



**WIRRAL  
INTELLIGENCE  
SERVICE**

# **Learning Disability & Autistic Spectrum Disorder Profile for Wirral**

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**March 2024**

# Learning Disability & Autistic Spectrum Disorder Profile for Wirral

For further information please contact:

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## Key Findings

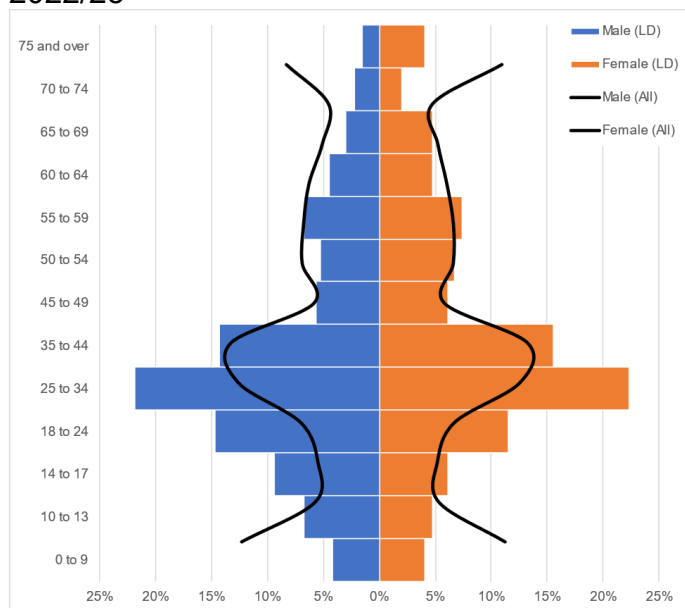
- **Prevalence:** Numbers of people with autism known to services in Wirral are greater than those estimated using recent research (3,950 known vs 2,330 estimated). Numbers known to primary care<sup>1</sup>, education<sup>4</sup> and social care have increased in recent years
- **Projected Trends:** Projected trends are unable to be completed at present. This relates to population changes following [Census 2021](#) awaiting inclusion into data sources such as [POPPI](#) and [PANSI](#).
- **Support from Schools and Children's Services<sup>4</sup>:** The number of pupils in Wirral overall has decreased in recent years, however this is not reflected in the trend for pupils with SEN/EHCP, which has increased in the same period.
- **Children in Need (CiN)<sup>4</sup>:** Learning Disabilities represent a substantial proportion of CiN who have a disability; more than one in three for Wirral.
- **Support from Adult Social Care<sup>5</sup>:** Wirral supports less adults with a learning disability per head of population than Cheshire & Merseyside, but has a higher rate than [CIPFA](#) neighbours, North West and England for both 18-64 and 65+ years.
- **The proportion of adults living on their own or with their families<sup>8</sup>** is lower in Wirral than in Cheshire & Merseyside but higher than England)
- **The proportion in paid employment<sup>8</sup>** is lower than both Cheshire & Merseyside and England.
- Although the number of [Safeguarding \(Section 42\) enquiries](#) involving people with a learning disability has fallen recently; the Wirral rate has been higher than England since 2019/20.
- **Screening/ Annual Health Checks<sup>1</sup>** are not offered to children under 14, or to people with Autism-only at present. This remains an area of significant challenge for Cheshire and Merseyside. However, in Wirral uptake has improved in line with national trends and was just under 80% in 2022/23.
- **Seasonal flu vaccination rate<sup>1</sup>** has improved in recent years, despite a small dip in the most recent season (2022/23). This is in line with national trends as well as those seen across Cheshire & Merseyside.
- **Weight status<sup>1</sup>** is better recorded for people with a learning disability than for those without. In Wirral, the rate of obesity in people with LD is considerably higher for females than males.
- **Cancer<sup>1</sup>:** The low screening uptake for cervical and bowel screening for people with learning disabilities is considerable. However, in 2022/23 screening for breast cancer was at a similar level to those without a learning disability.
- **Long-term conditions<sup>1</sup>:** In 2022/23, Wirral continued to record a higher prevalence for epilepsy, severe mental illness, dementia, non-type 1 diabetes and hyperthyroidism in those with a learning disability than those without a learning disability.

# Numbers Known to Services

## Primary Care (2022/23)

### Learning Disability (LD)

**Figure 1:** GP registered population recorded as having a learning disability, Wirral, 2022/23



740 females

1,330 males

2,070 patients

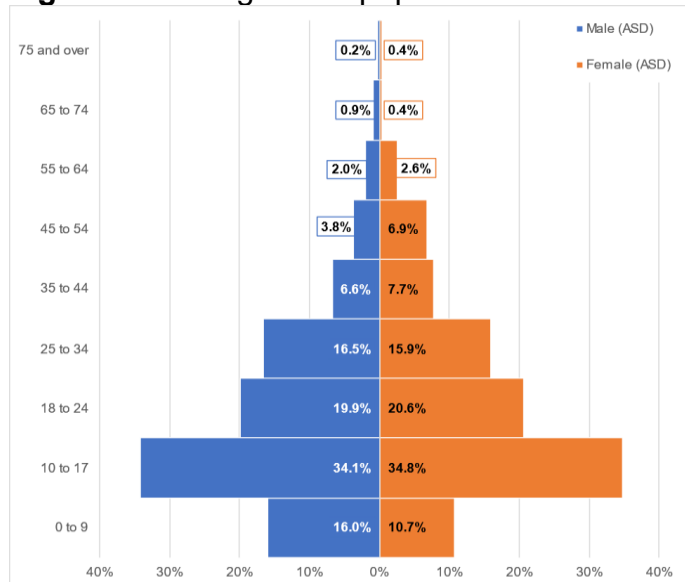
Source: [Reference 1](#)

Note: NHS Digital 2022/23 dataset, which includes 85% of the GP registered population in Wirral (compared to 55.1% nationally)

### Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- Patients diagnosed with and Autistic Spectrum Disorder are more likely to be male and aged under 45, the most prevalent age being 10-17 years.

