

Dear Prime Minister,

Date

29.06.2022

I write to you on behalf of the NHS Confederation: the membership body that brings together, supports and speaks for the whole healthcare system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**For the attention of the
Prime Minister's Office:**

[ministerial.correspondence
@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:ministerial.correspondence@cabinetoffice.gov.uk)

The leaders we represent employ 1.5 million staff, care for more than 1 million patients a day and control £150 billion of public expenditure. We promote collaboration and partnership working as the key to improving population health, delivering high-quality care and reducing health inequalities.

Also, we host NHS Employers, which supports and represents workforce leaders across the NHS to be the best employers they can be.

I write to you in light of the mounting concern of our members regarding investment in rates of pay for the social care workforce in England.

Whilst the government has acknowledged the need to implement a workforce strategy for social care and acted to place care workers on the shortage occupation list to support overseas recruitment, we see a clear need to improve rates of pay for social care staff in England.

We ask that you immediately implement a national care worker minimum wage of £10.50 per hour, with additional action to invest in the value of the senior care worker role.

Over the last ten years, average rates of pay for social care staff have got ever closer to the minimum rate set by the National Living Wage. In 2013, median pay for care workers was 12% above the government-set minimum: in recent years, it has dropped to below 3%.

Other sectors that once paid less than social care now pay more. Retailers, hospitality and distribution organisations are able to increase payments (including for fuel costs) and pass on the costs to their customers. For example, care workers were paid 13p an hour more than sales and retail workers in 2012/13 and in 2020/21, they were paid 21p less.

There is simply not the financial headroom available to social care providers to respond to the labour market pressures they are facing, and this leads to reductions in service provision as vacancies remain

unfilled. Skills for Care's latest [workforce tracking data](#) shows that vacancy rates are continuing to rise across all settings in adult social care. This was acknowledged by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care in his evidence to the Health and Social Care Committee on 7th June, when he stated that Skills for Care has reported vacancy rates of over 10%. (In May, Skills for Care found that vacancy rates had increased to 10.3%, compared to 5.8% in May 2021).

In May 2022, [ADASS](#) reported a 71% increase in people waiting at the end of February 2022 for a social care placement compared to September 2021 with a reduction in available capacity. Feedback from our members suggests that this position has deteriorated even further with staffing issues the single biggest limiting factor on service expansion in social care.

The government's Migration Advisory Committee commented in its report of 27th April 2022:

“Historically social care workers were paid a premium over occupations against which the sector competes today. However, this premium has narrowed in the past decade. This has been driven, in part, by the 2016 introduction of the National Living Wage (NLW) to sit above the National Minimum Wage (NMW) which has increased wages for the lowest paid whilst also compressing the distribution of pay, such that there is now little premium for relevant experience and the additional pay for working as a senior care worker, compared to a care worker, is often unlikely to be sufficient to persuade workers to take the extra responsibility that would come with promotion. In 2021, the Scottish Government introduced a minimum hourly wage of £9.50 per hour for care workers, which has risen to £10.50 per hour from April 2022. The Welsh Government has also set a new minimum wage for social care staff of £9.90 due to come into effect in April 2022, pegged to the Real Living Wage. We believe these changes, if fully funded, are desirable across the UK and will be key to improving recruitment and retention, but thought must also be given to maintaining differentials, to reward both experience and seniority, rather than just merely increasing minimums.”

Most sectors in the economy are reporting both increased problems filling vacancies and real concern about the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on their workforce.

Health leaders are increasingly concerned that their colleagues in social care are not able to respond to these twin issues because of

the long-term financial constraints imposed by a lack of a government strategy for social care and its workforce. This concern is magnified because there is a real risk that the levels of pay offered by the NHS for similar roles will pull even further ahead relative to social care. There is a clear danger that present challenges with capacity for social care services will be exacerbated with clear consequences for demand for, and delays within, NHS services. Most importantly, there is a risk of real detriment to families across the country who will find that their loved ones are not able to receive the care and support they need.

We urge you, therefore, to act decisively to implement a new settlement for the social care workforce with a national care minimum wage and a clear incentive to progress to the senior care worker role. This should be fully funded and distributed through local authorities, which will be able to ensure the funding reaches the front line, does not impact self-funders' cost of care, and relieves capacity challenges.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with your office to discuss this in more detail. If they would like to get in touch, they can reach me at matthew.taylor@nhsconfed.org.

Yours sincerely,



Matthew Taylor
Chief executive
NHS Confederation



Lord Victor Adebowale CBE
Chair
NHS Confederation

CC:

Rt Hon Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care;
Gillian Keegan MP, Minister for Care and Mental Health