

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to welcome you back to the role of Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. We look forward to working with you once again.

We stand ready to support you and your team by providing insights from our members working on the frontline managing NHS services and would be pleased to convene a small group of NHS leaders from across the health care system for a private roundtable to explore any of the matters raised below in more detail. You can get in touch via [external.affairs@nhsconfed.org](mailto:external.affairs@nhsconfed.org) to arrange this.

Whilst health leaders understand the pressures created by the current economic situation, they await the Chancellor's Autumn Statement with trepidation following numerous briefings about cuts to public services.

The NHS is already facing a [real-terms budget cut](#) of up to £9.4 billion this year and quite simply, there is no fat left to trim. Further reductions in funding for the NHS will exacerbate the already significant capacity challenge. Cutting the NHS budget is a false economy that will lead to much higher costs for government in the medium and long-term as more people become too unwell to work as they are unable to access treatment. This will reduce the numbers able to participate in the workforce and stymie growth.

Independent analysis we [published recently](#) reveals a direct correlation between investment in health and economic growth. It shows that for every pound of public money invested in the NHS, £4 is recouped through gains in productivity and increased participation in the labour market.

On behalf of our members, we are asking you to represent the NHS and the wider health and social care sector round the cabinet table. We ask you to commit to making the case to your colleagues that there is no wealth without health and highlight the economic benefits of ensuring our health and social care services get the investment they need.

Below we have reiterated the key concerns of our members, first raised with you in July and where things have evolved, updated them. On behalf of our members, we are asking you to urge the Chancellor to be

**Date**

26.10.2022

**For the attention of**

**Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP**

Secretary of State for Health and  
Social Care

mindful of these challenges as he plans his forthcoming Autumn Statement.

### **Social care capacity**

The current priority for our members is the allocation of the £500m Adult Social Care Discharge Fund.

The increasing ambulance handover delay times and wait times at A&E are an issue of flow through our hospitals and without this funding to improve social care capacity to reduce delayed discharge and keep more people well in the community, it will simply be impossible to address these pressures.

Our members need you to unblock this funding and ensure health leaders can access it without delay. With 165,000 vacancies, the social care sector is on the brink of collapse, and we ask you to urge the Chancellor to use his Autumn Statement next month to introduce a [new national minimum care worker wage](#) of £10.50 an hour to reduce the flow of social care workers to other, better paid sectors in the context of a tight labour market.

### **Bolstering the workforce**

The latest publicly reported figures on unfilled roles stand at 132,000 across England and on top of that, close to one in four GP posts are set to be vacant by 2030. The sector has been calling for a long-term, fully funded workforce plan for the NHS to ensure its communities can reliably receive the best possible care in the future, which must include a sharp focus on domestic training and supply.

When we surveyed our members [last year](#), nine in ten of them told us that a lack of staffing across the NHS was putting patient safety and care at risk.

The workforce shortage situation means many staff across the service are exhausted and have [very poor morale](#), which risks more leaving the sector. The likelihood of industrial action from frontline professions this winter over pay and working conditions is growing. We suggest you meet urgently with health unions and show health care workers that you understand the challenges they are facing every shift.

We welcomed the pay increase you awarded to NHS staff in the summer, but we remain concerned that the NHS, and in particular primary care, has not been given with the extra funding to cover this which means it has to come from existing budgets which are already facing a [real-terms cut](#).

We ask you to raise this gap in funding for the pay award with the Chancellor ahead of his Autumn Statement or risk a direct impact on the provision of patient services as NHS bodies have to find money from existing budgets to pay staff accordingly.

### **NHS capital**

In June, nine in ten members [told us](#) the lack of capital investment across the health service is undermining their efforts to reduce the size of their waiting lists.

Though often looked to as an area for cuts, capital is particularly critical in the current context to help the NHS make better use of estates, digital and infrastructure to improve service efficiency and make faster progress through long waiting lists, reducing some of the capacity pressure.

We advise against looking at capital budgets as a straightforward way to reduce investment in the health service, and instead consider the medium-term reduction in spending on care if NHS care can be optimized to tackle the backlog more quickly.

### **Investing in tackling the drivers of poor health**

As we [warned](#) in the summer, the cost-of-living crisis has the potential to drive a public health emergency without more action from government. This would of course put even more pressure on services.

Whilst we understand that the current economic climate has meant that household support for energy bills can only be guaranteed until April, we ask you to press the Chancellor to set out further support for local communities – particularly the most vulnerable - beyond then at his Autumn Statement to stop more pressure on NHS services, and to stop more people becoming too unwell to work.

We also urge you to recommit to the public health measures the previous administration chose to pause, review or scrap in order to ensure those living in communities with the highest levels of deprivation can enjoy the

best possible health. The national obesity strategy, the tobacco control plan, the ten-year mental health plan, and the white paper on reducing health disparities would reduce pressure on the NHS and help boost economic growth through driving participation in the workforce.

### **How our members can help**

We know the NHS has a key role to play in realising the more prosperous country the government seeks to build.

The 42 integrated care systems across the country, which are in our membership, have a key role in developing population health management strategies for their local communities which will in turn, help to bolster growth.

Our members understand that the current pressures in the NHS and social care mean much of your focus will be on operational issues, but they ask you not to lose sight of the longer-term drive to build a more sustainable NHS for the future.

When you were last in post, we welcomed your call for a reduction in the overall number of performance targets across the health service and your push for local health leaders to lead and shape care for the communities they serve. In the face of unprecedented capacity challenges, this is more critical than ever.

The NHS is one of the most efficient healthcare systems in the world, with management costs considerably lower than in Western counterparts. NHS managers perform critical strategic roles that free up clinicians to spend more time with patients and boost NHS productivity – something you will agree is vital in the face of the current capacity situation.

Yours sincerely,



**Lord Victor Adebowale CBE**  
**Chair**  
**NHS Confederation**



**Matthew Taylor**  
**Chief executive**  
**NHS Confederation**