

**policy connect**

# **POLICY CONNECT'S HEALTH MANIFESTO**

**Six health priorities for Britain's next government.**

# About

Policy Connect is a cross-party think tank. We specialise in supporting parliamentary groups, forums and commissions, delivering impactful policy research and event programmes and bringing together parliamentarians and government in collaboration with academia, business and civil society to help shape public policy in Westminster and Whitehall, so as to improve people's lives.

Our work focusses on five key policy areas which are: Education & Skills; Industry, Technology & Innovation; Sustainability; Health; and Assistive & Accessible Technology.

Policy Connect serves as the secretariat for multiple All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) and has provided the secretariat for the APPG for Health since its establishment in 2001.

\*(From 30 May to 17 July 2024, while Parliament is dissolved, APPGs must not be active.)

# Context

Health and social care are two of the most pressing policy issues facing the United Kingdom today. The challenges and inequalities brought about by the pandemic, an ageing population, and a workforce crisis are critical issues that must be addressed to improve the quality and access to health and social care in the UK. This Health Manifesto has been developed with inputs and engagements from important stakeholders in the health and social care sector and is based on evidence from our research, events and other programme of activities. Although there is a plethora of health challenges that require attention, we believe the following six priorities can help set the UK on course to a world-class health and social care system.



# Delivering a sustainable healthcare workforce

The next government must build a health and social care workforce that is resilient and supported to deliver quality care

The NHS and social care workforce have been severely impacted by austerity, under-resourced workplaces, and staff burnout, leading to an inability to meet the growing demand for healthcare services, with staff shortages being a critical issue that needs urgent attention to improve the functioning of the NHS.

Future health priorities should focus on creating a sustainable and future-focussed NHS by addressing capacity shortfalls in healthcare settings to support education and research, improving recruitment and retention of healthcare staff by enhancing career opportunities, benefits, and rewards, and considering better student funding models. Additionally, there should be greater provision for international healthcare staff through supportive policies on student and graduate visas.

A truly integrated National Health and Care Service requires addressing health and care needs with a balanced, integrated workforce, and increased funding and focus on social care. This can improve recognition and career progression in social care, upskilling NHS and social care staff through continuous professional development, and digitalising and integrating health and social care services. Staff wellbeing, including Mental Health support, should also be a priority.

## Key Asks

- 1** Improved working conditions for healthcare and social care staff, with access to frequent breaks, mental health support and better wages for them to carry out their job while feeling safe and secure.
- 2** Sustained investment in recruitment and greater availability of medical courses to deliver a domestic workforce that can manage demand for healthcare services.
- 3** Increased capital investment to improve hospital infrastructure, equipment availability, and technology to alleviate workforce pressures.
- 4** Introduction of a registration training grant to increase training places – retaining graduates and ensuring a skilled, trained workforce.



# Reforming Mental Health Care

The next government must prioritise reform of the Mental Health Act

## Key Asks

**1**

**Reform the Mental Health Act to prioritise positive outcomes and strength-based approaches, and to eliminate indiscriminate use of the Act against ethnic minorities.**

**2**

**Invest in the expansion of mental health services and provide greater funding for mental health research and services.**

**3**

**Reforming the benefits system and sick pay to provide a social safety net for those with mental health problems.**

Evidence shows that rates of detention under the Mental Health Act are disproportionately higher for Black Britons.<sup>1</sup>

To ensure inclusive mental health support and to address resource gaps within mental health care, Policy Connect and Manchester Metropolitan University's NIHR-funded research project, 'The ImprovE-ACT', has highlighted that lived experience must be placed at the forefront of research, policymaking, and reform in the mental health sector. We therefore call for the establishment of a Lived Experience Commissioning council to serve as an independent consultancy body advising key stakeholders such as the CQC and DHSC, policymakers and leading mental health boards across the nation.

Mental health reform would require greater investment in care services so that those suffering from mental illness can receive adequate care. Access to community-based care can be crucial for those living with mental health conditions.

<sup>1</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-act-statistics-annual-figures/2020-21-annual-figures>



# Fostering innovation in research through greater partnerships

Enhance the development, regulation, and adoption of new medicines and vaccines, positioning the UK as a leading hub for global research investment

According to the Association of the British Pharmaceuticals Industry (ABPI), boosting recruitment for industry clinical trials could save the NHS up to £3.5 billion over five years, including £678 million in savings from free medicines and treatments.<sup>2</sup> To achieve this, it is essential to integrate existing R&D components, ensuring a smooth transition between genetic testing, personalised medicine, and clinical trials. Collaboration with the industry is crucial to improving health outcomes, boosting investment in medicines and vaccines, and maintaining NHS sustainability. Additionally, dedicated central funding is needed for the National Action Plan against antimicrobial resistance (AMR), and the Innovative Medicines Fund in England should be reformed to better serve patients.

