Challenges facing the NHS in England: a guide for prospective parliamentary candidates

The NHS Confederation is the membership body that represents the full range of organisations that commission and provide NHS services. We bring together the voices of those across the whole health and care system to effect change on behalf of our members, patients and the public.

This guide sets out for prospective parliamentary candidates the challenges facing health and care services in England, the progress already made in confronting these issues and the future direction of travel. It outlines the actions which need to be taken by national and local politicians in England, as well as health and care leaders, to tackle these challenges.

What are the challenges facing health and care?

The 2015 general election comes at a critical time for health and care services. The pressures on the system have never been greater. Changes in how people live their lives and the success of the NHS in keeping people alive for longer means demand for care is rising. The needs of people are very different now from patients in 1948. Many millions of people now need a long-term relationship with an NHS that supports them to live with ongoing health conditions as well as possible, for as long as possible. There is a huge degree of consensus across leading health and care organisations that there are seven key challenges facing the health and care system, shown on page 2.

To meet these challenges we will need to make improvements in how we deliver care – which will require some upfront investment. Some of these changes could potentially be controversial. Many services will need to be redesigned, to deliver radically different models of care which better meet the needs of all people, reflect advances in technology and treatments and overcome historic boundaries between organisations which get in the way of fully joined-up care.

In the future we want:

- individuals to be empowered to shape their care around their needs, aspirations and capabilities
- the public to have a real say in their services
- care to be compassionate and joined-up
- services to invest in preventing illness and keeping people healthy
- every organisation to strive continually to improve quality and safety
- services to innovate and embrace new technologies
- all staff to be engaged, valued and equipped to work in new ways
- real and continued progress on eliminating discrimination and reducing inequalities in outcomes
- the NHS to use its finite resources efficiently, fairly and sustainably.
How we do this

The only way we can successfully do this is if we work in partnership with patients, the public and staff on proposals to reshape care locally which give people what they need from their health and care services. We need a greater focus on prevention with services which are better joined up, provided closer to where people live and designed around people’s specific needs. This approach will need political backing and leadership.

What the public think

Recent polling\(^1\) shows the public understand the root causes of the challenges facing the NHS, with 79 per cent thinking that rising demand for care is due to an ageing population. 76 per cent of people said they would support changes to their local NHS services if there was evidence they would improve care. The public also want more information so they can take part in a debate about the future of the NHS – only 40 per cent think they have the necessary knowledge to be able to contribute to this debate.

The 2015 Challenge Declaration

1. The need challenge
   Meeting the rising demand for care, particularly from people with complex needs or long-term conditions, while maintaining people’s wellbeing and preventing ill health for as long as possible.

2. The culture challenge
   Building confidence in the health service by achieving a fundamental shift in culture from the bottom up. Creating a more open and transparent NHS, which enables patients, citizens and communities to be partners in decisions, and staff to improve care.

3. The design challenge
   Redesigning the health and care system to reflect the needs of people now – and so that it remains sustainable in the future. Shifting more care closer to people’s homes, while maintaining great hospital care. A focus on joining up all parts of the health and care system so care revolves around the needs and capacities of individuals, families and communities.

4. The finance challenge
   Recognising the financial pressures on all parts of the system and squeezing value from every penny of public money spent on health and care. Debating honestly and openly the future levels and sources of funding of health and social care.

5. The leadership challenge
   Creating value-based, system leaders across the NHS and empowering them to improve health and wellbeing for local people. Supporting these local leaders to work in partnership with a wide range of health, care and related organisations to address the 2015 Challenge, involve patients and citizens as leaders, and have the resilience to make the biggest changes in the recent history of health and care.

6. The workforce challenge
   Planning for a workforce to better match changing demand. Developing staff roles and skills to provide complex, multidisciplinary, coordinated care, in partnership with individuals and communities and more often in community settings.

7. The technology challenge
   Using technology to help transform care and enabling people to access information and treatment in a way that meets their needs. Spreading innovation to improve the quality of care while responding to the financial challenge facing the NHS and care system.
How can you make a difference during the election campaign?

