

NHS vs Private Diagnosis: Which Route Is Right for You?

TL;DR · QUICK SUMMARY

- The NHS route is free but often has very long waiting times, which vary widely by area.
- NHS “Right to Choose” lets you pick an alternative NHS-funded provider, often (but not always) faster.
- Private assessment is usually much quicker but self-funded, with costs that vary significantly.
- There's no universally “right” choice; it depends on your circumstances, urgency and budget.

A Note Before You Read On

This resource offers general guidance and reflects common experience, not professional, legal, medical or financial advice. It is not a substitute for employment law, HR policy, occupational health guidance, or individual professional assessment. Every person's experience of neurodivergence is different, so please adapt anything here to your own situation. The Uniquely Wired Network does not accept liability for decisions, actions or outcomes arising from the use of this material. If you need advice specific to your circumstances, please consult a qualified professional (e.g. HR, legal, medical, or financial advisor).

Why This Matters

Each route has real trade-offs. Understanding them clearly helps you make a decision that's right for your situation, rather than defaulting to whichever option you heard about first.

What This Might Look Like

- Someone choosing the standard NHS route because cost is the main concern, and they can wait.

- Someone using Right to Choose to access an NHS-funded assessment faster than their local service.
- Someone paying privately because they need documentation quickly, e.g. for work or study.

Standard NHS Route

- Free at the point of use.
- Waiting times vary enormously by area and service, commonly anywhere from several months to several years.
- Referral usually goes to your local NHS neurodevelopmental, autism or ADHD service.
- Good option if cost is the main concern and you're able to wait.

NHS Right to Choose

- Still NHS-funded and free at the point of use, but lets you choose an alternative approved provider instead of your local service.
- Often faster than local waiting lists, though timeframes vary by provider and can change as ICB funding and demand shift.
- Availability can vary by region; some ICBs pause or limit funded places at certain times.
- Worth asking your GP about explicitly, as it isn't always offered proactively.

Private Route

- Self-funded, with fees that vary by provider, clinician seniority, and whether it's a single or combined (e.g. ADHD + autism) assessment.
- Typically much faster, often weeks rather than months or years.
- Look for CQC-registered providers using recognised, validated assessment tools.
- If ADHD medication is likely, ask about "shared care", whether your NHS GP will take over prescribing afterwards, as not all GPs agree to this.

Questions Worth Asking Any Provider

- What's included in the fee (assessment, report, follow-up)?

- How long is the wait, realistically, right now?
- Will an NHS GP accept this report for shared care or workplace adjustments?
- What assessment tools and qualifications does the assessor use?

Helpful Phrases You Can Borrow

You don't have to use these exact words. Take what fits and leave the rest.

"Given the waiting times, I'm thinking about a Right to Choose or private assessment. Can you talk me through what that would involve?"

"If I go private, would you be willing to take over prescribing afterwards through a shared care agreement?"

Quick Tips

- Right to Choose is still free; don't assume "faster" means "private."
- Ask about shared care before paying privately if medication may be relevant.
- Very cheap or very fast private assessments are worth double-checking for quality.
- Availability and waiting times shift often; always check current figures.
- You can start on the NHS route and switch later if your circumstances change.
- Whichever route you choose, a written report at the end is standard practice.

Want to Know More?

- See our companion guide: "Costs, Waiting Times & What to Expect" for current figures.
- Your ICB (Integrated Care Board) website lists approved local Right to Choose providers.
- The Care Quality Commission (CQC) website lets you check a private provider's registration.

Before You Go

There's no single "correct" route, only the one that fits your circumstances, timeline and budget best.

Whichever path you take, wanting clarity about yourself is a reasonable, valid goal.