**Figure 2:** GP registered population recorded as having an ASD, Wirral, 2022/23



1,165 females

2,785 males

3,950 patients

Source: [Reference 1](#)

Note: NHS Digital 2022/23 dataset, which includes 85% of the GP registered population in Wirral (compared to 55.1% nationally)

- Primary care diagnosis figures (**Table 2**) for Wirral do largely exceed the estimates calculated using estimates (**Table 1**) from recent research from primary care diagnosis (O’Nions et al)<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 1 (left):** Estimated ASD population, Wirral, 2022/23

**Table 2 (right):** GP registered population with ASD, Wirral, 2022/23

Age Band	Estimated* ASD
0-19	1,482
20-29	540
30-59	269
60+	39
All	2,330

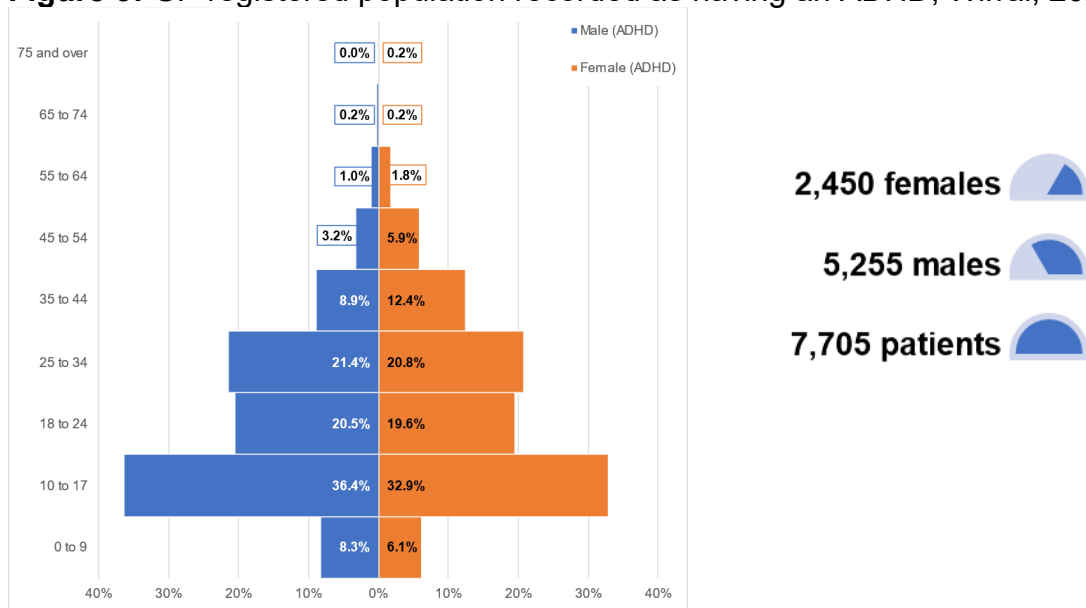
Age Band	GP Reg ASD
0-17	1,925
18-24	795
25-64	1,190
65+	40
All	3,950

Source 1: [Reference 3](#)

Source 2: [Reference 1 \(with Reference 11\)](#)

## Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

**Figure 3:** GP registered population recorded as having an ADHD, Wirral, 2022/23



Source: [Reference 1](#)

Note: NHS Digital 2022/23 dataset, which includes 85% of the GP registered population in Wirral (compared to 55.1% nationally)

- Patients diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are more likely to be male and aged under 45, the most prevalent age being 10-17 years.

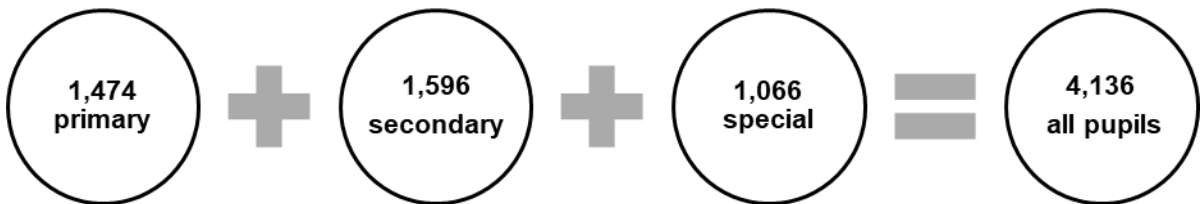
## Education (2022/23)

### Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

**Figure 4** is based on pupil numbers who have SEN due to the following primary needs:

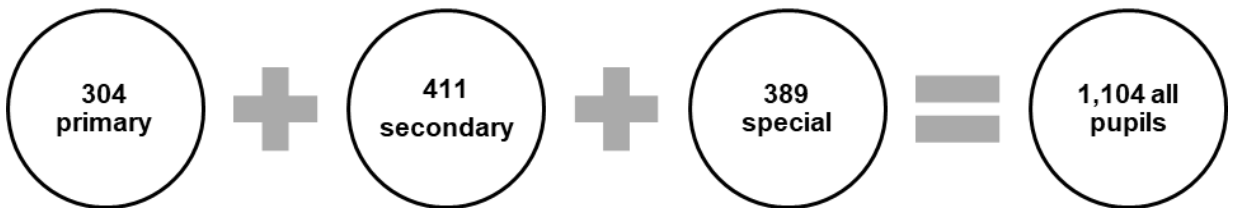
- Moderate learning difficulty
- Severe learning difficulty
- Profound & Multiple learning difficulty
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

