

Autistica welcomes landmark Government strategy to transform adult autism support



Phil Hope

Autistica welcomed a raft of new measures in the landmark adult autism strategy published on March 3rd aimed at tackling the isolation, ignorance and inequality routinely experienced by the over 300,000 adults with autism in England.

Announced by Care Services Minister, Phil Hope, the three year strategy *Fulfilling and rewarding lives* is expected to drive a dramatic improvement in the quality of health, social care and other public services for people with autism. This follows research from the National Autistic Society (NAS) revealing at least 1 in 3 adults with autism are experiencing serious mental health difficulties due to a lack of support.

Hilary Gilfoy, chief executive of Autistica said:

“The delivery plan for the strategy, which will be published by the 31st March 2010 will set out the priorities for the first year and provide support for the NHS and local authorities to deliver the strategy at a local level.”

Anya Ustaszewski, vice chair of the strategy’s external reference group and an adult with autism said:

“A lack of support can leave people with autism isolated and vulnerable. An exciting milestone has been reached with the publication of the strategy, however, it is important that the delivery plan contains clear measures for local authorities and support from the Department of Health to deliver them. We want to be able to feel happy, safe and accepted and have equal and fair access to choice and opportunities in our lives. We should all be able to fulfil our true potential as autistic individuals.”

“Finally, it is important that this strategy is seen as the start of an ongoing process to improve the lives and rights of people with autism – it cannot be seen as a ‘one-off’ solution.”

In accordance with the Autism Act the strategy will be accompanied by statutory guidance to be published by December 2010. This means local authorities and NHS services who fail to provide appropriate support for adults with autism will be breaking the law.

Autistica welcomes measures in the strategy including:

- A programme to develop training with health and social care professional bodies – backed by £500,000 investment to ensure better recognition and awareness of autism in frontline public services
- Autism awareness training for all Jobcentre Plus Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) – NAS research shows **over a third** of adults with autism think their DEA has a poor knowledge of autism and **just 15%** of adults with autism are in full time paid employment
- The development of clear, consistent pathways for diagnosis through the development of guidance by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) and the appointment of local lead professionals to develop diagnostic services
- A commitment to develop guidance on making public services accessible for adults with autism, like improving buildings, public transport and communication

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- Autism affects 1 in 100 adults
- The external reference group advising on the strategy comprises of adults with autism, parents, carers and representatives from The National Autistic Society, Hampshire Autistic Society, Autism Initiatives, Autism Anglia, London Autistic Rights Movement, Autistica, Norsaca, Autism London, The Autism Trust, Supporting Asperger Families in Essex, Research Autism, Autism in Mind (AIM) and Autism West Midlands.
- The Autism Act became England's first disability specific law in November 2009. It started out as a Private Member's bill championed through Parliament by Cheryl Gillan MP and was drafted by the National Autistic Society in coalition with Wirral Autistic Society, Autism Research Centre, TreeHouse, Hampshire Autistic Society, Staffordshire Adults Autistic Society, Research Autism, Autism Anglia, The Wessex Autistic Society, Autism Education Trust, Autism Speaks, Autism West Midlands, Autism in Mind, Autism Initiatives, Sussex Autistic Community Trust and Tyne and Wear Autistic Society.