

ADHD diagnosis: long waits on the NHS need urgent attention

In May 2025 it was estimated that 2,498,000 people in England have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), including those without a diagnosis. In March 2025, up to 549,000 people may have been waiting for an ADHD assessment.

A New Healthwatch England poll of **2,579** adults in England highlights that ADHD diagnosis can change people's lives. However, long waits for assessments put people with suspected ADHD off seeking professional care.

The national survey: key findings

- Of the 363 respondents who had already been diagnosed, most agreed their **diagnosis improved many aspects of their lives:**
 - The vast majority of respondents (**84%**) said that a diagnosis helped them **understand their behaviour** and how their brain works
 - Over half (**54%**) agreed that being diagnosed for ADHD improved their **self-esteem**, and **47%** agreed it helped them **concentrate** at work or while studying
 - For over half (**58%**) it helped them find **new strategies** to manage traits, while the same number agreed it helped them look after their **mental health and wellbeing**.
- **70%**, of those who have been diagnosed said that they found the length of the process between referral and diagnosis difficult
- Almost a quarter (**21%**) said they had a negative experience of the process from referral to diagnosis
- Of all 963 respondents **41%** said they didn't seek a formal ADHD diagnosis, with **20%** of this group citing long waits as a reason.

Healthwatch England have set out four priorities for the Department for Health and Social Care, NHS England and other stakeholders. Find out more in their [How to improve ADHD support for people report](#).

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition characterised by difficulties with concentration, energy levels, impulsiveness or a person's ability to manage their time. People reporting experience of ADHD traits note significant impacts on their mental health, studies, work and relationships.

Here in Surrey?

A number of Surrey residents responded to the national poll and ADHD – particularly issues around diagnosis – is something people talk to us about regularly.



We have been told how ADHD affects people's lives, the impact of being on a waiting list and the lack of support available.



"Having such a late diagnosis made childhood very difficult and the lack of ability to get support or a diagnosis compounds the whole situation. It was only the ability to get a private diagnosis that helped but was far too late to reduce the anxiety and depression that then took years to stabilise from." **Surrey resident**

"I am just struggling along with everything as I have been waiting for just over a year. I received an acknowledgement of receipt of my referral [but] nothing else. I also have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) referral in and haven't even had an acknowledgement it was received." **Surrey resident**

"I feel like the diagnosis has helped me understand myself, my difficulties and my strengths. Over the years I have acquired many labels such as stupid, useless, lazy, annoying, etc. ADHD is the most validating label and is helping me undo years of thinking negatively about myself." **Surrey resident**



The importance of diagnosis: the bigger picture

In 2023, in the light of long waits for diagnosis and increased needs based support for children and young people, we set out to explore what families perceive to be the benefits of a formal neurodiversity diagnosis. Our findings and recommendations can be found in our [Neurodiversity – the hidden value of diagnosis report](#).