**Figure 4:** SEN Pupils with primary need of LD or ASD, Wirral, 2022/23



Source: [Reference 4](#)

**Figure 5:** SEN Pupils with primary need of ASD, Wirral, 2022/23



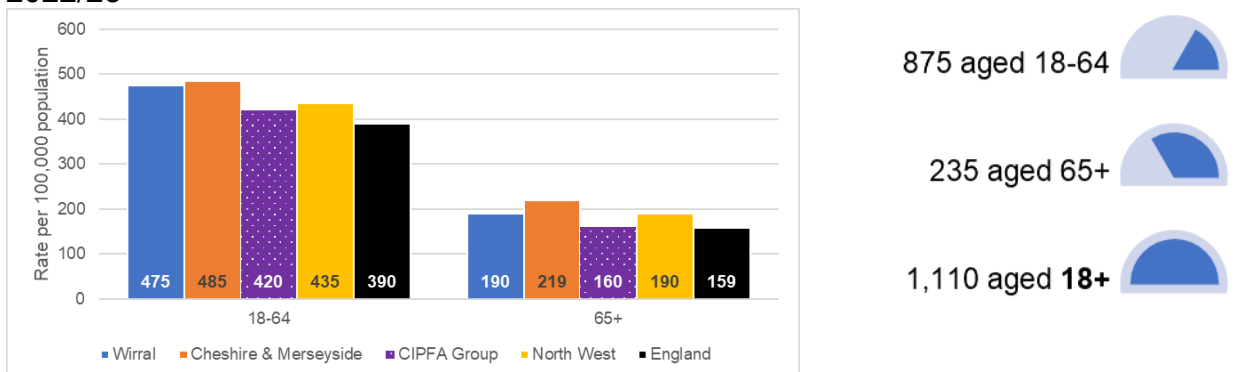
Source: [Reference 4](#)

## Adult Social Care (2022/23)

### Receiving long term support

- In 2021/22, quality of life score for carers<sup>6</sup> of people with learning disabilities in Wirral is higher than North West and England.

**Figure 6:** Rate of people with learning disabilities receiving long term support, 2022/23



Source: [Reference 5](#)

# Children with LD and ASD

## Support from Schools and Child Services as of 31 March 2023

### Special Educational Needs (SEN)

**Table 3:** Pupils by primary need and school type, Wirral, 2022/23

Primary Need	Primary		Secondary		Special*	
	Number	%**	Number	%**	Number	%**
Any LD or ASD	1,474	29.6%	1,596	40.7%	1,066	37.7%
Specific LD	745	50.5%	813	50.9%	9	<1%
Moderate LD	417	28.3%	371	23.2%	85	8.0%
Severe LD	6	<1%	<5	<1%	542	50.8%
Profound & Multiple LD	<5	<1%	0	0	44	4.1%
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	304	20.6%	411	25.8%	389	36.5%

Source: [Reference 4](#)

**Note:** Includes state-funded special schools only. Percentages used for "Any LD or ASD" are calculated as a proportion of all pupils with SEN needs and/or EHC plan. Percentages used for specific diagnoses are calculated as a proportion of all pupils with "Any LD or ASD".

### Learning Disability and behaviours that challenge<sup>10</sup>

- Emerson et al (2014) estimate that about 1 in 8 (11.7%) of children with LD also show behaviours that challenge.
- They assert that this is likely to be a conservative estimate due to the failure of the Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to identify behaviours that challenge that are more specific to (and can be common among) children with learning disabilities (e.g., severe self-injury).

Wirral  
Estimate<sup>10</sup>  
355

### Children in Need (CiN)

**Table 4:** Children in Need (CiN) breakdown, by area, 2022/23

Area	CiN	CiN with special needs	CiN with special needs %	LD %	ASD %
Wirral	1,557	766	49.2%	35.5%	6.0%
Cheshire & Merseyside	10,977	4,932	44.9%	27.8%	12.1%
North West	64,869	30,156	46.5%	29.1%	13.1%
England	210,970	102,890	48.8%	29.8%	15.1%

Source: [Reference 4](#)

- In Wirral nearly half of children in need (CiN) nearly half (49.2%) have special needs, which is higher than Cheshire & Merseyside (44.9%), North West (46.5%) and England (48.8%) (**Table 4**).
- Of those CiN with special needs, 35.5% (or more than one in three have) LD in Wirral, which is slightly higher than the three comparator areas.
- However, the proportion of CiN in Wirral with ASD (6.0%) is substantially lower than the three comparator areas.

