

Vision to Reality

Our goals for 2026-2030



**Creating a
society that
works for
autistic
people**



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Foreword

It's been three years since we launched our Vision to Reality strategy. The strategy aimed to bring our Moonshot Vision to life, with actionable, tactical beliefs and foundations to steer everything we do as a charity. While I'm incredibly proud of everything we've achieved in that time, we've still got some way to go.

Across the UK, autistic people continue to face unacceptable barriers to diagnosis, support and opportunity. In December 2025, more than 254,000 people were waiting for an autism assessment, with the vast majority waiting longer than three months. In October 2025, over 2,000 autistic people and people with a learning disability remained in mental health hospitals, often far from home. Meanwhile, the employment rate for autistic people stands at just 29%. These figures are not abstract statistics; they represent lives put on hold and potential left unrealised.

At the same time, the context in which autistic people live has changed profoundly. Public discourse around autism has become more hostile and confused, with damaging narratives about "overdiagnosis", pseudoscientific claims about causes and cures, and autistic people's rights increasingly treated as a political battleground. Alongside this, artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping how people access information, make decisions and interact with the world - a transformation that will only accelerate. There has also been a growing shift toward talking about neurodiversity and neurodivergence rather than specific conditions. This creates opportunities to celebrate strengths and shared experiences, but also risks diluting autism-specific understanding and support.

Our new strategy responds directly to this landscape. We will place a stronger emphasis on challenging misinformation and advocating clearly and confidently for autistic people. We will embrace new technologies, including AI, to improve how we deliver trusted advice, information and support. And we will evolve our products and services so they sit confidently within broader conversations about neurodivergence, while remaining proudly and authentically autism-focused.

None of this would be possible without our extraordinary supporters. Thousands of people, from individual fundraisers to corporate partners, continue to give their time, energy and expertise to drive change. Their generosity and commitment underpin this strategy and strengthen our resolve to build a society that truly works for autistic people.



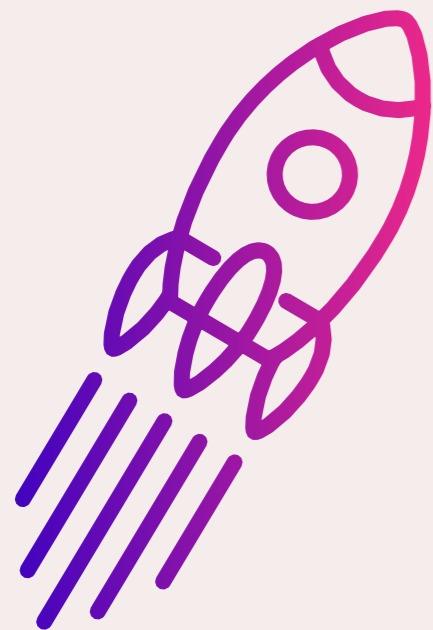
Caroline Stevens
Chief Executive, National Autistic Society

Public discourse around autism has become more hostile and confused, with damaging narratives about "overdiagnosis", pseudoscientific claims about causes and cures, and autistic people's rights increasingly treated as a political battleground.

Who we are and what we do

The National Autistic Society was started in 1962 by a group of desperate parents sitting around a kitchen table. They were trying to get the right education for their autistic children at a time when autism was barely heard of and autistic people were often locked away in institutions.

In the six decades since, we've successfully fought for autistic people's rights and autism-friendly policies. Our specialist schools and services, local branches and Online Community are life-changing for those who use them. Relentless campaigning alongside autistic people and their families has driven vital improvements in healthcare, education, the workplace and the law. Public awareness and understanding of autism has massively increased as a result.



The Moonshot

Today, our goal is the same as it always was - to create a society that works for autistic people. But society has changed a lot since that kitchen table conversation, as has what we know about autism and what autistic people rightly expect from the world around them.

So, in 2022, we embarked on a major exercise to articulate what a society that works for autistic people actually looks like, by asking autistic people, their families and professionals about the challenges they face and the changes they most want to see. This led to the publication of our shared vision of an autism-friendly society. We called it the Moonshot because of the scale of ambition and collaboration needed to achieve it.

Autistic people and family members told us powerful stories about the barriers and discrimination they face every day in all areas of life. They told us that a society that works for autistic people:

- values autistic individuals
- maximises autistic power
- guarantees support
- adapts public services and spaces
- is free from discrimination.

We developed a strategy to bring this vision to life, which resulted in the Vision to Reality 2023-2026 strategy.



The Vision to Reality strategy set out the first steps that our charity would take towards Moonshot. It is structured around three key beliefs about our role as a charity to:

- **support** all autistic individuals and their families to live a fulfilled life on their terms
- **influence and collaborate** with others to improve standards and adjustments
- **transform society** by building understanding, acceptance and respect for all autistic people.

