

NAT statement on the increasing of ward space at the High Security State Hospital Carstairs – 05.10.20

The National Autistic Taskforce (NAT) is saddened and shocked to hear of the plan to increase the numbers of autistic people detained at the High Security State Hospital in Carstairs. This move disregards the recommendations made in the report commissioned by the Scottish Government: 'Coming Home': complex needs and out of area placements (2018). That report clearly stated when talking about autistic people and people with a learning disability that 'having to move far from home or even to live for long periods of time within hospital settings, is a denigration of their human rights'.

In response to the same report Clare Haughey MSP Minister For Mental Health said: "I want us to work together towards the aspirations of the individuals covered in this report to be moved closer to home as soon as this is practically possible. In future, we want to see fewer people moving to live far from their families and the communities they call "home"."

It appears that reports and statements have once again been used to placate whilst the reality for many autistic people across Scotland continues to be that living in a home and community of their choosing is denied. Being removed from a familiar community away from friends and relatives, sometimes hundreds of miles away from everything that is familiar is an unacceptable and cruel practice that will have a negative impact on a person's mental health in itself: something that can lead to much longer and unnecessary inpatient times, creating a cycle of distress through admission.

Increasing the number of autistic people detained at Carstairs is an expensive and unnecessary backwards step that repeats the mistakes of the past. This is also a puzzling time to announce this change in policy: the review of mental health law in Scotland is ongoing and will no doubt touch on recommendations in this area.

We call for a deeper genuine understanding of autistic people and people with a learning disability throughout social care and mental health services. On many occasions admissions are the result of misunderstandings that escalate, or a crisis that could have been avoided with the appropriate support at home. Where inpatient care is a genuine need it should be provided close to home and discharge planning should start on admission.

The NAT Independent Guide to Quality Care for Autistic People can be read here: https://nationalautistictaskforce.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/RC791_NAT_Guide_to_Quality_Online.pdf