



LEARNING DISABILITY, AUTISM & SAFER HEALTHCARE

Reasonable Adjustments in Healthcare

Understanding accessible care and the NHS
Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag in England

The key idea

Reasonable adjustments are changes that reduce disability-related barriers and help disabled people access healthcare more equitably. The digital flag allows relevant adjustments to be recorded and shared so services can see what a person needs rather than asking them to start again each time.

What is a reasonable adjustment?

A reasonable adjustment is a change made to reduce or remove a substantial disadvantage experienced by a disabled person. In healthcare, this can involve the way an appointment is arranged, how information is communicated, the physical or sensory environment, equipment, support or the way a usual procedure is carried out.

In everyday language

Equal access does not always mean giving everyone exactly the same thing. Sometimes a service needs to work differently so a disabled person can use it safely and effectively.

The legal duty

The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on service providers and those exercising public functions to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people. For services, this is an anticipatory duty: organisations should think ahead about barriers disabled people may face rather than waiting until access has already failed.

Important legal point

The duty can involve changing a provision, criterion or practice; addressing barriers created by physical features; or providing an auxiliary aid. What is reasonable depends on the circumstances, including whether the adjustment is effective and practicable.

Reasonable adjustments in healthcare

An adjustment should respond to the barrier the person actually experiences. A diagnosis alone does not tell staff what someone needs, and two people with the same diagnosis may need very different adjustments.

What this might look like

Examples include a longer appointment, a quieter waiting area, first or last appointment of the day, Easy Read or large-print information, extra processing time, communication support, allowing a supporter to attend, reducing sensory demands, accessible equipment or adapting how a procedure is explained and carried out.

Reasonable does not mean optional

Where the Equality Act duty applies and an adjustment is reasonable, making it is a legal obligation rather than simply a courtesy or preference. Service providers cannot charge a disabled person for reasonable adjustments.

What is the Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag?

The NHS Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag is a national marker on a person's health and care record. It indicates that the person needs reasonable adjustments and allows relevant details about those adjustments to be recorded, shared and viewed across publicly funded health and social care services.

Key distinction

The digital flag records and shares information about adjustments. It does not create the legal duty: the reasonable-adjustment duty comes from equality law. A person can still need and be entitled to reasonable adjustments even if a digital flag has not yet been recorded.

Who is the flag for?

The flag is for disabled people who need reasonable adjustments when accessing health or social care. It is not limited to people with a learning disability or autism. Needs may relate to communication, cognition, sensory processing, mobility, physical access or other disability-related barriers.

What can be recorded?

The record can indicate that reasonable adjustments are required and describe the adjustments a person needs. The purpose is to help staff know about those needs wherever the person is seen or treated, reducing repeated explanations and improving continuity.

Example

A person's flag might record that they need written information in plain language, additional processing time, a quiet place to wait and support from a familiar person during appointments. Staff can then plan for these needs before the consultation begins.

A national implementation deadline

NHS England states that all NHS and other publicly funded health and social care services must be able to share, write to and read from the Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag by 30 September 2026. This is an implementation requirement for services and supports information being available across care settings.

Important to remember

A technical flag is useful only if the information is noticed and acted upon. Recording an adjustment is not the same as providing it.

Identifying the adjustment

The starting point should usually be the barrier: what makes it harder for this person to access, understand, participate in or receive care? The person should be involved in identifying what helps wherever possible. Information from family, carers, advocates or supporters may also be useful when appropriate.

Communication adjustments

Communication adjustments may include Easy Read, pictures, large print, British Sign Language interpretation, AAC, writing rather than telephone contact, one question at a time, concrete language, extra processing time or checking understanding without pressuring the person.

Sensory and environmental adjustments

Healthcare environments can create barriers through noise, lighting, touch, smells, crowds, unpredictability or long waits. Adjustments might include quieter spaces, reduced waiting, dimmer lighting where possible, advance information, permission to use sensory aids or changes to how physical contact is approached.

Appointment and procedural adjustments

Some people may need longer appointments, appointments at a particular time, breaks, more preparation before a procedure, step-by-step explanations, familiarisation visits, accessible equipment or a different way of completing part of a usual pathway.

What you can ask

What part of this appointment or environment is difficult for me? What change would reduce that barrier? Has the adjustment been recorded? Will the next service be able to see it? Who should I contact if my needs change?

Adjustments should be reviewed

Needs can change over time, between environments or with changes in health. An adjustment that worked previously may need updating. Staff should not assume that a recorded flag tells them everything about the person's current needs.

The flag does not replace communication

A digital record should support, not replace, a conversation with the person. Staff should still ask what the person needs, check whether recorded information remains accurate and avoid treating an adjustment as a fixed rule when the person's circumstances have changed.

For healthcare professionals

Notice the flag early enough to act on it. Plan adjustments before the person arrives where possible, document changes accurately, and consider whether routine systems or policies are creating avoidable barriers.

If an adjustment is not provided

If a person cannot access care because an agreed or needed adjustment has not been made, it can be helpful to explain the barrier and requested adjustment clearly and ask the service how it will address it. Concerns may also be raised through the service's complaints or patient-support routes where appropriate.

Practical check

Has the barrier been identified? Has the person been asked what helps? Is the adjustment reasonable and effective? Has it been recorded accurately? Can relevant services see it? Is it actually being provided, and does it still meet the person's needs?

References & Further Resources

This guide focuses on healthcare and the NHS Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag in England. Equality Act duties on services and public functions apply across England, Wales and Scotland, while the digital flag described here is an NHS England programme.

NHS England - Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag	Explains what the national digital flag is, who it is for and how it enables reasonable-adjustment information to be recorded, shared and viewed across publicly funded health and social care.
NHS England - Accessible flag information	Easy Read and Plain English information about the Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag, published in February 2026.
Equality Act 2010	Sections 20 and 21 and Schedule 2 set out the reasonable-adjustment duty and how it applies to services and public functions.
EHRC Code of Practice 2026	The updated Code of Practice for services, public functions and associations explains the anticipatory duty, substantial disadvantage and factors relevant to what may be reasonable.
GOV.UK - Reasonable adjustments: a legal duty	Practical guidance for health and social care professionals, including examples of adjustments for people with a learning disability.

How to use these resources

Use NHS England's current information for the digital flag and implementation arrangements. For the underlying legal duty, use the Equality Act and the current Equality and Human Rights Commission Code of Practice. Individual circumstances matter when deciding what adjustment is reasonable and effective.