
What Is the Plan for the NHS?



With the election in the UK over and the Conservatives scoring an [overwhelming victory](#), what future awaits the National Health Service (NHS)?

The topic of NHS has been huge on all parties' agenda and was discussed in details and debated by all major media outlets in the UK. In the Conservative Party's [manifesto](#) the NHS-related policies immediately follow the section on Brexit, arguably the number one issue in British politics of the last years. The document reveals the following steps that the party promises to take "to ensure that we deliver world-class public services so that you can have the help and support you need throughout your life."

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The legislation is to be introduced with the extra £34bn per year put in to the NHS by 2023: " Within the first three months of our new term, we will enshrine in law our fully funded, long-term NHS plan. This is the largest cash settlement in NHS history. ... Between 2018 and 2023, we will have raised funding for the NHS by 29 per cent. By the end of the Parliament, that will be more than £650 million extra a week," says the manifesto. [According to some estimates](#), it equals to a 3.3% increase in spending while a 4% increase is needed to address waiting times and the under-provision of mental health services.

Current staff will be expanded with 50,000 nurses, 6,000 doctors in GP surgeries and 6,000 primary care staff, such as physiotherapists and pharmacists. (However, the prime minister later clarified that of those 50,000 nurses only [31,000 would be new recruits](#).) Currently, there are [43,000 nursing vacancies](#) across the NHS and in five-year time this number [could grow to 70,000](#).

Since some of these extra professionals include migrant staff, and the party promises that " qualified doctors, nurses and allied health professionals with a job offer from the NHS, who have been trained to a recognised standard, and who have good working English, will be offered fast-track entry, reduced visa fees and dedicated support to come to the UK with their families." Meanwhile, the number of [EU doctors and nurses working in the NHS fell](#) because their rights to live and work in the UK post-Brexit are not clear.

The Conservatives also plan to reintroduce a nurse bursary with students getting £5,000 to £8,000 per year as maintenance grant. The bursary was scrapped by the Government in 2017, and £9,250-a-year fees were introduced for nursing and allied health students. The number of people starting nursing courses [dropped](#) by 11% between 2016/17 and 2017/18. The courses at risk [include](#): radiography, mental health nursing, learning disability nursing, podiatry, prosthetics, etc.

Another major promise from the Conservative Party is to build 40 new hospitals by 2030 in addition to 20 hospital upgrades. This, however, [cannot be realised](#) with the budget of £2.7bn, released so far to upgrade six hospitals.

A topic that drew a lot of public attention is granting market access to the NHS to American companies. [It was confirmed](#) that talks between the UK and US had covered the NHS, drug pricing and patents, the pharmaceutical industry and medical devices among others. No decisions were revealed, and the Conservatives have been insisting that "[w]hen we are negotiating trade deals, the NHS will not be on the table."

Further Conservative promises on health included:

- Extending the Cancer Drugs Fund into an Innovative Medicines Fund. Extra funding of £1bn a year for social care services.
- Free parking for NHS staff on night shifts, disabled and terminally ill patients and their families (parking is already free in Scotland and Wales, but not in England).
- Investing in preventing disease by "empowering people with lifestyle-related conditions such as obesity to live healthier lives, ... promot[ing] the uptake of vaccines ... extend[ing] social prescribing ... overhaul[ing] NHS screening ... focus[ing] on helping patients with multiple conditions to have simplified and more joined-up access to the NHS. ... improv[ing] hospital food."
- Treating mental health "with the same urgency as physical health."
- Improving NHS performance by bringing down operating waiting times, improving A&E performance and increasing cancer survival rates.
- Supporting hospices.

- Making the NHS “the best place in the world to give birth.”
- Clamping down on health tourism by making overseas patients paying “their fair share” for NHS services and increasing the NHS surcharge paid by migrants.

It should be noted that the prime minister’s stance on the NHS has changed considerably over the years. Earlier in his career Boris Johnson not only encouraged charging for healthcare services and called the NHS a “monolithic, monopolistic” entity. “I don’t see why it should be sacrilegious to say that the NHS is failing. I think it’s all very well to treat the NHS as a religion. But it’s legitimate for some of us to point out that insofar as it is a religion, it is letting down its adherents very, very badly,” said he [in a speech in 2002](#). In the current manifesto, “[t]he NHS represents the best of this country” and “is precious to all of us – especially because it is free at the point of use and there for you on the basis of need, not your ability to pay.”

Image credit: NHS

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