

## BRIEFING: Your Attention Please: The Social and Economic Impact of ADHD

### INTRODUCTION

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a frequently stereotyped condition. But contrary to common misconceptions, ADHD does not only affect young boys, nor does it reflect a simple inability to behave. It is a chronic condition that affects people from all backgrounds and frequently persists into adulthood. Many people grow up and become adults without ever being diagnosed, receiving little or no support; the true impact of this is not well understood from a research perspective. At a time when mental health services are under the spotlight, the aim of this Demos report was to explore the socioeconomic impact of undiagnosed and untreated ADHD on individuals, the people around them and wider society. We also sought to assess the evidence base concerning the impact of ADHD and to identify gaps.

### METHODOLOGY

Research for this project took place between August and October 2017. It consisted of:

- conducting a rapid evidence assessment (REA) of academic literature
- supplementary desk research
- holding interviews with people diagnosed with ADHD in adulthood
- examining written submissions from people diagnosed with ADHD in adulthood
- holding interviews with professional experts and stakeholders

### KEY FINDINGS

- ADHD is set apart from other conditions by the **enormous number of ways in which it can affect a person's life** – from struggles in education and work, to poor relationships and risk-taking, and even crime and anti-social behaviour. Daily activities like sorting through post and housework can be overwhelming for people with ADHD.
- Although the evidence suffers from significant limitations, monetised estimates of the impact of ADHD suggest that the condition is very costly to individuals, families and the economy. Estimates typically suggest **that the combined cost to individuals and the state runs into billions of pounds per year.**
- Surprisingly, **most of the costs of ADHD are associated with adults who have the condition**, rather than children. The majority of children with ADHD continue to have symptoms, if not a full diagnosis, in adulthood.
- **Lack of employment among people with ADHD and its associated costs**, including reduced tax returns and provision of income replacement benefits, **are thought to be the biggest costs** – not healthcare costs.
- **Awareness and understanding of ADHD is still extremely poor** - not only among the general public and parents, but among teachers and healthcare professionals, including GPs

---

#### Disclaimer

This initiative was entirely funded by Shire Pharmaceuticals Limited. Editorial control rested with Demos, but Shire has reviewed the document for technical accuracy.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

People with ADHD can be creative, energetic and dynamic. But as things stand, too many people with the condition are going through life without receiving the diagnosis or support they need to be happy and fulfilled, and to make the most of their talents. Many people with the condition suffer immensely in all areas of their lives, including education, work, relationships and more, with implications for their friends and family, wider society and the public purse too. Reducing the socioeconomic burden of ADHD will be a complex task. It will require change and joined-up thinking across a number of different sectors and services, including health, education, employment and research – as reflected in our recommendations below. But the green paper on children's mental health represents an important opportunity for the government to lead the charge. Policymakers must use the green paper as a springboard to implement a convincing and transformative strategy to ensure that people with ADHD are left behind no longer.

### *Recommendations for policy and practice*

We make the following recommendations for policy-makers and practitioners:

- **The government** should work with people with ADHD and the media to develop an awareness-raising campaign, aiming to make ADHD visible to a wider audience and promote better public understanding of the condition.
- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** (<https://mhfaengland.org/>) should develop its government-sponsored schools programme to include advice on ADHD.
- **Initial teacher training (ITT) providers** should clearly focus on supporting children with ADHD in their programmes, in meeting the new requirement for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) training to form a core part of all ITT courses from 2018.
- **NHS England** should work with clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) to ensure that they prioritise data collection and use as part of a drive to improve their commissioning of health services for people with ADHD.
- **Health professionals** treating children and young people with ADHD should work with other professionals (such as the proposed designated senior leads for mental health in schools) to create transition plans ahead of key changes in the individual's life.
- **Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) work coaches and employers** should signpost people with ADHD to Access to Work.

### *Recommendations for research*

We recommend that the following work is prioritised by researchers and research funders:

- Explore the difference made by early access to diagnosis and treatment to the long-term outcomes and costs of people with ADHD.
- Compare outcomes for adults with ADHD treated in general psychiatric clinics with outcomes for those treated in adult ADHD clinics.
- Explore under-researched social and economic impacts of ADHD.
- Separate the impacts of ADHD from the impacts of other psychiatric conditions that frequently co-occur with ADHD.

### *Disclaimer*

This initiative was entirely funded by Shire Pharmaceuticals Limited. Editorial control rested with Demos, but Shire has reviewed the document for technical accuracy.