

# Statement on the NHS

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Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022

## Background

The new Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP, will make a statement in the House of Commons regarding the NHS on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> September.

It's anticipated that this statement will focus on the priorities set out by the Secretary of State a fortnight ago – addressing ambulance delays, backlogs, care and doctors and dentists, or 'ABCD.'

The NHS Confederation wrote to Dr Coffey last week to set out what our members need to see from the announcement to support them as they deliver the best possible care to patients this winter.

NHS leaders want to see a number of measures, which should be underpinned by the following two principles:

- 1) A **realism reset** from politicians on the NHS and honesty with the public about the challenges it's facing.
- 2) An approach that **lets local leaders lead** and gives them the autonomy to make decisions in the best interests of the health of the communities they serve.

## What NHS leaders need from the statement

Our members – NHS leaders across the system including those managing mental health, acute, primary care, community services and Integrated Care Systems (ICS) – need to see the following from the new Prime Minister and her government:

- **Restore Discharge to Assess funding** – figures show 1 in 7 beds in hospital are still occupied by someone medically ready to go home but cannot be discharged due to a lack of available care package in the community. To improve ambulance handovers, more support for patients is crucial. Previous national Discharge to Assess Funding was successful in providing this by freeing up to 30,000 hospital beds and the equivalent of 6,000 staff. Health leaders were disappointed that this funding abruptly came to an end at the start of the financial year. In order to tackle ambulance delays, measures that address the whole system must be implemented. Scrapping the 4 hour A&E target as trailed in the media is not something NHS leaders oppose (NHS England have been undertaking a review of clinical standards for some time already) but it will not in and of itself fix the issue.
- **Focus on the backlogs in community and mental health services, not just on the elective backlog** – there are 1.6 million people waiting for mental healthcare and more than one million people, including hundreds of thousands of children,

waiting for healthcare services in the community. The plan set out in the statement must include a serious focus on addressing backlogs across all parts of the NHS, not just for elective care.

- **Address the workforce crisis in the NHS** – a key barrier over the coming months is the lack of capacity in the system due to the 132,000 vacancies across provider trusts, alongside thousands of roles unfilled across primary care and GPs leaving the profession. NHS leaders warn us that winter pressures will absorb all additional capacity available due to care needs from flu and COVID-19. This will mean the NHS will have to continue to work flat out just to stabilise current performance levels. The NHS cannot wait longer for a long-term plan for the workforce.
- **Appreciate and maximise the role of the whole multidisciplinary workforce** - we recognise the Secretary of State's priority to increase the number of appointments available to patients – particularly in primary care. The efforts of our members to address access issues have been considerable – with more appointments taking place in primary care in July than in the same month before Covid in 2019. There is currently a shortage of around 4,200 full-time equivalent GPs. Primary Care teams are made up of multidisciplinary professions providing a broad range of services that keep people well in the community and away from hospital. The statement must set out how this will be made clear to aid public understanding around the value of the care they receive from primary care professionals beyond solely GPs.
- **Address the NHS pensions issue** - we set out to the previous chancellor the urgent steps that would correct these pension and taxation problems and it is critical this is addressed in the statement by Secretary of State.
- **Action on mileage rates for community staff** – the statement must include immediate action to increase mileage rates (and increase tax allowances which have been frozen for 12 years). This is because community staff are often out visiting patients in the community and they rely on their own cars. Our members tell us many community staff are walking away from their jobs due to soaring fuel costs and we need to address this quickly or risk exacerbating the staffing crisis we are already experiencing.
- **Ensure maximum productivity is possible by providing capital funding** – nine in ten members recently told us the lack of capital investment is undermining their efforts to reduce waiting lists and is putting patient safety at risk. It is also impeding them from working as efficiently as they otherwise could. Ensuring investment in capital in the NHS will boost productivity, support the NHS to get through its care backlogs and ensure patients can access the best possible treatment and support must be a part of this statement.
- **Fix social care** – NHS leaders recently identified that ensuring better retention of staff in social care as the number one priority for addressing capacity issues across the health service. Our members recently called for the introduction of a national minimum care worker wage of £10.50 an hour to reduce the flow of social care workers to other, better paid sectors. However, this investment must not be at the expense of the NHS budget. NHS funding has already been eroded by soaring inflation and the lack of additional funding to cover the much needed pay award for

staff. This means that the NHS is facing a real-terms funding cut that could stretch to £9.4 billion this year.

## Suggested questions for Secretary of State

- The Secretary of State will know a key driver of ambulance delays in 1 in 7 patients in hospital being medically fit to be discharged but can't be due to no available care package in the community. Will the Secretary of State listen to calls from NHS leaders represented by the NHS Confederation and restore Discharge to Assess funding which freed up 30,000 beds and the equivalent of 6000 staff during the worst of the pandemic?
- Does the Secretary of State agree with the NHS Confederation that we must look beyond the elective backlog to the 1.6 million people waiting for mental healthcare and more than one million people, including hundreds of thousands of children, waiting for healthcare services in the community too? What will she do to support those services?
- The Secretary of State has rightly set out improving access to primary care appointments as a key priority. Will she commit to aiding public understanding of the multidisciplinary teams working in primary care to help people get the care they need in a timely manner from the most appropriate person?
- Will Secretary of State increase mileage rates for those NHS staff working in the community who rely on their cars to get to see patients? The NHS Confederation and NHS Providers recently warned many community staff are walking away from their jobs due to soaring fuel costs.
- Nine in ten NHS Confederation members recently said the lack of capital investment in the NHS is undermining their efforts to reduce waiting lists. Will the Secretary of State commit to raising this issue with the Chancellor ahead of the mooted Spending Review to ensure the NHS can ensure they are working as productively and effectively as possible?
- NHS leaders recently identified that ensuring better retention of staff in social care as the number one priority for addressing capacity issues across the health service. As a result, the NHS Confederation recently called for the introduction of a national minimum care worker wage of £10.50 an hour to reduce the flow of social care workers to other, better paid sectors. Will the Secretary of State commit to raising this issue with the Chancellor at her earliest convenience to ensure the 165,000 vacancies in the social care sector don't increase.

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## About the NHS Confederation

The NHS Confederation is the membership organisation 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. We promote collaboration and partnership working as the key to improving population health, delivering high-quality care and reducing health inequalities.