

Autism services in Wales improving

In 2016, the Welsh Government published a new Autistic Spectrum Disorder Strategic Action Plan, backed by a £13m investment in new Integrated Autism services across Wales.

The first annual report on the delivery of the Action Plan is being published today, and sets out what has been achieved during the last year.

Achievements include:

- Improving services – The establishment of a National Integrated Autism service is creating consistent support for autistic people across Wales. Services are already operating in Cardiff and Vale, Cwm Taf, Gwent and Powys, it will be launched in North Wales next week and will be operational in Western Bay and West Wales later this year.
- Improving waiting times for assessment – Since 2015 the Welsh Government has invested an additional £2m a year in children’s neurodevelopmental services. In November 2017, a new 26 week waiting time standard from referral to first assessment appointment was introduced, which is now being piloted.
- Raising awareness – The extension of the Learning with Autism programme. In addition to the primary schools scheme, the secondary school and early years schemes have been launched and are being rolled out. 80 schools have now completed the primary school programme, with nearly 13,000 children becoming autism super heroes. The Can You See me campaign is also being delivered, aimed at improving awareness of autism in local communities. The campaign film and resources are being rolled out in partnership with local parents, carers and businesses across Wales.

Health and Social Services Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“I’m pleased with the real progress we’ve made this year to improve services for people with autism. We are raising awareness of autism across services, improving access to assessment and diagnosis and putting in place additional specialist support in every region.

“Although we are making good progress we know there is still much more to do and we continue to look carefully at the issues which autistic people say matter most to them to inform future action.”

To further support service improvement, Ministers intend to highlight the needs of autistic people across statutory services by introducing a Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services, which is being developed in partnership with autistic people. It will provide clarity on the support autistic people can expect to receive and will provide guidance on how services can adapt their practice to meet the individual needs of autistic people.

The Health Secretary added:

“Over this Assembly term we want to focus all our efforts on delivering the ASD Strategic Action Plan, embedding the new integrated service, and delivering on all our other commitments.

“We are already delivering much needed improvements in autism services and I am convinced that costly and resource intensive legislation will not bring any additional benefits for autistic people. It must be much better to invest time and money in ensuring we deliver on our firm commitments and to ensure there is a focus on continuous improvement as the new services we are putting in place become established.

“The calls for improvement in autism services are not falling on deaf ears, we are taking action to achieve the outcomes everyone wants to see. We will continue to listen and I will keep an open mind on the need for autism specific legislation in the future, if it becomes clear through evaluation that the improvements we all want to see can only be delivered by taking this route.”