What NHS Dorset Has Been Doing for Children in Care and Care Leavers (2025-26)

Who is this for?

This summary is for children and young people in care, and care leavers. It explains what has been happening in health services over the last year, what has gone well, and what still needs to improve.

What We Are Proud Of

🦷 Better Access to Dentists

More children and young people in care are now getting regular dental check-ups. The Dental Premium Scheme helped increase dental attendance from around 71% to over 92%, which is a big improvement.

💙 A New Care Leaver Flag

A new Care Leaver Flag has been introduced across health services. This helps staff recognise when someone has care experience so they can provide more understanding, compassionate and trauma-informed support without young people having to repeat their story again and again.

☺ Better Emotional Wellbeing Support

Health, social care and psychology teams are working together more closely to help children and young people get the right emotional wellbeing support when they need it.

🗣 Listening to Young People

NHS Dorset has continued to work with Youth Voice groups and Corporate Parenting Boards to hear directly from children and young people about what works well and what needs to change. This feedback is helping shape future services.

🌍 Support for Young People Seeking Asylum

Children coming to Dorset as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children continue to access a "one-stop" health assessment service, making it easier to get the checks and support they need.

What Needs to Get Better?

⏳ Waiting Too Long for Some Health Assessments

Because more children are coming into care and services are very busy, some health assessments are taking longer than they should.

🚗 Living Away From Dorset

About one-third of Dorset's children in care live outside the county. This can make it harder to get health appointments and support quickly.

🔄 Moving into Adult Services

Many care leavers tell us that moving from children's services to adult services can be difficult, especially when accessing mental health and wellbeing support.

🧠 Neurodevelopmental Assessments

Waiting times for assessments such as autism and ADHD can still be very long, although work is underway to improve this.

What Will Happen Next?

In 2026-27 NHS Dorset plans to:

✅ Improve waiting times for health assessments.

✅ Reduce inequalities for children living outside Dorset.

✅ Improve mental health and emotional wellbeing support.

✅ Develop better pathways for autism and ADHD assessments.

✅ Make sure children and young people's voices continue to shape services.

✅ Continue to develop trauma-informed services that understand the impact of care experience.

Our Message to You

You told us that being listened to, treated with kindness, and getting help when you need it matters most. We are committed to working with you to improve health services and make sure every child in care and care leaver has the opportunity to be healthy, happy and reach their potential.