## Adults with LD and ASD

### Primary Support Reason (PSR)

**Table 5:** Adults receiving social care support with a PSR of Learning Disability, 2022/23

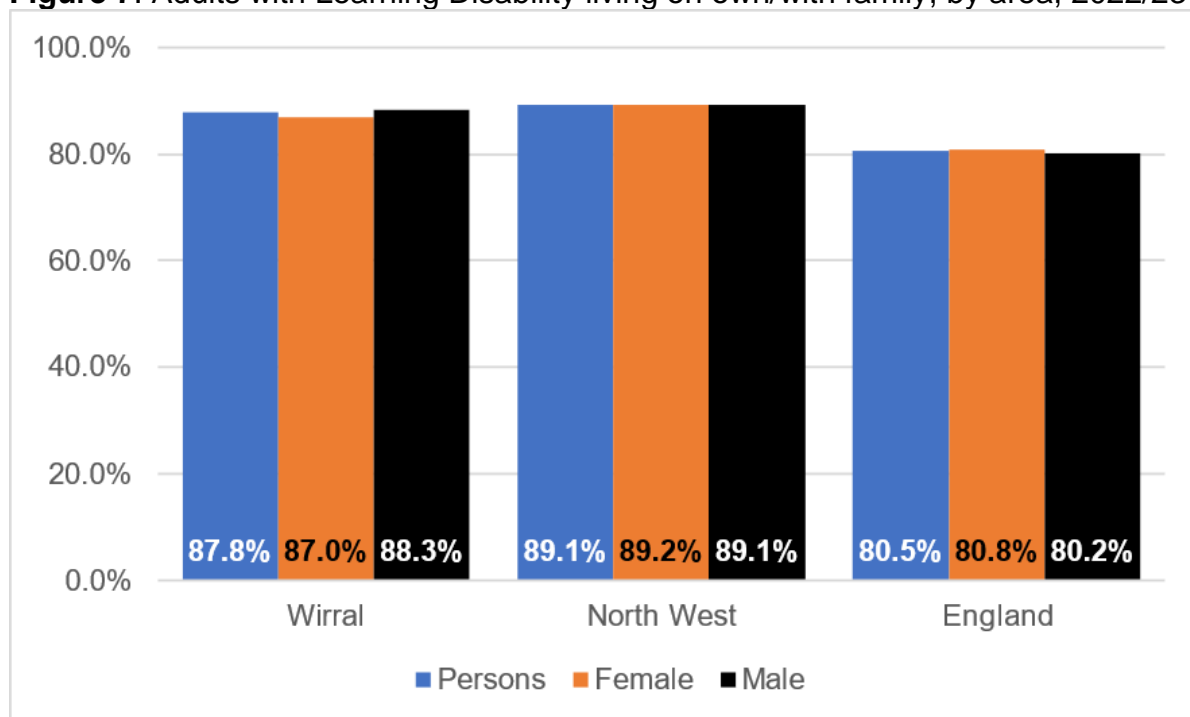
Area	18-64		65 and over	
	Number	Rate per 100,000	Number	Rate per 100,000
Wirral	875	475	135	190
Cheshire & Merseyside	7,075	485	1,065	219
CIPFA Group	12,520	420	1,675	160
North West	19,430	435	2,620	190
England	133,750	390	16,690	159

CIPFA is a statistical neighbours grouping

Source: [Reference 5](#)

- For both age cohorts, Wirral has rates of adults receiving social support due to a learning disability that are higher than other comparator areas except Cheshire & Merseyside (**Table 5**).

**Figure 7:** Adults with Learning Disability living on own/with family, by area, 2022/23

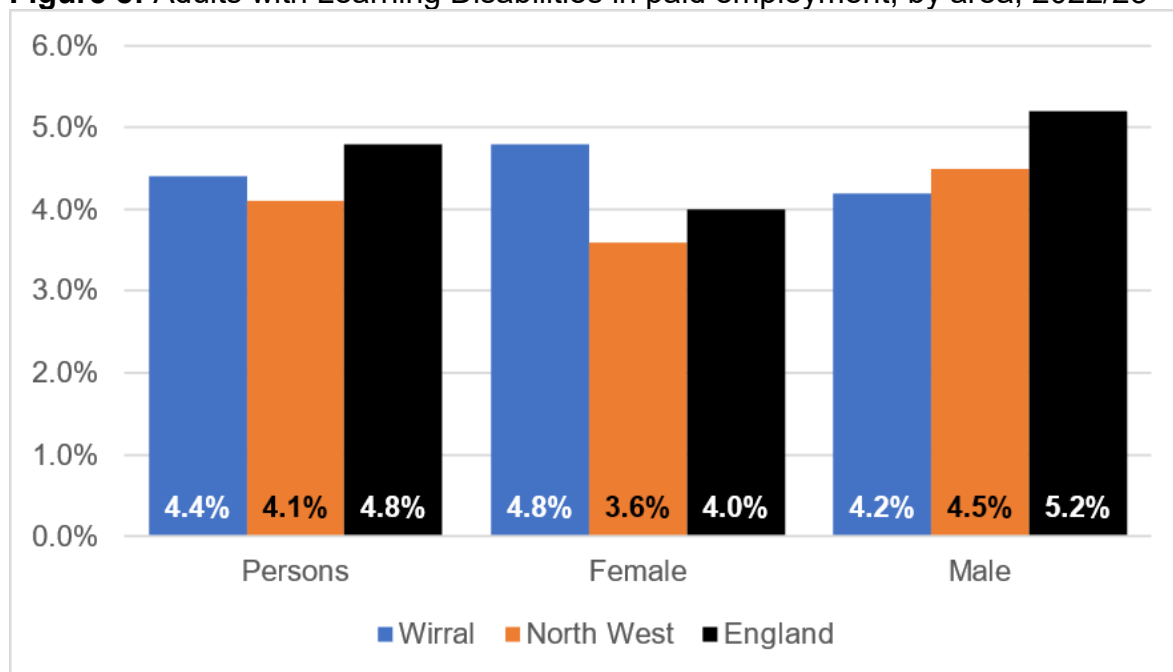


Source: [Reference 8](#)

- Lower proportion of Wirral people (87.8%) with LD living in the community than for North West (89.1%) but higher than England (80.5%).
- Men (88.3%) are also slightly more likely to live on own/with family in Wirral than women (87.0%).



**Figure 8:** Adults with Learning Disabilities in paid employment, by area, 2022/23



Source: [Reference 8](#)

- Higher proportion of persons with LD in paid employment in Wirral (4.4%) than North West (4.1%) but lower than England. (4.8%).
- Females (4.8%) are also more likely to be in paid employment in Wirral than males (4.2%).

