

## Briefing on the 2019 party conferences

The 2019 party conference season took place amidst political uncertainty surrounding the UK's future relationship with the EU and speculation about an early general election. The Supreme Court's ruling that the prorogation of parliament was unlawful overshadowed the Labour and Conservative conferences, with Jeremy Corbyn's speech taking place a day earlier than planned due to MPs returning to Westminster. MPs later voted against a government motion to hold a conference recess for the duration of the Conservative Party conference.

It was Boris Johnson's first conference as Conservative party leader and Prime Minister and Jo Swinson's first conference as Liberal Democrat leader.

As member trusts will be aware, NHS Providers is a politically neutral organisation. We have a presence at each of the main party conferences to ensure we maintain and develop relationships with key influencers and make the most of the opportunity to promote our messages on behalf of the membership.

NHS Providers hosted a series of roundtables focused on building the NHS of the future, at the Labour and Conservative conferences, and on building the NHS mental health services of the future at the Liberal Democrat conference. This briefing sets out the key announcements made by the parties, as well as the main discussion points from our roundtables.

### Key policy announcements

#### Conservative party conference

##### Health and care speech

In [his speech to conference](#), health and social care secretary Matt Hancock announced:

- A health infrastructure plan – “the biggest hospital building programme in a generation” – committing to build forty new hospitals across England over the next decade.
  - The first phase will see £2.7bn earmarked upfront for 6 projects as part of a £13bn plan over the next decade.
  - A further twenty one new build projects (consisting of thirty four new hospitals in total) are receiving seed funding to kick start their schemes.
  - The package includes £200m to replace MRI, CT scanners and breast cancer screening equipment.
- The Department of Health and Social Care will receive a new multi-year capital settlement at the next capital review.

## Other key speeches and announcements

In [his speech to conference](#), Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

- That hospitals were “finally getting the investment to match the devotion of the staff”
- More nurses and doctors are being recruited and trained
- He wanted to “get Brexit done” on 31 October and had put forward “constructive and reasonable” proposals to Brussels

In [his speech to conference](#), chancellor Sajid Javid announced:

- The national living wage will reach £10.50 by 2024, representing a pay rise of £4,000 a year on average
- A multi-billion pound infrastructure investment in roads, buses and broadband for hard-to-reach areas
- A £500m Youth Investment Fund to build new youth centres and refurbish existing ones
- A white paper on further devolution in England
- A ‘Brexit Red Tape Challenge online portal’ to support businesses cut red tape to boost growth
- £16.6bn to replace EU funding for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland up to 2030 under a no-deal Brexit

In [her speech to conference](#), home secretary Priti Patel:

- Committed to ending the free movement of people and to introducing an Australian-style points-based immigration system

## NHS Providers view

We have led calls for more capital funding to rebuild our NHS so we welcome this significant and important new commitment.

The new £3bn that’s been committed for 2020-25 will be particularly good news for the patients and staff in the six acute hospitals that will directly benefit. We welcome the government’s intention to fund a further 21 schemes between 2025 and 2030 and the £100m for those organisations to start work on developing those projects, noting that the funding to actually compete those schemes remains to be allocated. We also welcome the extra £200m for scanning and diagnostic equipment.

The NHS has been starved of capital since 2010. There’s a £6bn maintenance backlog, £3bn of it safety critical. It’s not just these six hospitals who have crumbling, outdated, infrastructure - community and mental health trusts, ambulance services and other hospitals across the country have equally pressing needs. We also need increased capital spending to support changes in the way care is delivered, including in IT and digital, to deliver the new NHS long term plan.

The NHS spends around £6bn capital a year. To catch up after a decade of capital squeeze and to meet the NHS’s needs, we believe that budget needs to double over the next 5-10 years. That would restore NHS capital spending to the levels of other comparable countries, ensuring safe care for patients and a better working environment for staff. Whilst the extra £3bn spread over the next 5 years – an average 10% annual

increase - is an important and valuable step, there's still a long way to go.

