

# Liberal Democrats



## Protecting & improving the NHS

change that works **for you**

**BUILDING A FAIRER BRITAIN**

## **Protecting and Improving the NHS**

### **Foreword**

The NHS is a source of pride because it's built on the basic British principle of fairness. We're right to be proud of the NHS but the truth is that it still isn't as good as it should be: it's often too big and complex, too much money is being wasted on bureaucracy and doctors and nurses spend too much time trying to meet government targets instead of caring for patients.

Liberal Democrats are totally committed to the NHS. Free at the point of use - care when you need it, regardless of your ability to pay. But that is just our starting point. The real challenge we face is to improve the NHS at a time when the public finances are in a mess.

We need a new approach. That means changing the way the NHS works so the money goes further and patients come first.

Our first priority is this: the money we save from cutting back on waste, we will reinvest back into the healthcare you need.

We will give people the power to have a say in how their local NHS is run and stop hospital closures in their area. Entitlements to treatment will be backed up by a guarantee that if you're not treated on time, the NHS will pay for you to go private. We will give everyone the right to choose their GP and tackle health inequalities by paying doctors extra to treat patients from the most deprived areas.

This paper sets out the Liberal Democrats commitments to the NHS in three main areas:

- Protecting and Improving the NHS
- More control over the healthcare you need
- Quality care for all patients

We hope that after reading this document you will see how the NHS would improve under the Liberal Democrats. We can make the NHS work better and improve vital services for patients.

**Nick Clegg MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats**

## Protecting and Improving the NHS

Our first priority is to make the NHS work better with the money it has. We have identified specific savings that can be made by cutting back on waste and we will reinvest that money back into the healthcare you need. Because of rising costs of treatments and an ageing population, there will be particular pressure on services like cancer treatment, mental health services, maternity services, and dementia care: only by going through this process of finding savings elsewhere can we defend these services in the coming years. The NHS is a huge system, and we will make changes to ensure it works as effectively as possible.

- The Social Care system is in crisis and is one of the biggest problems facing our society. Labour and the Conservatives are offering piecemeal policies on social care that will not provide the long-term solutions people need. **We will establish a commission, with cross-party support, to develop proposals for long-term care of the elderly**, which will be tasked to report back within one year. **And we will use the money for Labour's flawed care bill to provide guaranteed respite care for 1 million carers who work the longest hours.**
- One of the problems with the way the NHS is run is that politicians and bureaucrats keep interfering. We will change this by devolving power into the hands of local people. In a decentralised model, the need for a costly, all-powerful Department of Health, micromanaging the day-to-day operation of the NHS, disappears. Reducing the size of the central bureaucracy could lead to enormous efficiency savings. **We will halve the size of the Department of Health over the next parliament.**
- Many people across the NHS complain about the burden of repeated assessments and requests for data. The government sets so many tests and ask so many unnecessary questions that each hospital now employs an army of clerks simply to respond. What we need is common sense regulations that don't waste health professional's time. **We would set a rule that no more than one organisation can ask the same question to a hospital or any other health trust.** If other organisations really need to know, then the information can be shared. This would drastically reduce costs across the NHS.
- Rather than reducing spending on quangos this government has dramatically increased their scale and power. There is now an extraordinary overlap of functions on a national scale. These unelected and unaccountable bodies now cost over £1.4bn each year. Many of these quangos carry out work that could be done better by others. **We will cut the total amount spent on health quangos by 1/3<sup>rd</sup> and cap chief executive pay so that no one earns more than the Prime Minister.**
- Strategic Health Authorities are amongst the least effective bodies in the NHS. We believe that they are nothing more than outposts of the

Department of Health, there to enforce the Secretary of State's will on the local NHS. **We will abolish them and instead, local NHS Trusts within a region will act together to commission tertiary services.**

- Over the last decade there has been a 76% increase in the number of managers in the NHS. Since 2005-06 Primary Care Trust spending on management and administration has increased by 30%. We know that savings can be made as there are huge regional variations in the amount being spent, even when you factor in the needs of the population due to geography, age and need. **We will cut the amount PCTs spend on management and administration by 1/3<sup>rd</sup>.**
- Despite the fact that times are tough the Department of Health has doubled the amount of money they're spending on advertising, publishing and public relations firms. While there are campaigns that legitimately require public money there can be no justification for such dramatic increases in spending. **We will halve the amount the Department of Health spends on advertising, publishing and public relations.**
- Our health should be getting better – but alcohol, smoking, obesity, bad diets and not enough exercise means it is getting worse. What's crazy is that only a tiny fraction of the health budget is spent on preventing people getting ill in the first place. **We will reform incentive payments to health boards and GPs, linking them more directly to prevention measures.**
- There are huge variations across the country in the efficiency and productivity of the NHS. If every NHS organisation improved its performance to match that of the best performing Trusts then enormous savings could be achieved along with significant benefits to patients. According to the NHS Institute for Innovation improved productivity and better efficiency could unlock resources worth £3.6bn for the NHS. This can be achieved by reforming the way hospitals are paid to reward efficiency and effectiveness. **We will improve the way the NHS works by reducing delays in hospital discharges, increasing the number of day case operations, reducing delays prior to operations, speeding up the time between patients' admission and their surgical procedure, and where possible moving consultations into the community.**
- Many people who are treated by the NHS, particularly those who are older or suffering from mental health problems, will have complex needs that go beyond the boundaries of their local health service. Unfortunately, the system often lets them down and organisations fail to work together to ensure they get the support they need. **We will integrate health and social care to give a seamless service, ending bureaucratic barriers, and saving money to allow people to stay in their homes for longer rather than going into hospital or long-term residential care.**

## **More control over the healthcare you need**

Liberal Democrats believe that one important way to improve the NHS is to make care flexible, designed to suit what patients' need. And we believe care would improve if local people had a say in how their health services were run.

