

Labour's health mission: Building an NHS fit for the future

As part of Labour's '5 Missions for a Better Britain' first set out in February, the leader of the Labour Party, Sir Keir Starmer MP, and shadow health and social care secretary Wes Streeting today outlined their plans for the *Future of the NHS*. This is one of five missions which will form the basis of Labour's general election manifesto.

The speech promised to build an NHS fit for future use, that is there when people need it, that works to prevent loss of life to the biggest killers, and that ensures everyone lives healthier for longer. Starmer set out a series of measurable goals and what the party sees as the necessary shifts required to meet them, underpinned by a technological revolution. Following his speech, Starmer received questions from the media, many of which raised concerns over the cost of delivering these promises. Starmer accepted there would be a cost to reform, but reiterated the necessity of these changes, adding the long-term focus on prevention will benefit public finance in the future.

This briefing summarises the **key announcements** from today's speech and the accompanying **technical document**. NHS Providers press statement is also included. NHS Providers works across the political spectrum with all major parties to influence and highlight issues of importance to our members. We are also looking to support direct engagement with trusts through roundtables, submissions to political party policy processes and through our presence at annual party conferences. If you have any comments or questions regarding this briefing please contact **Cath Witcombe**.

Mission driven government: building an NHS fit for the future

The challenge

The speech and technical document outlined three changes it sees as necessary to building an NHS fit for the future:

- 1 Change so that more people get care at home in their community

Much of the NHS' work today lies in treating long-term ongoing diseases such as arthritis or diabetes. As people are living longer, the relationship between care and support at home and preventing long hospital stays has become more important. But the NHS has not changed to meet these new needs and structurally, the UK spends more money on hospital care relative to community-based prevention than any other European country.

2 Change so that we have the workforce of the future, with the technology they need

Utilising the latest technology to put patients, as well as the NHS, in control of their own healthcare is seen by Labour as an efficient development for patients and NHS staff. Labour has identified that in the UK there is a gap in leadership and systems needed to take advantage of our world-class life sciences sector. Expanding the capability and capacity of the NHS will be achieved by addressing current workforce challenges and utilising new technology.

3 Change so we focus on prevention

Labour wants to focus on the impact of social determinants of health and the importance of addressing social issues, such as adequate housing and fair pay, in reducing demand on the NHS. This change will require cross-government departmental and local partnership working. The party suggests that for the past 13 years, there has been no joined-up plan for health and an absence of leadership on public health issues, including smoking, alcohol harm and childhood obesity. Labour is seeking to reduce strain on the health and care system by improving population health and addressing health inequalities.

Labour's mission plan

The technical document explains that a future Labour government would: use the private sector to increase capacity; give patients the option to be treated in a hospital other than their local one if neighbouring hospitals have shorter waiting lists; and undertake "one of the biggest workforce expansions in history" to deliver a long-term workforce plan that addresses retention issues. It has also acknowledged that that crumbling NHS estates can't continue. It would also make an assessment of all NHS capital projects to "make sure money is getting allocated efficiently, that we are eliminating waste and we are prioritising the projects that will get the patients the care they deserve faster".

Three broad areas for reform are set out, as summarised below.

1. Change so that more people get care at home in their community

Primary care: Labour wants to prioritise moving care out of hospitals and into the community. Its aim is to make the NHS “as much a Neighbourhood Health Service as it is a National Health Service”. The party believes that for “nearly every” sick person, it is best for people to recover in their own homes. It will focus on reforming primary care to make it “fit for the 21st Century”. Measures include improving GP access by training more GPs, shifting the focus of care out of hospitals and into the community and modernising the way in which people book appointments. This includes “harnessing the power of the NHS App to end the 8am scramble”. Labour also pledges to improve continuity of care for those who need it (for example those living with chronic conditions). It will join up community health and social care services and encourage ICSs to “identify opportunities to join up services”. It wants more patients to have one point of contact for appointments to improve their experience. In addition, it wants to ensure that those people living with multi-morbidities have a named care coordinator in the community, acting as a single point of contact.

Labour also wants to open new referral routes and will ask the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) to make recommendations on “expanding instances where someone can refer themselves to a specialist service or diagnostic test”. Other measures include expanding the role of community pharmacy and creating open access mental health hubs for children and young people in every community. As part of its pledge to make sure more people receive care in the community, Labour will create a “neighbourhood” workforce, and pledge to double the number of district nurses and train 5,000 more health visitors.

Reform of social care: As part of social care reform, Labour says it will end the workforce crisis in social care, recruiting and retaining more carers and introducing better rights at work. Adult social care will be “subject to fair agreement collectively and negotiated across the sector”. It also pledges to raise standards across the sector by requiring care providers to “demonstrate financial sustainability and responsible tax practices”. Care providers will also have to deliver high quality care for service users before they are allowed to receive contracts from local authorities and before they can gain registration from the Care Quality Commission.

Labour also wants to develop local partnership working between the NHS and social care on hospital discharge, “building on existing practice with respect to intermediate care and rehabilitation”. It will give unpaid carers paid carer’s leave and give people in care homes a legal right to see their loved ones.