We will continue to call for a full multi-year capital settlement for the NHS that ensures all types of trusts across the country can access the capital they need. The NHS also needs a sustainable and transparent approach to prioritising NHS capital, with appropriate local decision making to ensure the money gets to where the needs are greatest.

## Labour party conference

### Health and care announcements

In [his speech to conference](#), shadow health secretary Jonathan Ashworth said the next Labour government would “rebuild our NHS” and committed to:

- Outlining a plan to rebuild our hospitals and health centres, investing in equipment and technology
- Repealing the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and restoring a publicly administered National Health Service
- Rebuilding child and adolescent mental health services, reforming the Mental Health Act, provide mental health support for schools, investing in eating disorder and suicide prevention services
- Declaring a climate emergency across the NHS and delivering a “Green New Deal”, including investing in solar panels and energy efficiency schemes, low emission ambulances and an NHS forest
- Funding addiction recovery services and public health services, prioritising children’s health and enshrining in law a commitment to defeat health inequalities through a new Future Generations Wellbeing Act
- Building a “National Care Service”, introducing free personal care to support older people to live independently, addressing the funding gap in social care, supporting local authorities to directly provide care and building a fully trained care workforce
- Guaranteeing fair pay, increasing training and professional development budgets, legislating for safe staffing and bringing back a bursary to train 24,000 more nurses and midwives for the future
- Delivering Agenda for Change pay for public health staff and blocking “backdoor privatisations”
- Expanding GP training places to 5,000 a year, to deliver 27 million extra GP appointments
- Abolishing all prescription charges

In [his speech to conference](#), leader of the opposition Jeremy Corbyn announced:

- The launch of ‘[Medicines for the Many](#)’, a proposal to introduce compulsory licensing for generic versions of patented medicines, with the aim of making drugs more affordable for patients
- The creation of a new publicly owned generic drugs manufacturer, aiming to supply cheaper medicines to the NHS
- That Labour will extend workers’ rights, stopping use of zero hours contracts, giving all workers equal rights from their first day in the job, and will take action on the gender, disability and ethnicity pay gaps and introduce flexible working time for workers experiencing the menopause

## Other relevant announcements

In [his speech to conference](#), shadow chancellor John McDonnell committed to:

- Introducing free personal care at the point of use for the elderly in England, costing an estimated £8bn a year and funded through general taxation
- Introducing a four-day working week and establishing a Working Time Commission with powers to increase statutory leave entitlements “as quickly as possible without increasing unemployment”
- Ending in-work poverty in the first term of office by measures including introducing a “Real Living Wage” of at least £10 per hour
- “A strong trade union movement and collective bargaining”, highlighting “management by workers and service users rather than remote bureaucrats in Whitehall” in public services.
- A third of company directors being elected by employees, with a tenth of shares owned by those employees

On Brexit, Labour Party delegates passed a compromise motion on Brexit, which commits the party to putting a Labour-negotiated Brexit deal to a referendum while not committing to ‘Leave’ or ‘Remain’.

## NHS Providers view

**Social care:** It is welcome that the Labour Party has recognised the urgent need to address the crisis in our adult social care system. Underfunding, staffing shortages and an inability to meet rapidly rising demand is leaving millions of vulnerable people without the support they need. We urgently need a new approach. We must start talking about credible solutions and take action to deliver them. As well as increased funding, we need to see real and deliverable reform to make sure that those with unmet or under-met need have access to appropriate care and support. We need a sustainable social care system.

**Health inequalities:** The shadow secretary of state has put a significant and welcome emphasis on tackling wider health inequalities. The NHS has an important role to play in helping to improve access to good healthcare for all. However, we also need to see a reverse to damaging cuts to public health and support services and fully appreciate the role of community services, primary care and local government in meeting these challenges.

