

Association of British Paediatric Nurses' background paper on Lord Darzi's report 'Independent Investigation of the National Health Service in England' in relation to children's care

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to inform Association of British Paediatric Nurses (ABPN) members of the key findings from the Investigation relating to children's¹ care

Background

The Review was published on 12 September 2024 and is available at [Independent Investigation of the National Health Service in England \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/131422/independent-investigation-of-the-national-health-service-in-england.pdf)

On 11 July 2024 the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care commissioned an immediate and independent investigation of the NHS across England. The investigation was expected to consider the available data and intelligence in order to:

- provide an independent and expert understanding of the current performance of the NHS across England and the challenges facing the healthcare system
- ensure that a new 10-year plan for health focuses on these challenges
- stimulate and support an honest conversation with the public and staff about the level of improvement that is required, what is realistic and by when.

There are a considerable number of direct references to children and young people's health throughout the report, with a section in Chapter 3 'Quality of Care in the NHS' specifically looking at children and young people.

Children and young people are 24% of the population and account for 11% of NHS expenditure. The report identifies that children's mental and physical health appears to have been deteriorating in recent years.

It recognises that the "problems faced by all NHS patients are similarly encountered by children and young people. Childhood is precious because it is brief; too many children are spending too much of it waiting for care. It is apparent that the NHS must do better and that national policymaking on care for children and young people needs to be more joined up".

An overview of the key findings of the review in relation to the health and well-being of children and young people.

The investigation has highlighted significant concerns regarding child health within the NHS. The report reveals that nearly 500,000 children and young people are currently on

¹ In this paper the term 'child' is used to refer to neonates, infants, children, young people and young adults up to the 25 years of age

NHS waiting lists, some for over a year. Over 1 million people are waiting for community services, including over 50,000 waiting for over 1 year – of these 80% are children.

The investigation emphasises the need for immediate investment in child health services, particularly in areas such as CAMHS and community services.

In terms of workforce there are 75% more nurses working with children and young people in children's hospitals compared to 15 years ago, but productivity is not matching pace. However, there is a recognised under-investment in community services with the numbers of nurses working in the community falling by 5% and the number of health visitors dropping by 20% between 2019 – 2023.

The proportion of children living in poverty has risen steadily since 2010 with 31% of children were living in poverty in 2019, and the latest data shows that this is now 29%.

Social care provides care for children with disabilities. The report recognises the submission from the Royal College of Occupational Therapists, that identified that 30% of their members surveyed in 2023 said they could not provide equipment or adaptations for children who needed it.

The Investigation places a strong emphasis on the urgent need to improve Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services including increasing access to psychological therapies and ensuring mental health services are integrated into primary care. This is in recognition that 340,000 children are waiting for mental health services, with 109 000 waiting for more than 1 year. In March 2024, more than 70,000 children and young people under 18 were waiting at least 13 weeks for an assessment for autism

The review calls for immediate and sustained investment, specifically in community and mental health services.

Nearly 250,000 infants (aged 0-2 years) were left waiting for more than four hours in accident and emergency departments and more than 100,000 infants waited more than six hours in 2023. For children aged 3 to 17, almost 500,000 waiting more than four hours and 225,000 waiting for more than six hours in A&E.

The review recognises the value of shifting towards preventative care and early intervention although it recognises the £191 million cuts to health promotion services for young children.

There is also a recognition that workforce improvements are crucial for ensuring that services can keep up with demand and provide timely, high-quality care. It reports that workforce issues include staff shortages in paediatric specialist services, mental health professionals, and general practitioners. This shortage is contributing to long waiting times for children's healthcare, including essential services like surgeries and mental health support. The review recommends ramping up recruitment efforts and improving

training programs for healthcare professionals, especially those in paediatric and mental health fields.

In summary, the report calls for a comprehensive approach to address the shortage of staff through improved recruitment, retention, and support strategies.