**Table 6:** Individuals with Learning Disabilities (LD) involved in Section 42 (S42) safeguarding enquiries, 2020/21 to 2022/23

		2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Wirral	All S42 enquiries	835	815	655
	LD-related S42 enquiries	165	135	130
	%	19.8%	16.6%	19.8%
North West	All S42 enquiries	20,905	21,585	24,580
	LD-related S42 enquiries	2,550	1,720	2,750
	%	12.2%	8.0%	11.2%
England	All S42 enquiries	155,270	161,925	173,280
	LD-related S42 enquiries	13,285	14,920	15,285
	%	8.6%	9.2%	8.8%

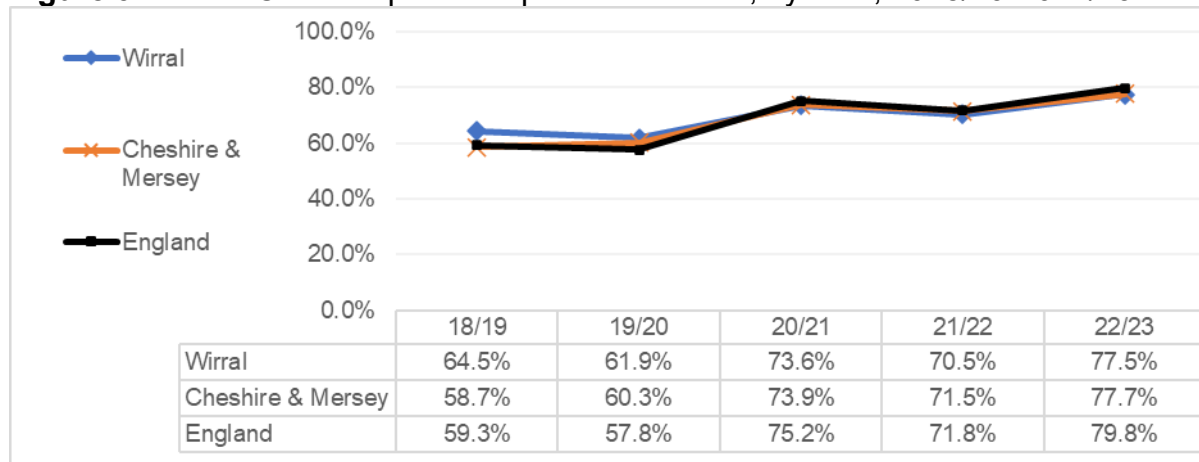
Source: [Reference 8](#)

- The proportion of S42 safeguarding enquiries involving people with LD has fluctuated over the three-year period between 2020/21 and 2022/23. This is due to the overall number of S42 enquiries decreasing at a faster rate than those specifically involving someone with LD.
- This is different to the national and regional picture, both of which seeing increases overall and in LD-related enquiries over the same period.

## Health of people with a Learning Disability (LD)

### Health Checks, Seasonal Flu Immunisations and Weight (to 2022/23)

**Figure 9:** Health Checks uptake for patients with LD, by area, 2018/19-2022/23



Source: [Reference 1](#)

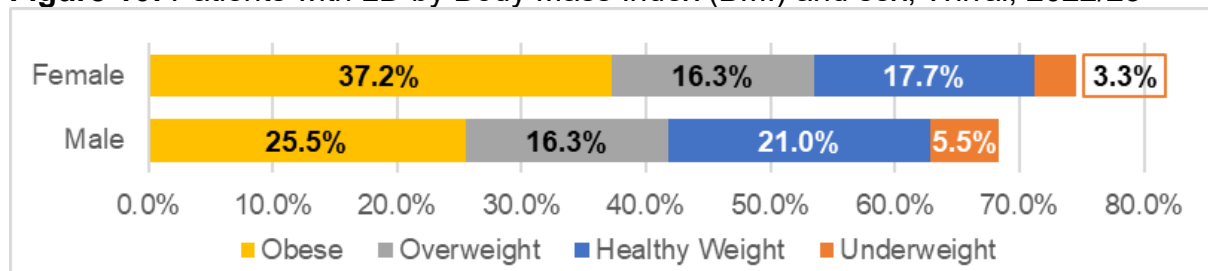
- Wirral has performed steadily and has mirrored the trends of Cheshire & Merseyside (C&M) and England. Improvements across England now mean it outperforms Wirral (**Figure 8**).
- The percentage receiving annual health checks in Wirral generally increases with age, peaking at 70-74 for women and 75 and over for men (**Table 7**).

**Table 7:** Annual Health Checks uptake for patients with LD, by age and sex, 2022/23

Age Band	14-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75+	ALL
Male	64.6%	61.2%	74.7%	80.6%	86.3%	84.7%	84.4%	83.3%	78.9%	89.7%	95.2%	80.6%
Female	63.8%	76.7%	78.5%	83.8%	80.4%	83.3%	86.8%	79.4%	86.5%	94.1%	87.5%	75.7%

Source: [Reference 1](#)