**The green deal and capital funding:** As the largest employer in the country and because of its vast scale, trusts are aware of their contribution to environmental issues and society as a whole. Several trusts are already carrying out measures to reduce clinical waste, encourage car-sharing among staff and put in place more energy-efficient systems across the NHS estate to reduce their carbon footprint. While we welcome the ambition of ‘NHS green deal’ set out by the Labour Party, to achieve these ‘green makeovers’ trusts must have access to the funding they need to properly upgrade and repair crumbling buildings following years of underinvestment. NHS Providers is campaigning to rebuild our NHS to ensure we have a health service equipped to meet the challenges of the future. So we welcome the focus on addressing capital funding set out by the Labour Party.

## Liberal Democrat party conference

### Health and care announcements

In [his speech to conference](#), Sir Vince Cable, shadow cabinet member for health and social care:

- Committed to putting an additional penny on the pound on income tax to meet immediate priorities in social care, reverse cuts to public health and invest in mental health
- Said mental health had skipped to the back of the queue and a real crisis exists amongst children and young people
- Highlighted poor working conditions in the NHS, citing “dreadful” staff retention rates, “ridiculous” workloads, early staff retirements and said restoring staff morale was “a precondition for improving the NHS”

A motion on health and social care [Stop Brexit to Save the NHS and Social Care](#) passed at conference. It endorsed the Party’s [policy paper 137, Save the NHS and Social Care by Stopping Brexit](#), as a statement of Liberal Democrat health and care policy. Key policies of interest include commitments to:

- Establish a cross-party commission to set a realistic long-term funding settlement for the NHS and social care
- Free prescriptions for chronic mental health conditions, investment in facilities to avoid travelling long distances for appointments and implementing the recommendations of the Wessely review of the Mental Health Act
- Ensuring local accountability for commissioning decisions by applying the principle of local government leading on the commissioning of both health and care services, where these are currently commissioned by CCGs
- Provide bursaries for specialities with most acute shortages, linked to clinical placements in under-staffed geographies
- An EU recruitment campaign
- Recognising the contribution of social care staff through a new professional body for care workers and improved training and career development

In [her speech to conference](#), party leader Jo Swinson:

- Stated “We must stop Brexit” and committed to revoking Article 50 if the Liberal Democrats won a majority at the general election
- Said a Liberal Democrat government will ringfence funding for mental health services and will invest “far more heavily” in childhood and adolescent mental health services
- Called for a public health approach to knife crime and said the party would give local authorities the funding they need to provide youth services and re-establish youth workers
- Announced a Liberal Democrat government would take a number of measures to tackle climate change including introducing climate risk reporting and establishing a green investment bank

## NHS Providers events

### Conservative roundtable – Building the NHS of the future

Andrew Selous MP, Health and Social Care Committee member, and NHS Providers chief executive, Chris Hopson addressed the roundtable. The roundtable was attended by public accounts committee member Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP as well as senior health and care stakeholders. The roundtable was chaired by *Daily Telegraph* health editor Laura Donnelley.

Participants discussed the need for government to focus on prevention, public health, primary care and social care and on the broader view of health, wellbeing and the wider determinants of health. Workforce was cited as a key issue, with the pensions crisis highlighted as an urgent and pressing problem having an impact on staff and patient care. The urgency of the long waiting lists for treatment and the challenge of meeting constitutional performance standards was also discussed, with the service's current performance challenges causing concern ahead of winter.

### Labour roundtable – Building the NHS of the future

Attended by senior health and care stakeholders, Saffron Cordery, NHS Providers deputy chief executive addressed the roundtable, which was chaired by Chris Smyth, the Whitehall editor of *The Times*.

The discussion focused on the importance of investing in infrastructure, including the NHS estate and equipment as well as IT infrastructure and systems. The need for a multiyear capital funding settlement at a level that keeps up with comparable economies across Europe was also raised. Participants expressed concerns over the workforce challenge, the inadequacy of workforce planning and the social care workforce, as well as the importance of investment in the workforce and ensuring the NHS is a good employer.

