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The Scottish Conservatives are calling for the SNP Government to introduce a three month waiting time target for autism patients, from referral to first appointment for autism assessment.

Delays in assessment and diagnosis of autism are extremely traumatic for patients and their families.

The National Audit Association Scotland (NAS) has highlighted the appalling experience of Sarah and her fight to get her son Tom diagnosed with autism.

The process they were forced to endure lasted several years and meant Tom couldn't get the support he needed during that time.

Sarah is calling on the diagnosis process to be significantly speeded up.

Collaborating with NAS, the Scottish Conservatives have published a plan to improve the provision and availability of autism services, with measures that are already in place in the rest of the UK.

The plan calls on the Scottish Government to:

- Introduce a national waiting time target of three months from referral to first appointment for autism assessment.
- Record, publish and monitor autism diagnosis waiting times in every area.
- Introduce a national audit looking at the benefits of faster diagnosis

Further research from the NAS highlights that over 40 percent of respondents found the current process stressful, with over 25 percent saying they had been misdiagnosed.

Scottish Conservative public health and equalities spokesman, Annie Wells MSP said:

“The autism diagnosis process is currently failing patients – the SNP must introduce a three month waiting time target and take direct action to tackling delays in autism diagnosis.

“Having worked closely with the National Autistic Society, it is clear that many youngsters are missing out on vital support in their formative years.

“The SNP must record, publish and monitor autism diagnosis in every health board area, which would give a greater understanding to health professionals.

“These are all measures already in place in the rest of the UK.

“These delays in diagnosing autism cannot simply be allowed to go on and on; instead we must have a SNP Government focused on tackling this as a key mental health priority.”

Nick Ward, Director of The National Autistic Society Scotland, said:

“Many autistic people and parents describe receiving their diagnosis as life changing.

“It can explain why someone has always felt different, help them access vital support and enable them to take control of their lives.

“We know that far too many autistic people have to wait many months, sometimes even years, for a diagnosis because of inadequate and overstretched services where they live.

“These long waits can often be traumatic for people who are desperate for help and at risk of developing mental health problems.

“We hope all the political parties will support the Scottish Conservatives’ call for a waiting time standard from referral to assessment of autism to be introduced.

“We believe this is an important step towards ensuring autistic people right across Scotland can access the support they need.”