The NHS often feels too remote and complex. Local services – especially maternity wards and Accident and Emergency Departments – keep being closed, even though local people desperately want them to stay open. Busy people often struggle to get convenient access to GP services, and poorer areas are less well served by the NHS, contributing to scandalous health inequalities. We want to make the NHS more responsive to people's needs.

- Labour's obsession with targets has undermined the principles of the NHS and distorted patient care. **We'll guarantee that patients get diagnosis and treatment on time. If they do not, the NHS will pay for the treatment to be provided privately.**
- In many hospitals frontline staff have little control over their ward or unit budgets, so they're not able to call in for extra help or equipment when they need it. It's unacceptable that doctors and nurses have to ask permission to get extra staff in or order a bed curtain to protect a patient's dignity. **We will give power back to doctors and nurses by giving them control over budgets and responsibility for running their own wards and units.**
- One key step to improving the NHS is to motivate those who work there. Top-down, command-and-control management has done great damage to staff morale. The NHS has an incredible workforce that has much to offer, but they're currently being treated as a cost rather than as a resource. We all know that to get the most out of people we have to empower them – giving them real involvement and a say over how their service is run. **We would allow NHS staff to vote for their hospital trust to become a wholly owned employee trust.**
- Government ministers are happy to take the credit for success in the NHS but are nowhere to be seen when hospitals close or care is compromised. It's wrong that local hospitals can be closed without the communities affected having any real say. **We will give people the power to take control over their local NHS through elected health boards.** This also means local people will be able to hold their NHS to account if the quality of care isn't up to scratch. Over time, Local Health Boards should be able take on greater responsibility for revenue and resources.
- We all live busy lives and the NHS should be there to help. People should be able to speak to their GP when it's convenient to them, not be forced to take days off work. We will scrap GP practice boundaries so that successful practices can expand. **We will give every patient the right to choose the**

**GP they want, regardless of where they live, and the right to access their GP by email.**

- The quality of out-of-hours care is unacceptable in many parts of the country and in some cases is no longer safe. Local GP's are best placed to ensure patients are treated properly and they should be responsible for out-of-hours services. **We will ensure that local GPs provide out-of-hours care.**
- Health inequality remains a scar on the nation's conscience, with life expectancy still varying by 15 years or more between the most deprived and most affluent parts of Britain. While deprivation and poor housing play a key part in this problem, one of the steps to addressing this is increasing access to high-quality primary care. **We will introduce a 'patient premium' so that GPs who accept patients from areas with the worst health and deprivation scores receive an extra payment for each person they take.** This would provide GP practices with a direct incentive to take on patients from deprived areas, and at the same time giving them resources to deal with any extra calls on their services that such patients might make.
- Trying to navigate the health and social care systems can be a complete nightmare. So many different rules about entitlements, so much confusing jargon, not enough information about the options available to people. Liberal Democrats believe that independent advice can help empower patients to make the best decisions about their care, so **we'll provide better help and advice for people with long term illnesses or disabilities by piloting a network of patient advocates.**
- Direct payments have revolutionised the provision of social care and they offer real potential to give patients greater control over their healthcare. The idea is to give individuals their own budgets so that they can decide what their priorities are, rather than a bureaucracy deciding for them. While this approach will not be suitable for all areas of healthcare, there is a strong case for developing this concept. **We will extend the use of direct payments and individual budgets to give patients greater control over the way their care needs are met.**

## Quality care for all patients

We all need to be assured that, if we become unwell, the care we get will be of good quality. Most of all, we need to be confident that our safety comes first, and the treatment we get doesn't put us in danger. We will introduce a series of reforms to improve patient safety.

- At the moment if a doctor makes a mistake when carrying out a procedure they are not obliged to tell you what's gone wrong. **We would require hospitals to be open about mistakes, and always tell patients if something has gone wrong.**
- European doctors are flying to the UK to cover weekend shifts but some of them do not understand our health service and mistakes have been made. We will make sure that everyone who works in the NHS knows how our health service works and can properly communicate with patients. **We will make it illegal for a local health board to allow a doctor to work in the UK for the first time without passing robust language and competence tests.**
- When there are failures in the standards of care in the NHS many people feel that no one is held to account. Part of the problem is that there are far too many bodies with some responsibility for patient safety. **We will give a single regulator responsibility for keeping patients safe so that everyone knows who is responsible.**
- Improving the health of the nation is a shared responsibility among individuals and families, schools, employers, the NHS and local government. All parties must do their part to adopt healthy lifestyles. Part of the solution is getting people to take a more active interest in their health, so they will start living more healthily. **We will give patients greater control of their own health records, so they're able to take a more active role in managing their health.**
- Part of the problem with the way the NHS works is that people find it difficult to find reliable information about the services available to them. **We will publish all relevant data about the performance of frontline services so that everyone is able to make informed choices about their healthcare.**