

## **Important update about providers for elective care and Right to Choose ADHD/Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) assessments**

We wanted to make GP practices aware of some important information relating to elective care and Right to Choose ADHD/Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) assessment services in 2025/26.

### **Elective care**

NHS Somerset has the following elective care waiting times targets in 2025/26:

- Increase the percentage of patients treated in 18 weeks from 62% - 67%
- Reduce patients waiting over 65 weeks to 0
- Significantly reducing the number of patients waiting over 52 weeks

This is in the context of a 9.4% reduction in a key NHS England funding stream for elective care. This means NHS Somerset has £3.4 million less funding than 2024/25 and, consequently, cannot afford to fund as many elective operations.

To achieve this NHS Somerset has put in place the following with elective care providers:

- Independent Sector (IS) - Measures so they do not exceed the allocated budget for 2025/26. This includes IS providers Practice Plus Group Shepton Mallet, SpaMedica, Nuffield Hospital, Taunton, Sulis Hospital Bath, NewMedica and Circle Bath.
- Somerset NHS Foundation Trust - Measures to ensure it increases the number of elective operations it provides this year.

The main impact in the coming months is that patients may wait longer for their treatment at IS providers, with the expectation there will be a minimum wait of 15 weeks for treatment. This mainly impacts orthopaedic and ophthalmology patients as most IS providers specialise in these procedures. This in the context of historically much shorter waiting times at IS providers when compared to Somerset FT. This is mainly due to them treating less complicated cases, providing limited care pathways and not treating patients under 18 years old.

This is balanced alongside the expectation that, overall, more patients will be treated within 18 weeks and that longer waiters will be seen sooner. This is because Somerset FT will be undertaking more operations. This will ensure more patients can be seen sooner as Somerset FT undertakes 75% of the county's elective care including complex cases and children.

### **ADHD/ASD assessments**

Demand for ADHD and ASD assessments has increased significantly in recent years and spending on assessments carried out by independent sector companies under Right to Choose is expected to be £2.8 million this year – £1.7 million higher than last year.

NHS Somerset is putting in place measures for some independent sector companies that provide the assessments to manage activity, which is becoming unaffordable. This means limiting the number of assessments they can carry out to make sure they remain in line with, or stay to close to, the spend agreed in their plan at the start of the year.

For ADHD/ASD Independent Sector assessment providers, this means that waiting times will increase for Children, Young People and Adult assessments. Please note the Somerset FT service is not affected by these measures.

### **Manging referrals and the expectations of patients**

Referrals should continue to be made as they were previously. Patient choice / Right to Choose under the NHS Constitution is not affected. Patients should continue to be given a choice of clinically suitable providers and can continue to select the provider of their choice. Please include up-to-date Blood Pressure and height and weight with elective referrals. [My Planned Care](#) has up to date elective care waiting times by specialty and provider. For ADHD/ASD assessments, see the individual provider websites for more detail.

Providers should not reject referrals due to these measures and should add patients to waiting lists as per normal practice. Providers remain responsible for patients on their waiting list. Patients should be advised to contact the provider if their symptoms relate to the issue for which they were referred. Providers have been given patient communications to advise patients of this wider work and should be directing patients to NHS Somerset should they raise concerns outside of their clinical condition.

Clinically urgent patients will not be affected by these changes. Patients with time critical conditions should be referred in the usual ways and there are no changes to pathways or waiting times in this regard. Services such as maternity and cancer care are not affected.

Please see below for tools and support for elective care patients on general health and fitness while they wait for treatment. Elective care providers also have this.

This approach will be reviewed as part of annual planning work for 2026/27.

For queries, please contact [somicb.generalpractice@nhs.net](mailto:somicb.generalpractice@nhs.net)

If required, patients can contact NHS Somerset's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

- Write to: PALS, NHS Somerset Integrated Care Board  
Freepost RRKL-XKSC-ACSG  
Yeovil, Somerset  
BA22 8HR
- Call 08000 851067
- Email [somicb.pals@nhs.net](mailto:somicb.pals@nhs.net)

## Waiting Well

### Improve your health

The [NHS website](#) has lots of tools and support to help with your general health and fitness.

Useful sections of the website are listed below:

- Help and support with [losing weight](#)
- Advice on [eating well](#)
- Help and support with [getting or keeping active](#)
- Help and support with [quitting smoking](#)
- Help and support with [drinking less alcohol](#)

### Managing pain

Some people are in pain or discomfort while they are waiting for a hospital appointment or treatment. You can find help and [advice on managing ongoing pain on the NHS website](#)

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy also has helpful [information on managing pain](#)

If your pain is getting worse or you are finding it difficult to cope with, contact your GP or NHS 111.

### Good mental health

People sometimes feel worried or anxious before a hospital appointment or treatment. This is perfectly normal. Some people might also find that an existing mental health condition gets worse. You can find helpful links for mental health support on the [Somerset Open Mental Health website](#)

Talking therapies, or psychological therapies, are effective and confidential treatments delivered by fully trained and accredited NHS practitioners. They can help with common mental health problems like stress, anxiety and depression. You can self-refer through [Talking Therapies](#).

## **Patients with caring responsibilities**

Waiting for hospital treatment can be a particularly worrying time for patients who are also carers for others, as they need to think also about the loved one they are caring for and make alternative arrangements for them when it is time for them to attend hospital.

The Community Council for Somerset is contracted by Somerset County Council to run the Somerset Carers service. There are over 60,000 unpaid carers in Somerset. If you regularly look after someone in an unpaid capacity, Somerset Carers can support you with advice and guidance: [Free information and support for Carers - Somerset Carers](#)