



HM Government

Building Back Better: Our Plan for Health and Social Care

Presented to Parliament
by the Prime Minister
by Command of Her Majesty

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Foreword



Prime Minister Rt Hon Boris Johnson, MP

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented challenge. The worst public health emergency for a century has had a profound impact on the NHS. Staff have treated more than half a million COVID-19 patients over the last 18 months in hospital alone – providing outstanding care for those suffering new, complex and sometimes severely debilitating conditions.

The pandemic has illuminated chronic problems in our health and social care system, and made many of them worse. For instance, when COVID-19 broke out, there were thousands of hospital beds filled with people that could have been better cared for elsewhere.

These problems are making it much harder to manage the pressures that have inevitably built up elsewhere in the system as a result of the pandemic. The need to treat COVID-19 patients has contributed to worsening wait times for non-COVID-19 care. Before the pandemic, nine out of ten were waiting fewer than 25 weeks in England, but that has now risen to 44 weeks. The number of NHS patients waiting for tests, surgery and routine treatment in England is at a record high of 5.5 million and could potentially reach 13 million over the next few years. Health services in other parts of the UK have faced similar challenges.

Around seven million patients in England did not come forward for treatment during the pandemic – and it is right that they should now be seen and given the treatment that they need. So while hard-working NHS staff are doing their best, it has been estimated that it may take the NHS up to a decade to clear treatment backlogs without concerted action.

We must also address the challenges in adult social care. The pandemic has placed significant pressure on the sector. But even before the pandemic there were problems in the sector. People in England were required to pay for all of their care needs in full, right down to £23,250, at which point the state would start to provide some support. At an already difficult time in their lives, people suffering medical conditions such as dementia faced losing their life savings. Successive governments have pledged to reform the system but none have brought about long-term change.

So we must take the same far-sighted approach as the Government that established the NHS and the modern welfare state after the Second World War. We must pursue the equivalent project of our era, supporting the NHS, reforming adult social care and creating a new integrated system between health and social care focussed on improving outcomes for our people. And that is what this Government will do.

We will provide significant new investment – reducing long waits for the tests and treatment that people need.

We will bring the health and the social care systems more closely together – so that people are cared for in the most appropriate place for their needs, whether at hospital, in care or at home.

We will protect individuals and families against unpredictable and potentially catastrophic care costs – so that from October 2023, no eligible person starting adult social care will have to pay more than £86,000 for personal care over their lifetime.

We will recognise the extraordinary contribution that health and social care staff made in helping the country through the pandemic – in part by making sure that they have the support that they need.

This is an unprecedented investment in health and social care. It is one that we should all accept some personal responsibility for providing. Both for our own futures and to care for our loved ones. To do otherwise and rely solely on the state to step in through yet more borrowing would be to fray the bonds that hold families and society together.

So it is right that we should introduce a Health and Social Care Levy to benefit the whole of the UK, with new funding to support health and social care services in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

No government wants to raise taxes, but nor should they neglect their duty of care to their citizens. So we must act to build a health and care system which reflects the brilliance of the staff working within it.

The NHS is a source of enormous pride for the nation. We will ensure that it continues to be.

Rt Hon Boris Johnson, MP
Prime Minister