



Health

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 for patients to handle, 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 believe we have to change the NHS so patients come first. And that care would improve if local people had a say in how their health services were run. Our first priority is to protect front line services by making the NHS work better with the money it has and investing the money we save back into frontline services. We will save money in the long term by investing in public health.

Protecting NHS frontline services. The NHS is facing increasing pressure on vital services: more and more people suffer from dementia, there are ever more expensive cancer drugs available, and increasing obesity is leading to more heart patients. To ensure these services aren't cut even though budgets are tight, we will cut waste and re-invest every penny in frontline services, such as cancer treatment, mental health services, maternity services and dementia care, which could face cuts.

Putting local people in charge. 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.

Patient contract. It's not fair that patients who don't get the treatment they need from the NHS within target times are often then left on long waiting lists. We believe that everyone should be seen within the agreed timeframe. So we'll improve the quality of care people get from the health service by paying for people to go private if the NHS can't treat you on time.

Improving GP services. Many of us lead hectic lives and the NHS should be there to help. That's why we'll make sure everyone has the right to register with the GP that's most convenient to them. There still aren't enough GPs in deprived areas where they are needed most. So we'll pay GPs a bit more to provide healthcare to patients in deprived areas with the worst health, paid for by rebalancing the pay system across the board.

Patient safety. Patients' lives are at risk because foreign doctors are allowed to work in the NHS without proper tests of competence and language. We'll introduce a national test to make sure everyone who works in the NHS can speak English and is up to scratch. We'll stop hospitals from getting paid for mistakes and put in place a legal duty for them to tell patients if something has gone wrong.

A review of social care. The long-term funding system for adult social care in England is not fit for purpose and funding for services is likely to become more difficult in the future. We want a cross-party commission set up to reach a consensus on social care and sort this problem out once for all. Our preference is for a partnership model, where the state and the individual both contribute, with a guaranteed contribution to the costs of care.

Respite Care Guarantee. There are close to five million unpaid carers in England, with a million providing more than 50 hours care each week. In most jobs you get paid holidays but for a huge number of carers that simply isn't an option. We believe that respite care is a lifeline – not just for carers but for whole families. That's why we will provide a week's break from caring every year to the 1 million unpaid carers who provide more than 50 hours care each week.