2. Change so that we have the workforce we need, with the modern technology to deliver the best healthcare

NHS workforce expansion: Labour reiterated its pledge to expand the workforce with 7,500 more medical school places and 10,000 more nursing and midwifery clinical placements per year. A proportion of new medical places will be in under-doctored areas. It will also train 700 more district nurses each year, 5,000 more health visitors and recruit thousands more mental health staff. This will be paid for by scrapping the non-dom tax status. It will also “consider the case” for looking at how public sector pay is set “without undermining existing collective bargaining arrangements”. Labour will introduce a targeted scheme for senior doctors across the UK to deal with retention issues. It will ensure that “comprehensive, independent workforce assessments are made” in future to enable NHS staffing to keep up with the demands of a growing and aging population. Workforce planning will cover issues that affect retention such as professional development, training quality and entrance routes.

A revolution in technology: Labour will develop an “innovation and adoption strategy”, working with industry, patients and ICSs. The technical document sets out a number of detailed measures, including joining up different parts of service and improving data interoperability between providers to help joined up working between the NHS and social care. It will make the NHS App a one “one-stop shop” for health information. Data would be owned by the patient. The NHS Digital Transformation Fund will be used to ensure that patients can see medical records through the app, book appointments online, order repeat prescriptions and link to appropriate self-referral routes. Patients would also receive alerts to remind them about screening and check-ups.

Labour has also focused on the need to make it easier to carry out life-saving research in the NHS. It wants a quicker, more transparent and less variable process and will make sure that those patients who want to be involved in clinical trials can be reached quickly and easily. In addition, Labour has highlighted the need to improve the diversity of those who participate in clinical trials, to ensure the workforce is trained to do clinical trials and to use research as a way to help retain staff in the NHS.

3. Change so that we focus on prevention

Labour wants a “relentless” government focus on prevention. Measures set out today include working across government departments to improve the wider determinants of health. It will establish a “mission delivery board” at the heart of government to bring departments together to focus on prevention. It will also introduce a Children’s Health Plan, which will include fully-funded breakfast clubs primary schools in England and will restrict junk food advertising. It will introduce measures to ensure children do not live in unsuitable housing and will pass a Clean Air Act to protect children from respiratory diseases. As part of its prevention agenda it will also make a number of changes including

reform of Universal Credit and Job Centres. Furthermore, it will create a smoke-free Britain. A first step will be to make all hospital trusts integrate 'opt-out' smoking cessation interventions into routine care – this includes reporting on their progress in annual report and having a named lead on smoking cessation.

Further measures include: boosting health in the workplace; empowering people to make their own choices by providing information to do so; and setting a target to end the black maternal mortality gap.

Labour's mission goals

Labour has set out three mission goals that it will work towards and be accountable for.

1. An NHS that is there when people need it

An immediate priority for a future Labour government is to address delays in services and to provide the minimum standards that people expect. Labour has pledged to ensure ambulances get to people in time to save lives; let people be seen by their GP when they need to; stop long waits in A&E; and guarantee appointments when people need specialist care.

Labour will measure progress towards these targets using NHS performance data and the annual reports of the national GP patient survey. Its aim is to achieve all relevant waiting times standards and to increase the proportion of people who get a GP appointment when they want or sooner within five years of entering government.

2. Fewer lives lost to the biggest killers

Labour's second goal is to reduce the number of people dying from preventable and treatable diseases. It aims to:

- Improve cancer survival rates by hitting all NHS cancer waiting time and early diagnosis targets within five years. Starmer said that Labour would make sure 75% of all cancer is diagnosed at stage one or two.
- Reduce deaths from heart disease and stroke by a quarter within ten years
- Reverse the rising trend in the rate of lives lost to suicide so they are declining within five years. In his speech Starmer said that suicide is the biggest killer of young lives in the country.

It will measure progress towards these targets using annual ONS statistics and NHS data.

3. A fairer Britain where everyone lives well for longer

Labour's third goal is to ensure people can "enjoy their lives to the fullest" without major health issues holding them back. It aims to tackle wider health inequalities that lead to poor health and will focus on prevention and early childhood intervention.

Labour has said that it will improve healthy life expectancy for all and halve the gap in healthy life expectancy between different regions of England. Progress will be measured using ONS statistics on Health State Life Expectancies.

NHS Providers' press statement

NHS Providers responds to Keir Starmer speech on the NHS

Responding to the speech today by Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer on his vision for the NHS, Sir Julian Hartley, chief executive at NHS Providers said:

"Trust leaders will welcome ambitious plans for the NHS from whichever party forms the next government.

"They will agree with Labour's goal to reduce waiting times. Trusts have made remarkable progress on the longest waits for planned operations given the recent challenges. However, this goal will only be achieved if it's underpinned by adequate funding for health and care workers as well as for infrastructure.

"We know prevention and early intervention go a long way to help improve people's health and manage demand for NHS services – as proved by trusts delivering effective interventions through community diagnostic centres. Trusts will also welcome the focus on community-based services including for mental health. To boost this work, trusts desperately need more investment in staff and resources.

"Trust leaders will also welcome the emphasis on health inequalities. The NHS is committed to addressing unfair, avoidable differences in people's access to, experiences of and outcomes. It's vital that trusts' different starting points and local circumstances are recognised in a complex and challenging environment.

"We agree that digital and technology can transform healthcare for the better, but investment in both core digital infrastructure and the NHS workforce will be vital for this transition.

"What the NHS needs is sustainable, long-term investment and strategic workforce planning to help it overcome the many challenges it faces."

Useful links

[The Labour Party: Building an NHS fit for the future](#)

[Transcript of Keir Starmer's speech](#)