

Dear Rt Hon Mr Sunak MP,

Date

03.08.2022

Urgent plan for support for the NHS and social care

We are writing from the [NHS Confederation](#), the membership body that brings together, supports and speaks for the whole healthcare system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The members we represent employ 1.5 million staff, care for more than 1 million patients a day and control £150 billion of public expenditure.

For the attention of Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP

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On behalf of health leaders across the country, we must share their deep concerns about the significant challenges facing the NHS and social care, and outline what they will need from the Government should you be successful in the Conservative Leadership contest and become the next Prime Minister.

Health leaders are clear there needs to be a ‘realism reset’ on the NHS – a dose of political honesty and levelling with the public about what the NHS is facing and what it needs to address it.

They have three urgent priorities that we have set out in detail in this letter: the need for a fully costed and funded workforce plan to deal with the 105,000 vacancies in the NHS and 165,000 vacancies in social care; capital investment to upgrade much of our crumbling estate and infrastructure; and, finally, a rescue package for social care which remains far from ‘fixed’ and which is leading to significant extra demand on the NHS.

Without this urgent action we have grave concerns about the immediate future of the NHS and social care. As you will know, the NHS is facing one of the most difficult periods in its history. Despite everything the NHS is doing, the backlog for elective care is growing, as are waiting lists for mental health and community services, alongside an ongoing workforce crisis, capacity issues across primary care, ambulance and emergency care services and pressures in the social care sector.

The culmination of these challenges means the NHS is currently facing ‘winter in summer’ and our members look to the colder months with extreme trepidation. Without action from the Government, they will simply not be able to provide the best possible care that people across the country need and deserve. Already, performance against the majority of key waiting time targets has deteriorated significantly over the last decade – many of which pre-date the onset of Covid.

Our members [welcomed](#) your recognition of the public service emergency we are seeing in our NHS, including the need to tackle the elective care backlog and to invest in surgical hubs and community diagnostic centres, in addition to your vision of a health service that improves prevention of illness and ill health.

There are three key things our members need in your plan for support for the NHS, which we urge you to set out as soon as possible.

Critically, urgent action is required to ensure the NHS has the workforce it needs to deliver the best possible care. In a recent [survey](#), nine in ten of our members told us that a lack of staffing across the NHS is putting patient safety and care at risk. As we learnt during the height of the pandemic, the NHS is its people and it is their commitment, tenacity and sheer hard work that supported the country through it. While we have welcomed the recent pay rise for NHS staff, we remain very concerned that the NHS has not been provided with more funding to cover this. NHS trusts have been given additional funding from NHS England to cover the cost this year; however, primary care has not and also, it will come at a price elsewhere with central funding for diagnostic capacity and the roll out of new technologies due to be cut back. We urge you to address this in your plan for the NHS, which must also set out how the Government will address the 105,000 vacancies across the NHS and 165,000 in social care.

Secondly, the NHS needs urgent capital investment to upgrade much of our estate and infrastructure. In a [recent survey](#), nine in 10 of our members told us their efforts to reduce the size of the waiting list are being hindered by a decade long lack of investment in buildings and estate. Put simply, this failure to invest in capital for decades is making the NHS less efficient than it could be.

Finally, in our [survey published just last week](#), more than nine in 10 NHS leaders warned of a social care workforce crisis and nearly all said a lack of capacity in social care is putting the care and safety of patients at risk. Nearly all leaders identified better pay for social care staff as the best way to address this crisis – this is due to increasing numbers of social care workers moving to better paid roles in sectors such as retail and hospitality in the context of a tight labour market. We strongly recommend a national minimum care workers wage of £10.50 per hour. Inadequate social care provision has contributed to up to 45% of delayed discharges from hospital for patients and so, the need to get this right cannot be overstated.

If you are to lead a government that supports the NHS, the clear view of NHS leaders is that you must address these three priorities to secure its future. A healthy and well nation is an economically productive one. You must also be honest and realistic with the public about the scale of the challenge and the time it will take to improve matters.

We encourage you to urgently set out how you will support the NHS and social care to address these challenges as Prime Minister, should you be successful in the Conservative Leadership contest. NHS staff, and patients people waiting for an operation, for an ambulance, or for mental health support, cannot afford to wait any longer.

If it would be helpful to discuss any of these issues further, or we can convene a meeting between you and some of our members so you can hear from them directly, please do not hesitate to be in touch via external.affairs@nhsconfed.org.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Victor Adebowale CBE
Chair
NHS Confederation



Danny Mortimer
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