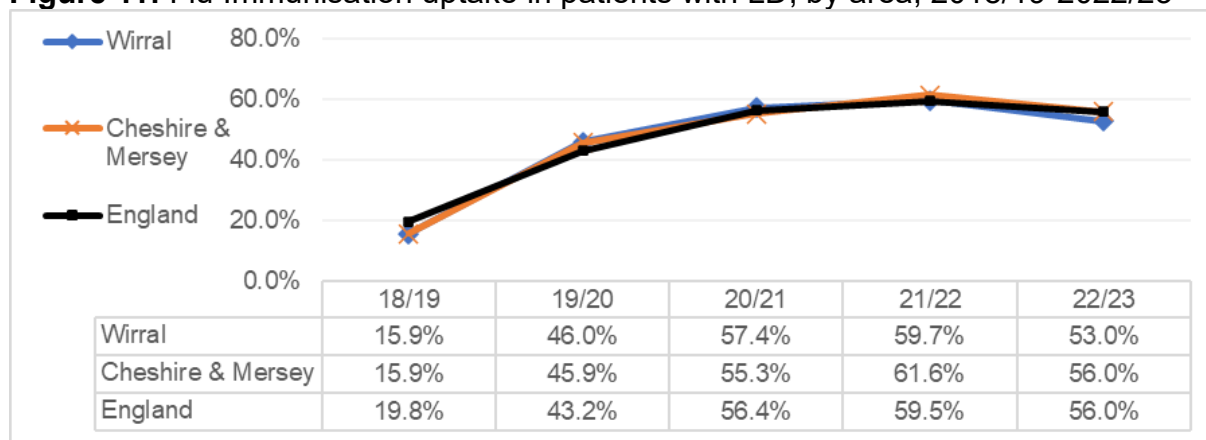
**Figure 10:** Patients with LD by Body Mass Index (BMI) and sex, Wirral, 2022/23



Source: [Reference 1](#)

- Female patients with LD are more likely to be obese than their male counterparts (37.2% vs 25.5%). They are equally like to be overweight, however male patients with LD are more likely to be underweight or be of a healthy weight (**Figure 10**).
- 72% of people in Wirral with LD have a Body Mass Index (BMI) recorded in March 2023 compared to 29.3% of patients without LD ([Reference 1](#)).

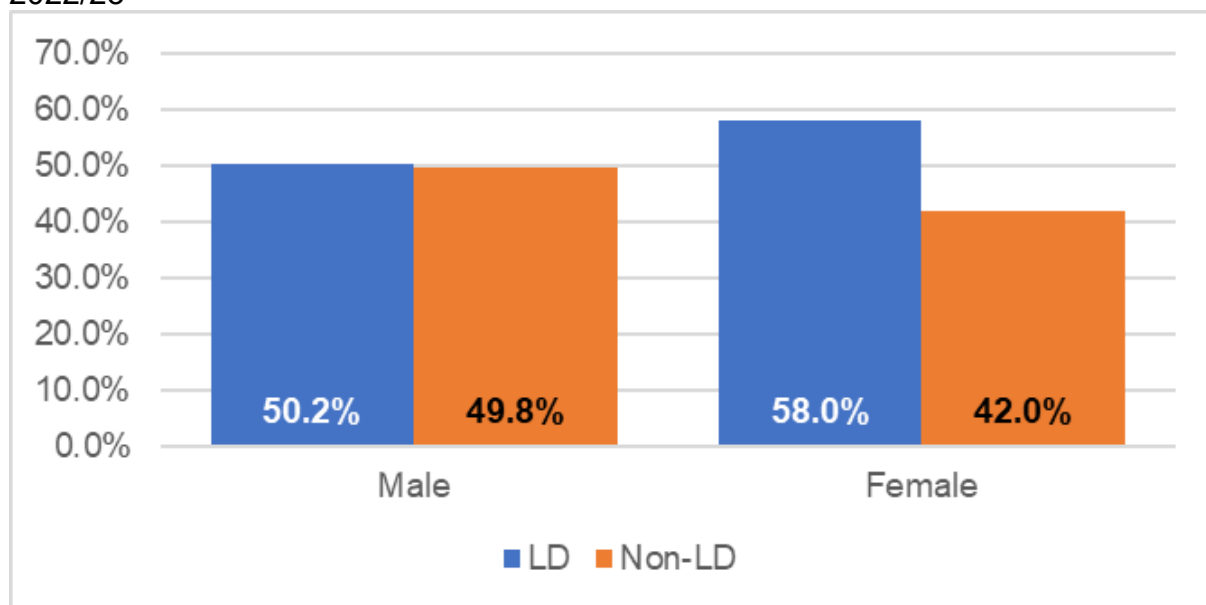
**Figure 11: Flu Immunisation uptake in patients with LD, by area, 2018/19-2022/23**



Source: [Reference 1](#)

- The percentage of patients immunised against seasonal influenza (flu) has fallen recently, both nationally and across Cheshire & Merseyside.
- This has also happened in Wirral, despite uptake rates having been consistently lower than C&M and England (**Figure 11**).

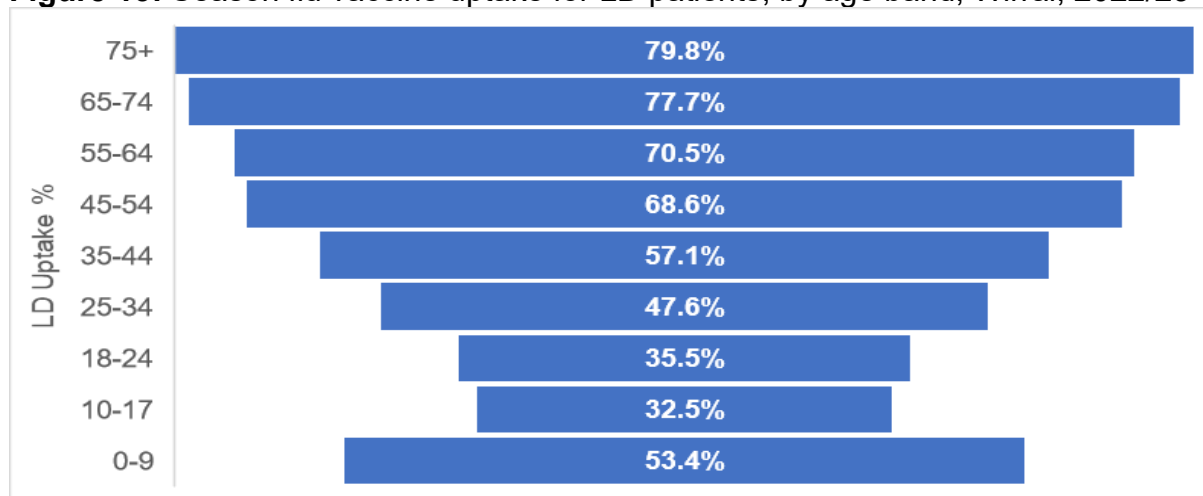
**Figure 12: Season flu vaccine uptake for LD and non-LD patients, by sex, Wirral, 2022/23**



