

<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/report-shows-hundreds-thousands-children-left-waiting-vital-community-care>

## Report shows hundreds of thousands of children left waiting for vital community care services

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### Media & Public Affairs team

With over 310,000 children in England currently waiting for community health services, paediatricians remain unclear on how the Government's 'shift care to the community' plans will work in practice.



A new report from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPC) lays bare the crisis in children's community health services. New analysis from RCPC shows that, as of March 2025, there are over **314,000** children waiting for essential community health services. Shockingly, this figure represents a **5% rise** from February to March and means a further **16,000** children are waiting for vital treatment.

Community paediatricians are doctors who specialise in caring for children with the greatest needs in our communities. They work in clinics, schools, or community health centres, focusing on long-term care and coordination across services. Their roles include diagnosing conditions such as autism, ADHD, developmental delays, assessing safeguarding concerns and supporting children with complex medical needs outside of hospital settings.

Despite the vital role community health services play for children and families, there remains a longstanding and consistent disparity in waiting times between children and adults. From April 2024 to March 2025, the adult waiting list decreased by **2%**, while the waiting list for children and young people increased by **11%**. As of now, **21.5%** of children have been waiting over 52 weeks, compared to just 1.3% of adults. While **86%** of adults are seen within the NHS's 18-week target, only **49.6%** of children and young people are seen within the same timeframe.

The UK Government has made shifting care from hospital to the community a priority as part of the 10 Year Health Plan process. Paediatricians welcome this intention, but concerns remain over how community health services for children will be able to meet this change without greater focus and, crucially, investment.

In their report '[Collaborative Healthcare in England: Delivering the services children need in the community](#)', RCPCH lay out a series of recommendations that will help build a stronger service in the community for children and young people to help ensure the UK Government is able to realise its ambition to create the healthiest generation of children ever.

RCPCH recommendations include:

- Introducing a distinct waiting times target for community waits to match the referral-to-treatment hospital targets.
- Implementing a Children's Health Investment Standard to address the investment gap between child and adult health services and gradually move towards more equitable service funding.
- Prioritising the child health workforce in national planning including by investing in training, skills and support for the children's community health workforce.

[Read RCPCH's report and full list of recommendations.](#)

**RCPCH Officer for Health Services, Dr Ronny Cheung, said:**

For too long, children's community services have been overlooked in the post-covid recovery agenda. As paediatricians, we're being asked to do more with less and as a result children and their families are waiting months and sometimes over a year for support that we know they urgently need.

Lengthy waits are unacceptable for any patient but for children and young people the waits can be catastrophic, as many treatments need to be given by a specific age or developmental stage. Waits such as these can result in delayed starts to school, limitations on socialising, play sports, increased risk of poor mental health, behavioural problems and distress for both the child and their families.

We want the NHS's 10-year plan to succeed, but we cannot shift care into the community while children are currently being left behind. Without urgent action, these waiting lists will continue to grow — and children will keep missing out on the vital care they need.

**Chair of the British Association for Community Child Health, Dr Douglas Simkiss, said:**

Community children's services are a vital but often overlooked component of the health care system. Work is underway to improve data, develop new models of care and create innovative workforce solutions, but this work must be seen through to completion. Implementing the recommendations in this report will have a tremendous positive impact for the children and families that rely on these services and the staff who work in them