Making an impact

Our latest Impact report showed progress in bringing these key beliefs to life. In 2024-25, through expert advice and guidance, we reached over 1.3 million people, providing essential support to autistic people and their families when it mattered most. Our Online Community welcomed 869,000 active users, and our 83 volunteer-led branches supported thousands of autistic people and their families.

Over 100 organisations earned our Autism Accreditation Award, raising the standard of care and understanding across the UK. And after years of tireless campaigning, the *Mental Health Bill* passed through the House of Lords, protecting autistic people from being detained simply because of their diagnosis.

We're dedicated to making further progress in all of our key beliefs from 2026 and beyond.



Looking at 2026 and beyond

In 2025, we conducted a review of our strategy with a fresh consultation process. This included:

- a survey to staff and the public, responded to by over 700 people. This was a really positive response and gives us confidence in the insight
- two engagement sessions with staff, attended by around 170 people
- two sessions for trustees and one-to-one meetings.

These sessions found that our stakeholders feel strongly that we are on the side of autistic people and their families and that we understand their concerns. We're extremely proud of this. The current main challenges that people are facing are similar to our established priorities and what we discovered in our previous insight work:

- dealing with mental health issues
- public attitudes to autism and autistic people
- getting an autism diagnosis
- getting or staying in a job
- getting appropriate quality education provision.

We also had a strong response from people that misinformation about autism and autistic people is creating challenges in people's daily lives. While this has always been a factor and has driven our work to improve public understanding, the way that autism is more explicitly being pulled into populist narratives and culture wars is a growing and worrying trend.

Growth in misinformation

Our *Truth. It Matters* campaign launched in 2025 in response to a wave of misinformation across causes, diagnosis and cures for autism. We executed the campaign using our social media channels, by working with news and media publications, as well as by speaking with MPs.

We achieved:

- 500+ pieces of media coverage
- 118 million people reached across print and broadcast media
- 1.48 million people saw our social media content
- 103,500 engagements with that social content.



Repositioning our beliefs

Our three core beliefs were never intended to be hierarchical. But through our consultation process and experiences with supporters over the past three years, it's clear that one element of our vision feels more important than ever: the transformation of society.

For this reason, we're updating our strategy to highlight this belief first, to award it the prominence it deserves.

Our three beliefs:

- 1. Transform society by building understanding, acceptance and respect for all autistic people.**
- 2. Influence and collaborate with others to improve standards and adjustments.**
- 3. Support all autistic individuals and their families to live a fulfilled life on their terms.**

Within each belief, we have recommitted to our ambitions, with some small tweaks to add clarity, detail and specificity. In the pages that follow, we outline our approach to working towards our Moonshot Vision: our Strategy 2026-2030.

To transform society, by building understanding, acceptance and respect for all autistic people.



Belief 1: Transform

Transform society by building understanding, acceptance and respect for all autistic people

Autistic people and their family members often tell us that the thing that would make the biggest improvement to their lives is greater public understanding of autism. Lack of understanding and pervasive misinformation have a daily impact on autistic people's lives and is one of the main barriers they face to taking part in education, work or leisure activities. We're committed to deepening public knowledge, improving autistic people's access to support, overcoming stereotypes and ending stigma.



Ambition 1

There is universal understanding of the unique lived experience and power of autistic individuals, with narratives shaped by autistic people.

We'll take our next steps by:

- continuing to develop our approach to campaigning to improve autism understanding, involving autistic people at every stage
- highlighting the stories and experiences of autistic people from a wide variety of backgrounds
- working with autistic influencers and creatives to create and promote a shared powerful narrative about autistic people.

Ambition 2

Autistic stereotypes and misinformation are challenged and stigma is ended.

We'll take our next steps by:

- calling out harmful misinformation and fake news without fear or favour
- improving our ability to identify misinformation in social and traditional media
- as a priority, challenging damaging misconceptions about people's motivations for seeking an autism diagnosis, or the validity of their diagnosis.

Ambition 3

Autistic people and allies are brought together in a movement for change.

We'll take our next steps by:

- working even more closely with other autism charities to secure our Moonshot Vision
- seeking funding specifically to pilot and roll out new approaches to local campaigning, and supporting our branches to campaign for change locally
- identifying opportunities to work strategically with local decision-makers to improve autistic people's lives, like our Greater Manchester Autism Consortium.

Ambition 4

Autistic people and their families' needs are recognised, respected and met in policy making.

We'll take our next steps by:

- campaigning to fix the mental health crisis that leaves autistic people at greater risk of being detained in hospital
- influencing changes to the SEND system in England and how these are implemented
- campaigning to make sure autistic people get the support they need from benefits and that government initiatives to support people into work benefit autistic people
- influencing the health service across the UK to tackle autistic health inequality, including how long people have to wait for an autism assessment
- identifying and tackling the intersectional inequality autistic people face because of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age or class.