The NHS is high on the political agenda – and rightly so. It’s a beloved institution which touches most people at some point during their lives, as well as receiving £110 billion of public money per year. As a prospective parliamentary candidate you will no doubt be having many conversations about the future of health and care with your potential constituents.

In order to help inform these conversations we draw your attention to the work of the 2015 Challenge. The 2015 Challenge partnership is a group of 23 organisations comprising of health and care charities, local government, staff and leaders, reflecting the broad consensus across health and care about the action needed to meet the challenges facing the NHS. Recognising the once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform patient care, the partnership last autumn published The 2015 Challenge Manifesto: a time for action, a route map to a sustainable health and care system. It sets out 15 asks for the next Government.

We know that proposals about the future of local services can be highly charged. It is, however, vital to recognise throughout the election campaign that if necessary change is blocked at a local level we risk storing up problems for the future. This could mean the gap between funding and the demand for care will increase and the quality of patient care might suffer.

“76% of the public would support changes to their local services if there was evidence they would improve care.”

What does the NHS need from the next Government?

While progress has been made by the Government and national arms length bodies, there is more to do. Building on this momentum, the 2015 Challenge partnership recently published The 2015 Challenge: our prescription for the election. The document sets out the immediate and critical next steps required during the busy election period and before summer. The immediate priorities for the next Government, which we want to see reflected in party political manifestos, are shown below.

- Prioritise reducing preventable illness, and set out how local areas’ efforts on this will be supported.
- Set out concrete plans to make mental health services as accessible to people as physical health services by the end of the next Parliament.
- Commit to adequate funding for health and social care – including funding to enable the transformation of services – and the next Government must begin to deliver on this in its first budget and spending review.
- Commit to providing the stability required for local areas to continue to make progress on vital work to reshape care. This means avoiding yet another top-down, structural reorganisation of the NHS, and continuing with the principles of NHS England’s Five Year Forward View.2

“Only 40% of the public think they have the necessary knowledge to be able to contribute to the debate.”
What can you do to support the NHS if you are elected to Parliament?

We want all politicians to be frank with the public about the scale of the challenges, the extent of the changes needed and the tough choices required if we are to sustain a world-class health and care system.

By helping to create the conditions for locally-led change, local politicians need to play their part in setting a tone which is supportive of local leaders as they face these unprecedentedly severe challenges head on.

Local scrutiny of proposals to change health and care services is vital. If elected, we encourage you to help ensure the debate around any proposed changes in your constituency is focused on what is best for patients, not on protecting buildings that no longer best meet the needs of your constituents. We urge you to work in partnership with leaders across health and care to engage with patients, staff and the public about the tough choices we will need to take in the future.

What will the NHS do in return?

This is not just down to politicians. Leaders at all levels of health and care, and in all local areas, need to build on progress made so far and drive the changes required. They will do so working in partnership: with people who use the NHS and social care and the public; with their staff; and as peers in local systems with each other. In return for political support, health and care leaders will need to:

- look beyond the boundaries of their own organisations and work in new and innovative partnerships with other sectors, such as housing, in their local area to improve people’s care
- support patients, carers and citizens to get involved with and shape health and care decisions
- engage health and social care professions, harnessing their ideas to improve care
- support health and social care professionals to take on leadership roles.

How can the NHS Confederation help you?

Please get in touch if you want further detail on any of the issues raised in this guide or would like to discuss the challenges facing the NHS. We can provide information and briefing on the key issues affecting the NHS and put you in touch with local NHS organisations.

For more information, please contact Campaigns Manager, Ben Cook: ben.cook@nhsconfed.org

You can visit our website at www.nhsconfed.org or follow us on Twitter at @nhsconfed

References

1. www.nhsconfed.org/polling
2. The NHS Five Year Forward View was published on 23 October 2014 by NHS England in partnership with Public Health England, Monitor, Health Education England, the Care Quality Commission and the NHS Trust Development Authority. It sets out a vision for the future of the NHS and the framework for further detailed planning about how the NHS needs to evolve over the next five years. www.nhsconfed.org/FYFV