

Health



Addressing the health inequalities that children, young people and adults with a learning disability face, so that they can live good and healthy lives

1

Ensure that people with a learning disability have access to early and appropriate psychological support

While learning disabilities are not mental health problems, [people with a learning disability can still have mental health issues](#).

Having specialist training and services for supporting children, young people and adults with a learning disability who are experiencing mental health problems is crucial in tackling mental health inequalities, but [services are patchy, eligibility criteria are strict, and capacity is limited](#).

Without access to these specialised services, [mental health issues can go unidentified or attributed to 'just being part of someone's learning disability'](#).

[Research by the Nuffield Trust in 2024](#) found that not only are mental health problems more common among people with a learning disability than the general population, but that people with a learning disability are both less likely to be referred to NHS Talking Therapies than someone without a learning disability, and are less likely to experience positive outcomes from these therapies.

Specialist support – tailoring therapies to people with a learning disability and their needs – has better outcomes, but whether someone is able to access these depends on where they live.

The Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England need to:

Ensure that each area has a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and an Adult Mental Health Service (AMHS) that can provide specialist support to children, young people and adults with a learning disability

Increase access to training that can support clinicians working within CAMHS and AMHS services to be able to support people with a learning disability

Put in place support for people with a learning disability and their families when they are visiting hospitals, GPs, and other medical services

2

When people with a learning disability need to visit hospitals, GPs, or other medical services, they can face significant barriers.

[Learning Disability Liaison Nurses](#) can help with supporting people with a learning disability and their families to access and navigate healthcare.

However, there is a shortage of learning disability nurses, meaning that people with a learning disability are not always able to access this vital support.

According to the [Royal College of Nursing](#), between 2009 and 2024 the number of learning disability nurses employed by the NHS in England fell by 44%. Between 2015 and 2023, the number of acceptances onto learning disability nursing courses fell by 36% – and a number of universities have stopped offering these courses.

Unless there is a concerted effort to increase the number of nurses and ensure that training is available, this shortage will only get worse.

How do learning disability liaison nurses support equal access to healthcare?

- supporting people with a learning disability to communicate with and access healthcare services
- promoting the use of [hospital passports](#)
- providing support and expert advice to staff in hospitals
- acting as a 'bridge' between the hospital and community settings

[Royal College of Nursing](#)
2021

The Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England need to:

Recruit and train additional Learning Disability Liaison Nurses

Increase awareness of the role of Learning Disability Liaison Nurses

3

Tackle the lower life expectancy of people with a learning disability from ethnic minority backgrounds

People with a learning disability, on average, die 19 years earlier than people in the general population – an inequality that needs to be tackled. But [research](#) shows that people with a learning disability from Black, South Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds have a dramatically lower life expectancy than their white counterparts.

The average age of death of people with a learning disability from minority ethnic backgrounds is 34 years, barely more than half that of their white counterparts (62 years).

In addition to this, multiple Learning from Lives and Deaths (LeDeR) reports have findings that indicate that people with a learning disability from black, black British, Caribbean, African or mixed ethnic backgrounds may be at greater risk of dying ‘avoidable’ deaths; however, due to the small sample sizes involved (with 94% of the cases analysed in 2022–2023 being white) this cannot be definitively proven.

NHS England and Integrated Care Boards need to:

Ensure that the recommendations of the ‘We Deserve Better’ report are carried out

NHS England needs to:

Commission specific research into whether people with a learning disability from black, black British, Caribbean, African or mixed ethnic backgrounds are at greater risk of ‘avoidable’ deaths

Make sure all people with a learning disability can access Annual Health Checks

4

Because people with a learning disability are both more at risk of developing certain health problems than the general population, and may find it more difficult to identify or communicate health issues that they are experiencing, they are entitled to Annual Health Checks, which are designed to identify health issues and treat them.

Annual Health Checks can have a positive impact on the health of people with a learning disability – [identifying conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and gastrointestinal problems](#) – and [help overcome some of the health inequalities leading to premature deaths](#). But not enough people with a learning disability are receiving them.

To get an Annual Health Check, you have to be on your GP's [Learning Disability Register](#). However, [evidence suggests](#) that only 26% of people with a learning disability are on the Learning Disability Register. With [78.1% of people on the Learning Disability Register receiving Annual Health Checks in 2022/23](#), this means that only approximately 20.7% of people with a learning disability received an Annual Health Check.

For more information about Annual Health Checks, see:

[Annual Health Checks](#)

[Easy Read Guide to Annual Health Checks](#)

[Video: Harshi's Learning Disability Annual Health Check and Health Action Plan](#)

[Video: Charlotte's Annual Health Check and Health Action Plan](#)

The Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England need to:

Ensure that all people with a learning disability aged 14+ are on the Learning Disability Register

Ensure all people on the Learning Disability Register are receiving Annual Health Checks