### Liberal Democrat roundtable – Building the NHS mental health services of the future

Chaired by Saffron Cordery and attended by senior stakeholders, Sir Vince Cable MP, the Liberal Democrat shadow cabinet member for health and social care, addressed the roundtable. Baroness Jolly, the party's health and care spokesperson in the House of Lords, alongside Baroness Tyler of Enfield, the party's mental health spokesperson, and Luciana Berger MP, a member of the health and social care select committee, also attended the roundtable.

Attendees discussed the need to overcome the mental health workforce challenge, with particular concern over mental health nursing numbers and the need to remove barriers for routes into mental health specialisms. Participants also discussed the importance of ensuring the physical environment was up to standard and the challenge of following the funding stream for child and adolescent mental health services.

## Key issues raised by health and care representatives

The following common themes were reflected in discussions across NHS Providers events.

### Workforce

- Participants stated that based on current supply and demand levels, the service doesn't have the numbers required to fill senior leadership posts and needs a doubling in medical student numbers.
- Some felt the narrative around workforce challenges was unrealistic, with solutions rather than quick-fixes required.
- Some raised concerns about workforce planning, with national and local plans unmatched, and demographic change not properly planned for.
- Negative workplace cultures were said to be impacting on staff. The NHS is not viewed as a flexible employer and is perceived as rigid in terms of pay and conditions.
- Some encouraged the NHS to learn from other sectors such as the construction sector that have embraced initiatives to minimise the impact of mental ill-health on their staff.

### Funding and finance

- The fabric of the estate and IT, alongside workforce challenges, were cited as three interrelated areas which require investment. Many participants highlighted the UK spends less than other OECD countries, and the importance of how to make good on many years of a lack of investment.
- The political cycle was said to be unhelpful in that it isn't conducive to planning for long-term reform or change. Politicians want to be able to show high profile and tangible change from investment, but the big issues the service is grappling with can't be solved overnight.
- Many noted the importance of having good IT infrastructure and systems. When conversations about technology and data in healthcare focus on AI this point can sometimes get lost.
- Pay disparity means that primary care services often can't compete with secondary care. The poor state of the primary care estate was cited.

### Mental health

- There is a mismatch between national workforce recruitment targets and regional targets. Participants stressed the need to overstock the workforce, with a very real deficit in psychiatry and a gap between the numbers of psychiatrists we have pledged to train and how many actually will be trained.
- Mental health nursing numbers were consistently cited as being particularly concerning, and learning disability service numbers were also cited as a challenge, with numbers plummeting and fewer universities offering courses.
- The mental health of the workforce isn't good as a whole. Roles are often inflexible, meaning it's hard for those with families.

- Participants noted that we've got best eye on the money we've ever had, but further transparency was still required. Local plans aren't transparent enough in how much they spend on mental health, while geographies between commissioners, local authorities and mental health trusts don't align.
- The physical environment for mental health is more important than in the physical health sector. It's unacceptable to refer people into poor facilities they don't want to stay in.
- The important role played by voluntary and community services, and the work they do in intense, complex step-down services and around the community was highlighted

## Other

- It's very hard to stem demand rises, while long waits for treatment and progress on meeting constitutional performance standards were cited as a concern with some participants nervous in the run up to winter.
- Respondents indicated that we shouldn't underestimate the level of integration already happening.
- The importance of interoperable patient records which flow between health and care was discussed. Participants suggested the benefits of data sharing, and the safeguards in place, could be better communicated to patients.
- Social care was viewed as a huge and challenging issue. The success of the long term plan was said to be predicated upon a sustainable social care settlement, but the interim NHS People Plan didn't include the sector.

## NHS Providers conference resources

- [Rebuild our NHS: our asks of the government](#)
- [The NHS driving the nation's health and wealth](#)