Belief 2: Influence

Influence and collaborate with others to improve standards and adjustments

Our vision of an autism-friendly future is a vision for the whole of society. This means we can't achieve it alone. Autistic people and their families told us we need to collaborate to have the reach and influence we need to change society. Our training and knowledge sharing must be targeted, persistent and based on autistic voices and high-quality evidence.



Ambition 1

There is a wide and ongoing commitment to deepening knowledge about autism and neurodivergence and sharing best practice.

We'll take our next steps by:

- keeping our knowledge and evidence about autism and neurodivergence up to date, sharing it across our charity and embedding it in all our services and support
- developing and updating our evidence-based training material and accreditation frameworks to meet the needs of professionals, including more content on wider neurodivergence
- establishing partnerships through our family of schools, Cullum Centres and our Neuroinclusive Education Network to research and evaluate innovative approaches to supporting autistic learners
- looking for new opportunities to improve autism practice across public services, like our current programme with HM Prison and Probation Services.

Ambition 2

Public spaces are welcoming, with adjustments that recognise the diverse needs and preferences of autistic people.

We'll take our next steps by:

- making sure that autistic people are aware of their rights under the *Equality Act* and have the information to enforce those rights
- rolling out our Neuroinclusive Access Award (formerly the Autism Friendly Award) to make public spaces accessible for autistic people, with a specific focus on the leisure and hospitality sector
- developing our training and consultancy offers to businesses to support a neuroinclusive framework.

Ambition 3

Professionals who work with autistic people across all services and areas of life have a strong evidence-based understanding of autism.

We'll take our next steps by:

- maintaining our autism specialism, but expanding our evidence-based accreditation, training and consultancy to include content across neurodivergences
- increasing the reach of our training through developing and growing our online learning content and opportunities
- creating networks and communities of practice for professionals to share best practice and practice-based learning, including our Neuroinclusive Education Network and our place-based partnership in Manchester.

Ambition 4

Autistic people can access all types of work, fulfil their goals and feel part of workplace communities.

We'll take our next steps by:

- increasing the number of businesses signing up to our Neuroinclusive Employer Award
- providing businesses with high-quality information about supporting autistic and other neurodivergent colleagues
- leading by example, by building on the progress of our Pioneer Programme to confidently and proudly be the best employer we can be of autistic people.

Belief 3: Support

Support all autistic individuals and their families to live a fulfilled life on their terms

We're here to support the more than 700,000 autistic people in the UK and their families. That won't change - we heard loud and clear from our insight gathering that this should remain one of our top priorities. Whether you need support from our specialist schools or adult social care services, or advice, we're here for you.



Ambition 1

Autistic people, their families and support networks are empowered with the information and advice they need.

We'll take our next steps by:

- maintaining our position as the go-to source of reliable, practical and evidence-based information and advice for autistic people and their families
- building our evidence-based advice offer to include more information about other commonly co-occurring conditions and deepening our advice offer for families of autistic people with complex needs
- continuing to grow our Online Community, fostering peer-to-peer advice and support
- updating and maintaining our Autism Services Directory so people can find the right support in their area.

Ambition 2

Autistic children and young people are supported to thrive at nursery, school or college.

We'll take our next steps by:

- maintaining a family of schools for autistic children with complex needs who need the most specialist education, so they can live the most independent and self-determined lives
- establishing and sharing best practice approaches, recruitment and career pathways in our schools to become proudly sector-leading
- developing, piloting and sharing new models for measuring the success and progress pupils make in our schools
- exploring opportunities to widen our impact in mainstream schools through our innovative Cullum Centres and Inclusive Spaces initiative.

Ambition 3

Autistic adults who have complex support needs are supported to live happy and fulfilling lives.

We'll take our next steps by:

- developing adult services that are sustainable and set for the future by offering a range of housing options, centring quality of life and choice in every setting
- investing in the right people to lead our services through recruitment, retention and progression
- embedding leadership and accountability at every level of management, including on the front line
- maintaining a stable and valued workforce, so the people we support benefit from highly-qualified and consistent staff.

Ambition 4

Families and support networks are equipped to support autistic people, from pre-diagnosis to the end of life.

We'll take our next steps by:

- empowering the families of children in our schools with enhanced support through their transitions in, through, and out of our schools
- giving empathetic, non-judgemental support through our Parent to Parent Emotional Support Service
- growing and supporting our national network of volunteer-led branches to provide local information, advice and support wherever they are in the UK, either face-to-face or online
- securing funding to maintain our advice presence in the South East through our Resource Centre Teams.

