes patient representation.

Call to Action

I urge you to:

1. Raise this issue with NHS England and advocate for patient involvement in the consultation process.
2. Challenge the proposed changes to the NHS Payment Scheme that would restrict RTC and patient choice.
3. Highlight the wider impact of these restrictions, which will affect not just ADHD patients but others requiring specialist care.
4. Press for an economic review, ensuring that cost-effective solutions like timely ADHD treatment and access to specialist services are prioritised over arbitrary restrictions.

More details are available on ADHD UK's website: <https://adhduk.co.uk/nhs-right-to-choose-changes>.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you will represent me on this matter.

Yours sincerely,