Source: [Reference 1](#)

- More women than men in Wirral are immunised (**Figure 12**); this is apparent for both patients with and without LD.
- Immunisation levels increase with age (Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Season flu vaccine uptake for LD patients, by age band, Wirral, 2022/23**



Source: [Reference 1](#)

## Cancer (to 2022/23)

### Cancer prevalence

- Cancer prevalence lower in those with a learning disability (LD), 1.9%, compared to those without 3.3% ([Reference 1](#)).
- When factoring the difference in age profile, the rate amongst people with LD is 10% lower than people without LD (standardised prevalence ratio = 0.9).

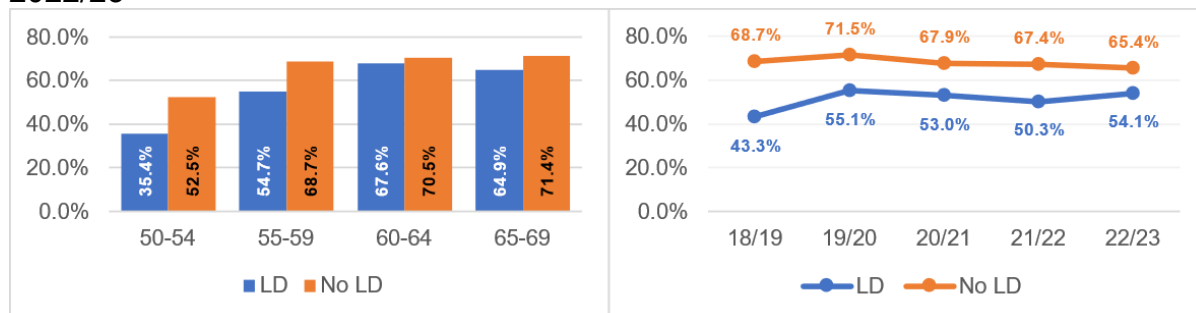
### Cancer screening

- Data suggests the greatest improvement could be made in cervical screening (**Figures 15 and 16**).
- Similar trends in uptake seen for those with and without LD.

### Breast Cancer Screening:

**Figure 14 (left): Uptake for LD and non-LD patients, by age band, Wirral, 2022/23**

**Figure 15 (right): Uptake for LD and non-LD patients, by year, Wirral, 2018/19-2022/23**

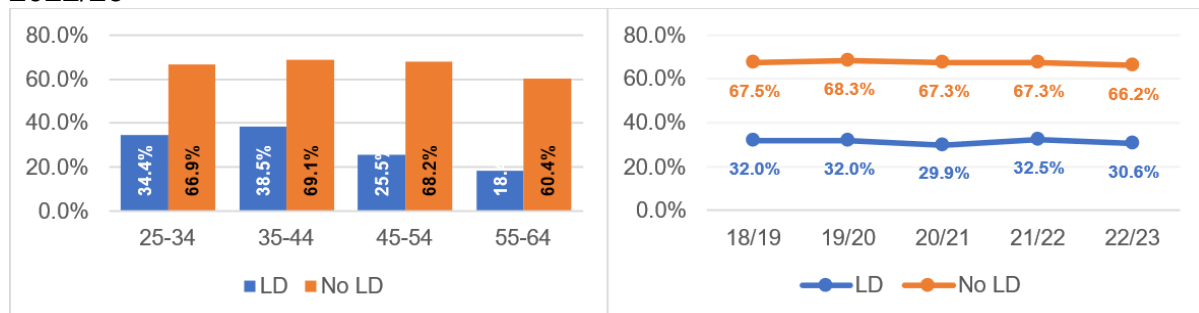


Source: [Reference 1](#)

## Cervical Cancer Screening:

**Figure 16 (left):** Uptake for LD and non-LD patients, by age band, Wirral, 2022/23

**Figure 17 (right):** Uptake for LD and non-LD patients, by year, Wirral, 2018/19-2022/23

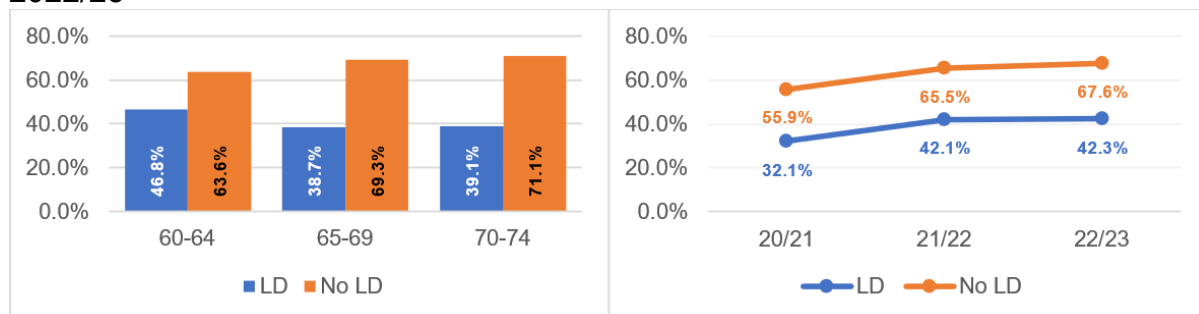


Source: [Reference 1](#)