Foundations

We recognised back in 2023 that to achieve the ambitions laid out above, we also needed to change ourselves. For the next three years, we're recommitting to reflect the change that we want to see. We've renewed our focus on our 'foundations' - the culture and ways of working we'll develop as an organisation to help put our strategy into action.

To support our strategy:

Foundation 1

We'll deliver high-impact fundraising approaches, exceptional supporter care and experience, and compelling storytelling to demonstrate impact.

For example:

- delivering and maximising opportunities presented by being the London Marathon Charity of the Year partner for 2027
- launching new fundraising products and investing in new methods to give our supporters new ways to raise vital money for our charity
- investing in the relationships we have with our supporters and making sure they know the impact of their support.

Foundation 2

We'll build a culture where every colleague feels heard, valued, supported and recognised - and proud to work within.

For example:

- building on progress over the last three years, we will equip our managers with the skills, knowledge, confidence and resources they need to drive and respond to change
- continuing to improve autistic colleagues' support and experiences working for the National Autistic Society, alongside wider work to improve our people processes in line with our organisational values
- implementing a standardised and market-based career progression and reward framework, to attract and retain the staff we need to create a society that works for autistic people.



Foundations continued

Foundation 3

We'll maintain sustainable financial models to support the long-term delivery of our vision and strategy.

For example:

- maintaining a robust financial control framework to ensure the rigorous stewardship of the organisation's income and assets
- increasing income generation for our tradeable services (eg training and consultancy) from high-growth sectors, such as businesses
- making sure that our property assets are aligned with the needs of the people we support.

Foundation 5

We'll champion technology internally and externally as a way to improve the lives of autistic people.

For example:

- implementing modern, integrated and scalable technology solutions across the charity, supporting our staff to do their jobs and care for the people we support
- enabling our charity to take advantage of AI innovation, within appropriate safety and security parameters.

Foundation 4

We will demonstrate an exemplary approach to safeguarding, governance, risk and health and safety in delivering high-quality services.

For example:

- introducing and embedding a single organisation-wide system for identifying, managing and learning from accidents, incidents, complaints and risk
- fostering a culture of transparency, openness and candour in line with our organisational values
- enlisting our schools and services in our Accreditation programme, so we hold ourselves to the same high standards as we hold others.

Foundation 6

We'll establish a new operating and decision-making model so that we can effectively and efficiently deliver our strategy for the benefit of all autistic people.

For example:

- underpinning this organisational strategy with directorate-owned operational plans, to make sure this framework guides all the work of our charity
- embedding greater cross-organisational collaboration to make sure projects are delivered on time, on budget and deliver impact
- refreshing our strategic approach taken in each nation of the UK in line with these new goals.





**Thank
you**

We've come a long way together - but there's still a long way to go. Together, we will achieve our vision of a society that works for autistic people.

Help create a society that works for autistic people.

Campaign with us

Lobby your local MP, council and businesses to ensure autistic people get the support and services that they're entitled to.

Donate

Give a regular or one-off gift to help fund vital services for autistic people and their families.

Volunteer with us

Find out about the variety of volunteer roles currently available, including working with our local branches.

Raise funds

Run a marathon, cycle round the park or hold an online quiz to raise money and help transform the lives of autistic people.

Become a member

Join over 14,000 like-minded people and receive our quarterly *Your Autism* magazine, expert advice and other benefits.

To find out more, visit www.autism.org.uk/get-involved

The National Autistic Society is here to transform lives, change attitudes and create a society that works for autistic people.

Over the decades since the National Autistic Society was founded in 1962, awareness and understanding of autism have increased in the UK.

But autistic people still experience many challenges.

Autistic people face unacceptable barriers to living life on their terms and continue to be denied the same opportunities as non-autistic people.

This is disgraceful.

Whether someone is autistic or not should not dictate their opportunities and life outcomes.

We are here to change this, and our mission is to:

- transform individual lives
- change societal attitudes.

We pride ourselves on supporting people with up-to-date advice and guidance, diagnostic services and community support. Our teams also improve the knowledge of thousands of professionals every year, especially those who provide services to autistic people in vital areas like education and healthcare.

We also provide direct services across the UK, such as our four specialist schools, dedicated Cullum Centres within mainstream schools, adult residential services and local branches.

Our charity platforms autistic people and seeks equality as part of the autism movement through our Online Community, magazines, celebrity ambassadors, public engagement and campaigns to change the law.

We fight alongside autistic people every step of the way, and we're so grateful to all our supporters, donors and members who stand with us as part of the autism movement.

The National Autistic Society is here to transform lives and change attitudes to create a society that works for autistic people.

We've come a long way, but there is still so much to do. The Moonshot Vision sets out what a society that works for autistic people really looks like - as described by autistic people and their families. This organisational strategy puts us on a pathway to achieve this vision for all of society.

Find out more at www.autism.org.uk