

## Liberal Democrats' manifesto: Health and social care analysis

The Liberal Democrats have today published their manifesto and this includes a series of commitments on the future of the NHS and social care system. This briefing assesses the key commitments against the issues that NHS Confederation members are most concerned about.

### Key points

- **A commitment to delivering an extra £35 billion over five years to be spent on the NHS and social care.** This funding would be focused on relieving the crisis in social care, tackling urgent workforce shortages, and investing in mental health and prevention services. It would be funded through a 1p rise on the basic, higher and additional rates of Income Tax. It is not yet clear exactly how this funding will be allocated between the NHS and social care, and it also relies heavily on economic performance (which cannot be guaranteed).
- **Investment of £10 billion in capital** to make 'necessary investments' in equipment hospitals, community, ambulance and mental health services.
- **Stopping Brexit** to ensure freedom of movement and mutual recognition of qualifications are retained for clinical staff.
- **Continuation of the direction of travel set out in the NHS Long Term Plan** in light of a lack of appetite from health leaders for another top-down reorganisation of the health service.
- **Measures to address workforce shortages**, including bursaries for specialty roles where shortages are most acute.
- **Equal treatment of physical and mental health in the NHS**, including measures to tackle stigma and implement all the recommendations set out in Professor Sir Simon Wessely's Independent Review of the Mental Health Act.

### NHS Confederation analysis

As the membership body that represents leaders across healthcare providers, clinical commissioners and local systems, the NHS Confederation recently surveyed its members in England to gauge what they feel are their most critical priorities for an incoming government. This survey revealed that the most pressing priorities for members are **workforce**, **social care** and **capital investment**. This briefing therefore assesses the Liberal Democrat manifesto against each of these issues in turn, before outlining some of the party's other commitments.

## Workforce

Supporting and growing the NHS workforce was seen by the vast majority (94 per cent) of health leaders surveyed as a key priority, with over half (56 per cent) ranking it priority number one. There are more than 100,000 FTE vacancies in England in hospital and community services alone. Shortages are particularly pronounced in mental health and learning disabilities services, which have a disproportionately high number of vacancies.

**In response, the Liberal Democrats' headline commitments are:**

- **Ending the GP shortfall by 2025**

This would be achieved by training more GPs, better utilising wider health staff (such as pharmacists and nurses) and promoting phone and video appointments where clinically suitable. While this ambition is welcome, no funding is specifically put against it and it is unclear how 'training more GPs' would be achieved. There is also uncertainty over what exactly 'ending' the GP shortfall means in practice and, with GPs already promoting phone and video appointments when suitable, it is unclear what more government would do to promote this.

- **Producing a national workforce strategy**

This would review the NHS's future needs for all staff ensure training places are matched to future needs. This commitment would represent a sensible first step to planning workforce needs over the long term and it is reassuring that the Party states it would 'listen and act' on the pensions crisis that is driving away clinicians and worsening waiting times.

- **Extra help for nursing students**

This would start with bursaries for specialties where shortages are most acute such as mental health and learning disability nursing, linked to clinical placements in areas that are particularly under-staffed. This is welcome but no estimate is made of how much funding would be required to fund such bursaries and whether this funding would come out of the extra £35 billion or elsewhere.

**On workforce, the Liberal Democrats would also:**

- **Stop Brexit**, to ensure that freedom of movement and the continued recognition of mutual qualifications is retained.
- **Encourage healthcare professionals to work in areas where there are shortages**, especially inner city and remote rural areas, through our Patient Premium – which would give incentive payments to clinicians.
- **Attract and support talented professionals from countries with developed health systems and attract staff back from EU member states**, encouraging them to once again come and work in our public services.

## Social care

Social care is seen by more than nine in ten (92 per cent) of leaders as a key priority for the incoming government, making it the second most pressing concern for health leaders after workforce. A report last year commissioned by the NHS Confederation, and undertaken by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Health Foundation, calculated that social care funding would need to increase by 3.9 per cent a year to meet the needs of an ageing population and an increasing number of younger adults living with disabilities.

**In response, the Liberal Democrats' headline commitments are:**

- **Increasing social care funding through the additional £35 billion raised**

The manifesto commits to using this cash to 'relieve the crisis in social care'. However, no specific figures are put against social care and it unclear how the £35 billion will be allocated. We are therefore unable to assess the likely impact of any funding on the social care crisis .

