DoH

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Autism Strategy

2023 - 2028

Our plan to better support autistic people and their families for the next 5 years.

To Respect

To Listen

To Involve

Sam says this picture shows that being different lets you see things in another way.

Seeing and doing things differently is not wrong. But it can be hard for other people to understand.

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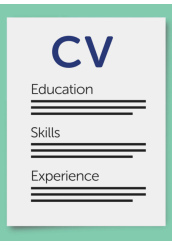

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Introduction

Our Autism Strategy says how we will support autistic people and their families in the next 5 years.

Autism means your brain works in a different way.
You have autism all your life.

People who are autistic may find some things difficult.

For example
- communication
- being with other people or
- how you think and feel about things.

Everyone who is autistic is different.
Some autistic people need more support than others.

A **strategy** is a plan to make things happen.
It tells you the most important things we will do.

To help us make this plan we asked autistic people and their families what support would make a difference.

Government departments will work with health and the social care staff to make this plan happen.

We want autistic people and their families to help make this plan a success.
Your views are very important.

We want **to respect, to listen, to involve.**

This document tells you

- what people with lived experience of autism have told us
- our promises to you and
- what we will do to make them happen.

Asher says this shows how hard it can be to communicate when you feel too much of something. For example, too much noise.

It makes it hard to focus.

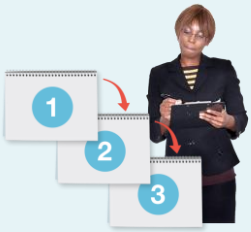
Promise 1 Care and support

We will make care and support for autistic people better to help them get the right support as early as possible.

What you told us

An autism assessment is when professionals look for signs that you might have autism.

Early support is needed for people before and after **autism assessment.**



More communication is needed about each part of the autism assessment.

Information about autism services and support needs to be easy to find.
For example, for health, education and housing.

Health and social care staff need to understand how autistic people feel and what can make them anxious.

A Direct Payment is money that is given to you instead of a service.
It can buy the support and services you need.

Direct Payments need to be easier to use.
More advice and support is needed.

Sometimes family members or brothers and sisters of an autistic person can need support too.

Short breaks are important and give families and unpaid carers a break.

They need to be planned and happen often.

Autistic people can find change difficult.
Transitions are times of big change and need better planning.

For example

- moving from children to adult services
- moving schools and into college or university
- getting and changing jobs and
- other life changes such as moving house, loved ones dying and changing relationships.

What we will do

Our health and social care services will give more early support to people before autism assessment.

Some people who are autistic may also have a learning disability or other needs which must be supported.

We will make our planning and services better to support these people.

We will have step-by-step guides for people waiting for autism assessment.

This will help them feel supported and know what is going to happen.

We will have an Autism Information Service for Northern Ireland.
It will make information easier to find.

We will have training videos to help doctors and health and social care staff understand

- what makes autistic people anxious and
- how to support them at medical appointments.

Our Adult Autism Services in health and social care will give more support earlier.

We will have planned breaks for autistic people that happen often.
This will help autistic people and their families feel supported.

We will give support to families of autistic people so they can talk to people about how they feel.

We will work with people in health and education to make life changes easier for autistic people.

Promise 2 Education

We will work with others to help autistic pupils and students to feel understood, supported and included.

We will help staff to understand the support that is needed for autistic people.

What you told us

There should be individual plans for autistic pupils and students.
This means that their needs are at the centre of their education.

There should be more autism training for teachers.

There should be people in colleges and universities who help autistic people to get support.

What we will do

We will help students get the right support to meet their needs.

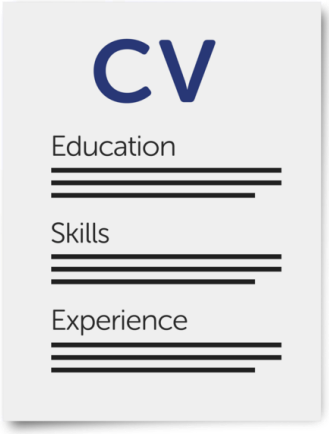
We will get advice to make our learning spaces in school better for everyone.

We will look at Special Educational Needs in education to see what needs to change to make it better for everyone.

This includes pupils, teachers and families.

We will keep on working with colleges and universities to help them support students.

Promise 3 Work



We will help people understand autism in the workplace so autistic people feel more supported.

This will help them feel confident at work and give them more job opportunities.

What you told us

Careers advice staff need to understand autism more to support autistic people to find the right job for them.

Autistic people can find it difficult to communicate with others.
This can mean they feel anxious and not understood at work.

Employers and staff need to understand autism more.
They can make workplaces better for autistic people by making small changes.

For example,

- quiet spaces
- home working or
- different working hours.

There should be more life skills support for autistic people to help them get a job and start work.

This could include support to

- fill in application forms
- get ready for an interview
- talk to people and
- cope with change.

What we will do

We will give autism training to help careers advisors work with and advise autistic people.

This will help autistic people find the right job.

We will give employers advice and guidance so they know how to support autistic people.

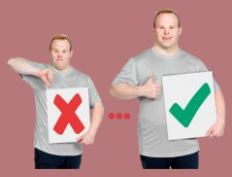
We will work to get more people with disabilities into jobs by

- supporting people before they get jobs and as they move forward in their jobs and
- giving training, skills and job advice.

We will work with others to find new ways to make small changes in the workplace to support people with a disability.

Orlaith says this picture shows how autism makes a difference to

- how you think and
- how you experience information.



You might not feel different.
You might feel that your way of thinking is better.

You find some things hard that others find easy.
You might be upset by things that others are not.

But some things are also easier for you and some things that upset others do not upset you.

Promise 4 Housing

Housing providers will understand autism more so they can better support the housing needs of autistic people.

What you told us

There needs to be better advice about housing for autistic people.

There needs to be better communication of information and advice.

There needs to be housing in Northern Ireland that will help autistic people to be independent.

People working in Housing and Health need to work better together.

What we will do

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Health and Social Care Trusts will continue to support autistic people moving into new homes.

We will give training to help their staff understand autistic people better.

We will support their staff to look at how they communicate with autistic people and how they can do this better.

We will get Housing and Health to work together more to find housing that meets the needs of each person.

We will think about how housing is designed so that it meets the needs of people with a disability. This includes autism.

We will keep working with people with a disability and people who are autistic to get their views on services.

Promise 5 Community

We will work with Councils and communities so more people know about and understand autism.

What you told us

Autistic people can often feel anxious or lonely in their communities.

We need more understanding of autism in our communities so autistic people feel included and accepted.

Autistic people would like to have more support in public spaces.

For example

- quiet spaces
- signs to warn that there may be sudden or loud noises and
- ear defenders for a more peaceful experience.

People with lived experience of autism should be involved and included in planning **public services**.

Public services are services for everyone that are paid for by the government. For example, the library, police and social housing.

Getting information and services can be hard for autistic people and their families.

Better signposting is needed.

What we will do

We will work with Councils and autistic people and their families so that we have communities that can support autistic people.

We will work with others to make an Autism Information Service for Northern Ireland so that people can find information more easily.

May says this pictures shows how autistic people are all different and all perfect.

The picture shows May as she learns what autism means to her.

Artwork

The pictures in our plan were made by children and young people.

The artwork shows what autism means to them.

The artwork was part of an art display called **What autism means to me: Creative voices.**

We would like to thank them for letting us use their artwork.

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