

Press release – embargoed until 00.00hrs 23rd February 2026

23rd February 2026

Eating Disorders Awareness Week – The Power of community

The theme this year celebrates the vital role family, friends and support networks have in supporting those with an eating disorder.

Eating Disorders Awareness week is aimed at increasing awareness of the complexities of eating disorders, including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge-eating disorder, avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder and others. Recognition, early intervention, access to treatment and support is critically important.

Eating disorders are complex mental illnesses affecting people of all ages, genders, ethnicities and backgrounds. Disordered eating behaviour is a way for individuals to feel in control and cope with difficult situations and feelings. Someone with an eating disorder may also experience other mental or physical health issues and therefore treatment must take into account other health issues, as well as neurodevelopmental conditions.

It is estimated that there are around 1.25 million people in the UK that have an eating disorder. The risk of developing an eating disorder is highest amongst adolescents and young adults. In 2023 12.3% of children between 11 to 16 years of age had an eating disorder, while 17 to 19 years of age this was 59.4%¹¹. The rate of overall prevalence of eating disorders has been increasing over that last decade, along with an increase in the number of children and young people being admitted to hospital. Accessing treatment is seen to be extremely challenging, with lengthy waiting times for urgent referrals. NHS England issued new National Guidance about Eating Disorder services for children and young people², emphasising the importance of prevention, the use of digital tools and partnership working.

The ABPN believes that

- Every child and young person, including those with additional learning needs and disabilities has a right to have their voice heard and for their specific needs to be recognised and addressed^{3,4}

¹ See <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up/part-5-eating-problems-and-disorders>

² See <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/eating-disorder-services-for-children-and-young-people-national-guidance/>

³ See ABPN Position statement on Children and Young People's rights [abpn_position_statement_children_and_young_peoples_rights.pdf](#) and ABPN Background briefing on Children and Young People's Rights [abpn_background_briefing_children_and_young_people.pdf](#)

⁴ UN Declaration of Human Rights 1948 see <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights/>

- Infants, children and young people should receive care from nurses that have the child specific knowledge, skills and competencies to meet their unique needs in age-appropriate facilities, at home, at school or closer to home in community and general practice settings⁵
- Child field specific pre-registration undergraduate education programmes, as well as specific post registration education is crucial to equip nurses to meet the needs of children and young people across all settings, including at school, at home or closer to home in community and general practice settings^{6,7}

Good nutrition is fundamental to child's physical, emotional, social development. Investment in services to get things right in childhood is a positive investment for the future health of the nation.

The Association of British Paediatric Nurses calls on the Government to invest in

- child and adolescent mental health services, including eating disorders specialists.
- education and training to recognise eating disorder issues for all nurses that come into contact with children and young people, as well as teachers and school staff
- access to confidential support and advice for pupils, their peers and families

“Children and adolescents who have an eating disorder can feel alone, unsupported and isolated from their peers, family and friends. Children’s nurses play a vital role in providing direct support as well as encouraging support from friends and family. No child or adolescent should feel that they are facing life with an eating disorder alone.”

Professor Bernie Carter, President, Association of British Paediatric Nurses.

Notes for editors

The term child refers to infants, children, young people and young adults up to 25 years of age

The ABPN recognises that primary and community services, as well as child public health and mental health services, including school nurses and health visitors also have a key role in supporting children, young people and families.

The ABPN is the oldest children’s nursing association in the world, established in 1938. Our wide membership includes experts in clinical practice, education, leadership and research.

⁵ See ABPN Position statement on Workforce planning and nurse staffing
[abpn_position_statement_workforce_planning_and_nurse_staffing-final_nov_2024.docx](#) and ABPN
 Background briefing on workforce planning and nurse staffing
[abpn_workforce_planning_and_nurse_staffing_background_briefing_paper-final_nov_2024.docx](#)

⁶ See ABPN Position Statement on Children’s Nurse Education
[abpn_position_statement_nurse_education_final_24_november_2024.pdf](#)

⁷ See ABPN Background Paper on Children’s Nurse Education
[abpn_cn_education_background_paper_final_22nd_november_2024.pdf](#)

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