- **Establishing a cross-party health and social care convention**

This would build on the existing body of work from previous conventions, select committees and the 2018 citizens' assembly to reach agreement on the long-term sustainable funding of a joined-up system of health and social care. A cross-party approach to the future of the health and social care system has been advocated by the NHS Confederation and so this commitment is welcome.

- **Improving support for unpaid carers**

The Liberal Democrats propose a handful of measures to do so. These include raising the amount people can earn before losing their Carer's Allowance from £123 to £150 a week and introducing a statutory guarantee of regular respite breaks for unpaid carers. With the number of family carers rising, such measures are likely to improve conditions for those with care commitments.

**On social care, the Liberal Democrats would also:**

- **Provide more choice at the end of life**, and move towards free end-of-life social care, whether people spend their last days at home or in a hospice.
- **Support the creation of a new Professional Body for Care Workers**, to promote clear career pathways with ongoing training and development, and improved pay structures.
- **Move towards single place-based budgets for health and social care** – encouraging greater collaboration between the local NHS and Local Authorities in commissioning.

## Capital investment

Capital investment ranked as the third most pressing priority identified by health leaders, with over nine in ten (93 per cent) of those who responded telling us the commitments already made NHS are just the start of what is needed. Spending on capital investment in the NHS has fallen by 7 per cent in real terms from 2010/11 (£5.8 billion) to 2017/18 (£5.3 billion) according to research carried out by the Health Foundation. The UK currently has one of the lowest levels of healthcare capital funding in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) countries.

**In response, the Liberal Democrats' headline commitment is:**

- **Investment of £10 billion in capital funding**

The Liberal Democrats outline that this would be used to make 'necessary investments' in equipment hospitals, community, ambulance and mental health services. While not in the manifesto, a previous announcement stated that this would be paid for through government borrowing. This funding would meet the £10 billion recommendation of the Naylor Review, however it is not yet clear where and how funding would be spent (for example on buildings, IT and equipment).

## Other commitments

**Outside the three areas outlined above, the Liberal Democrats also commit to:**

- **Introducing a statutory independent budget monitoring body for health and care**, similar to the Office for Budget Responsibility. This would report every three years on how much money the system needs to deliver safe and sustainable treatment and care, and how much is needed to meet the costs of projected increases in demand and any new initiatives.
- **Introducing further mental health maximum waiting time standards**, starting with children's services, services for people with eating disorders, and severe and enduring conditions.
- **Implementing all the recommendations of the Wessely review of the Mental Health Act**, including bringing forward the necessary investment to modernise and improve inpatient settings and ambulances.
- **Increasing access to a broader range and number of clinically effective talking therapies and make prescriptions for people with chronic mental health conditions available for free** on the NHS.
- **Implementing the recommendations of Roger Kline's report** into the lack of diversity in senior management in the NHS and commission a strategic analysis of racial discrimination in the NHS.
- **Supporting the changes to the Health and Social Care Act** recommended by the NHS, with the objective of making the NHS work in a more efficient and joined-up way, and to end the automatic tendering of services.

- **Publishing a national wellbeing strategy**, which puts better health and wellbeing for all at the heart of government.
- **Re-instating the funding that was cut from public health budgets** by the Conservatives (though the Party does not commit to exact figures).
- **Introducing minimum unit pricing for alcohol**, taking note of the impact of the policy in Scotland, and ensuring universal access to addiction treatment.

## Discussion

Health leaders will welcome the Liberal Democrats' backing for the overall direction of the Long Term Plan. A top-down reorganisation would be an unnecessary and costly distraction given the scale of the challenges facing the system. Throughout the Liberal Democrats' health and social care commitments is an emphasis on the important role of local authorities and this is also to be commended considering the vital role authorities play in the wider determinants of health.

The measures on workforce and funding on capital will help to appease health leaders' concerns. On social care, however, it is unclear how much new funding will be allocated to the sector. The cross-party convention and measures to support carers may be effective long-term policies, but immediate measures are needed to help alleviate the social care crisis. It is not obvious how any commitments in the Liberal Democrat manifesto will ease the huge pressures on social care in the short term.

## About the NHS Confederation

The NHS Confederation is the membership body that brings together and speaks on behalf of the whole NHS. We represent over 500 members across health and social care, including hospitals, community and mental health providers, ambulance trusts, independent sector organisations providing NHS care, and clinical commissioning groups.

To find out more, please visit [www.nhsconfed.org](http://www.nhsconfed.org) or email [enquiries@nhsconfed.org](mailto:enquiries@nhsconfed.org)



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