



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Graham Simpson MSP
Member of the Scottish Parliament for Central Scotland

09 August 2022

Kevin Stewart MSP
Minister for Mental Wellbeing & Social Care
The Scottish Government
St. Andrews House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Dear Kevin,

Re: Neurodevelopment Assessment Waiting Times – Lanarkshire

We are writing to you and the heads of NHS Lanarkshire on behalf of families across my region to urge you to immediately address the delays facing children in Lanarkshire with autism, or similar conditions, who need a neurodevelopment assessment. You may recall I raised this in Parliament back in April.

Having spoken to parents about this, I am of the belief that comprehensive action needs to be taken as soon as possible. Both their personal stories and the recent CAMHS statistics reinforce this point.

Principally, 0-18-year olds in Lanarkshire are waiting much longer for an assessment than their peers in alternative health boards.

Parents I've spoken to have been told they should expect to wait between 1 and 2 years for an initial assessment. This is reinforced by Public Health Scotland, who's figures show that at the end March 2022, 27.2% of CAMHS patients had waited 53 weeks or more to be seen. Nationwide, this figure was just 12.8%.

In one response to a parent, NHS Lanarkshire confirmed they were still working on referrals from August 2019.

This trend is also mirrored when looking at the number of patients waiting to be seen within the Scottish Government's 18-week target. In the quarter ending March 2022, 56.2% of 0-18-year olds across Scotland had been waiting between 0 and 18 weeks to be seen by their local CAMHS department. In Lanarkshire, just 32.2% had been seen within that time frame.

NHS Lanarkshire is also being outperformed by other Scottish health boards with a similar sized 0-18-year-old population. As of March 2022, it would take 31 weeks for NHS Lanarkshire to see 50% of their CAMHS patients. In NHS Tayside (6 weeks), NHS Grampian (6 weeks) and NHS Lothian (12 weeks) these figures are significantly lower.



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These delays have left many parents feeling abandoned by the health board. Despite some signposting to local charities, families are receiving little professional support while waiting for an assessment. During this time, a child's mental health will almost certainly worsen.

It is evident that these waits are being compounded by the current 'dual-list' system whereby children must see a community paediatrician first before joining the regional neurodevelopment list. Consequently, the waiting times referenced above paint only half a picture.

This is having wider consequences on patients and their families. One parent told me they'd been forced to give up work as they couldn't employ an autism specialist carer without an official diagnosis – which they've waited 2 years for. Those in need of treatment often face time away from school or social occasions with their friends while they wait.

Parents have also shared their concerns about staffing levels within Lanarkshire's CAMHS department – with many reporting lengthy enquiry response times, administrative errors, and poor communication.

The number of Whole Time Equivalent staff per 100,000 0-18-year olds has seen some recent improvement – increasing from 68.9 in December 2021 to 87.5 in March 2022. However, these figures are well below the national average of 108.4.

An increase in funding through the Mental Health Recovery and Renewal Funds may start to remedy this in the long term but as it stands, recruitment and the retention of staff is still a major issue in Lanarkshire.

Sadly, these delays are forcing Lanarkshire residents to give up on the NHS and look for alternative treatment. Some families have resorted to exploring private healthcare options at great expense.

Similarly, parents have questioned why children who are experiencing moderate to severe mental health difficulties on the neurodevelopment waiting list do not automatically qualify for CAMHS support. This is putting additional pressure on local groups like 'Hope' and 'Reach Lanarkshire' who will be seeing an increase in demand.

NHS Lanarkshire, I believe, are doing everything they can to try and address these concerns. I am aware a waiting list initiative designed to reduce delays is in operation, but parents have described this to me as "just an opt in" process.

Clearly, a more dynamic and supportive plan is needed. It is my view that the Scottish Government must lead on this in conjunction with the Health and Social Care Partnership.



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I would appreciate it if you could confirm what plans the Scottish Government has to work with NHS Lanarkshire to reduce these waiting times and if they will:

- Conduct a fresh review of NHS Lanarkshire's neurodevelopment assessment waiting list to establish where prioritising measures can be taken.
- Invest additional funding to increase capacity or reduce waiting times and explore opportunities to fund third party community groups.
- Set out a separate short-term action plan to expand the CAMHS workforce to meet existing high demand for these services in Lanarkshire.

I look forward to hearing from you with a response.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Simpson MSP

Lanarkshire Families:

Laura & Daryl Cassidy, Glenboig

Lorraine Hepburn, Coatbridge

Caroline Jackson, East Kilbride

Karen McClung, North Lanarkshire

Pamela McMorran, Carluke

Anne Mitchell, East Kilbride

Kirsten Malcolm, East Kilbride

Ellis Cattrell, North Lanarkshire

Linzi Robertson, Coatbridge

Gaynor Sherrock, Cambuslang

Clare & Russell Thom, South Lanarkshire

CC: Heather Knox, Chief Executive NHS Lanarkshire

Ross McGuffie, Chief Officer for Health and Social Care North Lanarkshire