## Key Asks

- 1** Develop a cohesive life sciences ecosystem to ensure swift approvals and adoption of new medicines by the NHS.
- 2** Establish the UK as a global leader in advanced and sustainable medicines manufacturing through long-term innovation funding.
- 3** Implement a comprehensive cross-departmental strategy for education and skills, involving life sciences and businesses to meet current and future skills demands.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.abpi.org.uk/media/news/2024/february/the-abpi-sets-out-its-plan-for-investment-health-and-growth/>



# Strengthen technological and data informed partnerships to improve health for all

Ensure the streamlining of the patient pathway benefits both patients and services through diagnostic partnerships and better integration of technologies and data

## Key Asks

**1**

**Support health and care staff to innovate with a focus on speeding up testing, evaluating, and training.**

**2**

**Introduce a registration training grant to increase training places – retaining graduates and ensuring a skilled, trained workforce.**

**3**

**Harness the opportunities of AI, data, and tech to improve productivity and quality of care, supporting the shift to a more preventive and personalised health and care system.**

**4**

**A national approach to transforming the delivery, quality and experience of care through the faster development, evaluation, and adoption and new innovations.**

Our discussions with stakeholders suggest that using technology and digital tools to improve the delivery of services is a key priority. Many patients undergo a complex pathway from first presentation to treatment with a number of different waits, whether for an appointment, diagnostics, treatment, or review. Streamlining processes and improving efficiency will lead to quicker clearing of NHS backlogs and alleviate some of the workforce pressures. The sharing and capturing of data can therefore enable the NHS to address the lack of interoperability between health care services. This recommendation includes access to shared patient records which would provide a smooth transition of care between patients, pharmacists, and GPs and HCPs.



# Empowering Women's Health:

## Eliminating gender-based health inequalities

The next government must prioritise women's health by further implementing the Women's Health Strategy and establishing Women's Health Hubs. With breast cancer being the leading cause of cancer deaths among women and largely preventable, urgent action is needed to address increasing waiting lists in cancer care in addition to a greater focus on sexual reproductive rights. The maternal mortality rate in the UK has risen by nearly 20% since 2017,<sup>3</sup> with significant persistent racial disparities. Understanding the broader context of women's lives is crucial to addressing these health inequalities. This necessitates a coordinated, cross-governmental strategy to sustainably reduce health disparities. Additionally, women are underrepresented in medical research and have a more than 50% higher risk of adverse drug reactions compared to men.

## Key Asks

**1**

**Continue to prioritise the implementation of the Women's Health Strategy and provide further funding for the implementation of Women's Health Hubs for long-term health support.**

**2**

**Urgently address rising waiting lists in cancer care by tackling all cancer backlogs including breast and ovarian cancer.**

**3**

**Develop a cross-governmental strategy to reduce maternal mortality and racial disparities in health outcomes and ensure equitable representation of women in medical research.**

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/mbrrace-uk/data-brief/maternal-mortality-2020-2022>



# Prioritising prevention in health and social care

Adopt a cross-governmental approach to prioritise preventative healthcare that reduces the burden of chronic diseases and alleviates pressure on health services

## Key Asks

- 1** National policies to support better information and education in healthy living and eating, moving towards a disease prevention model through education that is integrated into early years education.
- 2** Support for those who are struggling with the cost of living to ensure that wealth is not a barrier to health and expand access to healthy lifestyle options (such as food or exercise).
- 3** Increasing investment in diagnostic services, including community diagnostic centres, point of care testing and home sampling delivered through the support of HCPC registered professionals.
- 4** Deliver a strategy for home environmental health, and ensure that all government departments consider environmental determinants of health such as air quality in their policymaking.

Healthcare should be delivered in a holistic, life-contextual manner to improve prevention. Health outcomes are molded in an individual's environment – the decency of someone's home, and the quality of air they are exposed to, are well-established determinants of health.

Policymakers must take a cross-sector approach to preventative health, encompassing primary environmental determinants of health to achieve a real shift in health outcomes and health equity across the population. Healthcare policymakers and professionals must work in concert with partners from other frontline services, such as housing services, environmental health professionals, and energy workers to improve individuals' homes and environmental circumstances.

Additionally, there should be greater emphasis on patient education regarding self-care, and measures to improve health and safety at home. Policies across different government sectors must be aligned to support a comprehensive approach to preventive healthcare. This cross-governmental collaboration will foster a sustainable healthcare system that promotes long-term health and wellbeing.