## Colorectal (Bowel) Cancer Screening:

**Figure 18 (left):** Uptake for LD and non-LD patients, by age band, Wirral, 2022/23

**Figure 19 (right):** Uptake for LD and non-LD patients, by year, Wirral, 2018/19-2022/23



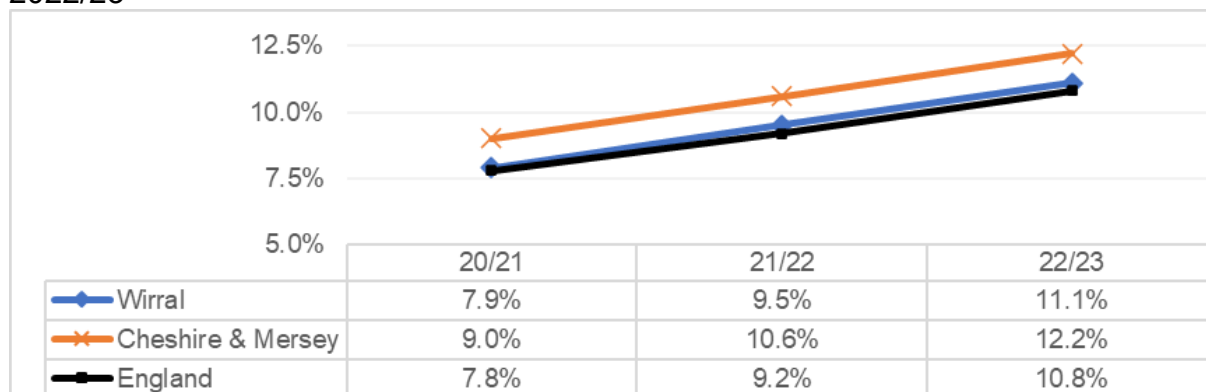
Source: [Reference 1](#)

## Long Term Conditions (to 2022/23)

### Dysphagia

- Dysphagia is a term used to describe swallowing problems.
- Rates in Wirral were lower than both Cheshire & Merseyside but higher than England in 2022/23 (**Figure 20**).

**Figure 20:** Prevalence of dysphagia in patients with LD, by area, 2020/21 to 2022/23



Source: [Reference 1](#)

- Generally, dysphagia is more prevalent in older people and more common in women than men (**Table 8**).

**Table 8:** Dysphagia in LD patients by age band and sex, Wirral, 2022/23

Age Band	0-9	10-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	ALL
Male	5.3%	3.2%	9.2%	6.6%	11.0%	16.6%	13.3%	25.4%	38.1%	10.3%
Female	3.2%	3.6%	8.1%	7.4%	12.8%	18.1%	20.7%	20.4%	28.1%	12.4%

Source: [Reference 1](#)

## Standardised Prevalence Ratios

**Table 9:** Standardised Prevalence Ratio, by condition, Wirral, 2022/23

Condition	LD	Non LD	Expected	Observed	SPR
Epilepsy	16.3%	0.7%	28	339	19.2
Autism	39.0%	1.4%	53	813	15.4
Mental Health	6.8%	1.1%	22	142	6.4
Dementia	1.4%	0.9%	6	30	4.7
ADHD with melatonin	3.7%	0.5%	17	76	4.6
ADHD	15.2%	2.7%	93	317	3.4
Hyperthyroidism	8.1%	4.4%	61	169	2.8
Diabetes non-type 1	7.2%	5.1%	70	150	2.1
Diabetes Mellitus	7.0%	5.0%	72	145	2.0
Asthma	11.2%	6.9%	141	234	1.7

Source: [Reference 1](#)

- In terms of prevalence in populations, people with a learning disability (LD) are more likely to have a diagnosis of epilepsy, severe mental illness and/or autism than for people with no LD.
- Most long-term conditions are more prevalent in people with LD when age differences factored in (**Table 9**).

## Primary Care Measures

**Table 10:** Primary care measures for LD and non-LD patients, Wirral, 2022/23

LD with Specific Condition Activity	LD	Non-LD
BP check in last 5 years	85.0%	62.4%
Hypertension prevalence	9.3%	14.8%
Epilepsy with drug treatment	3.9%	3.5%
Epileptic on drug treatment with seizure frequency known	5.0%	0.0%
Epileptic on drug treatment, seizure free in last 12months	2.5%	0.0%
Type 1 diabetes	0.8%	0.5%
Non-Type 1 diabetes	7.2%	5.1%

Source: [Reference 1](#)

- Patients with a learning disability (LD) are more likely to have their blood pressure (BP) checked (85.0% vs 62.4%, **Table 10**).
- Patients with LD and epilepsy are more likely to be on drug treatment and have a recorded seizure status (5.0% vs 0.0%, **Table 10**)
- Patients with LD are most likely to be diagnosed with a form of diabetes (**Table 10**).

## Data Sources and References

1. Health and Care of People with Learning Disabilities data series 2022/23, NHS Digital; <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/health-and-care-of-people-with-learning-disabilities>
2. QOF, NHS Digital, 2022/23; <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/quality-and-outcomes-framework-achievement-prevalence-and-exceptions-data/>
3. O’Nions et al, 2023, Autism in England: assessing underdiagnosis in a population-based cohort study of prospectively collected primary care data; [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanepi/article/PIIS2666-7762\(23\)00045-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanepi/article/PIIS2666-7762(23)00045-5/fulltext)
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