



GENERAL ELECTION

What health and care need  
from the next government

# Adult social care

Briefing

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# General Election briefings



Our briefings set out issues where we believe there is clear evidence that a government taking or returning to office in the next year must act to meaningfully improve health and care in England.



We are presenting a series of tests that any policy programme during the next Parliament should meet.



We hope these briefings will help political parties over the coming months as they draw up a platform to put to the British people – and give journalists, MPs and health organisations key questions to ask them.

# Test 1

## Set out a plan for cohesive social care reform offering clear benefits and policy parity with the NHS

### What's the problem?

Proposals to reform social care have stalled and England is lagging behind other developed countries on reform

There's low public understanding of what social care is or how it works or is funded – and it is not as prominent as the NHS

There are examples of reforms being passed, but these have made limited progress, either due to lack of funding or political will

Reform aspirations have not been accompanied by concrete implementation plans

### What needs to happen?

Government must give social care policy parity with NHS policy and position it as a vital part of national infrastructure

Politicians must build public support for change with high-profile speeches raising the benefits of improving social care

Engagement with people with lived experience and the wider public needs to be a core part of policymaking, e.g. through people's panels and citizens' assemblies

Government must clearly communicate a convincing vision for reform, supported by a realistic and costed implementation plan

# Test 2

## Introduce a credible mechanism to fund adult social care sustainably

### What's the problem?

The current mixed funding model with sporadic injections of money for social care creates instability and makes planning and improvement difficult

Spending on social care by councils has only grown by 5% since 2010/11, but the number of over 65s rose by a fifth and requests for support among working-age adults have risen by 22% since 2015/16

The amount of funding needed for reform will depend on level of ambition but to meet estimated need and improve access is estimated to be around £14 billion by 2030/31

Previous attempts to introduce additional funding have failed due to a lack of cross-party support and political priority

### What needs to happen?

Proposals should set out how they will raise enough money to enable more people to access high-quality care now and in the long term

The risk of very high care costs should be spread through taxes that are well understood and familiar, structured so they are transparent and as fair as possible

These taxes may include income, capital gains or corporation tax, or a combination of these

The benefits to people and their families of an improved social care system should be clearly articulated to the public to build support for additional taxes

# Test 3

## Introduce greater consistency in, and expand, access to publicly funded care

### What's the problem?

The split of responsibilities between the state and individuals for paying for care is unclear, complex and inconsistent

The amount of savings or assets a person can hold and be eligible for public funding has not changed since 2010

As many as 1.5 million people aged over 65 could have unmet care needs

There's a postcode lottery in access to care because councils have varying criteria and tax-raising potential

There is currently no limit on how much an individual might have to pay for care over their lifetime

### What needs to happen?

Government should introduce a consistent approach to eligibility for care – such as a national assessment framework – to ensure people know what they would be entitled to

The upper and lower financial means-test thresholds should be increased to enable more people to access publicly funded care and to reduce levels of unmet need

The minimum income guarantee (the minimum amount someone can be left with after paying for care) should keep pace with inflation

A lifetime or monthly cap should be introduced to protect people against unlimited or catastrophic care costs

# Test 4

## Ensure that people who need social care have choice and control and can access personalised support

### What's the problem?

There is a myth that social care caters only to older people living in care homes, when people of all ages draw on care and support in a variety of settings, including their own homes

How care services are provided and commissioned have not kept pace with changing needs and preferences and can be too inflexible to give people choice and control

Uptake of personal budgets and direct payments to better enable choice has been low and is falling

People are unable to exercise choice due to a limited range of provision and a lack of high-quality information about available and quality options

### What needs to happen?

Government needs to work with people who currently draw on support, their carers, friends and family to co-produce an approach to eligibility and allocation

Government should implement a flexible offer for care which enables people to choose the care and the setting that best suits them and their needs, potentially through greater use of personal budgets

Personal budgets should be simplified, their funding uplifted and what they can be used for should be broadened out

Easily understood, accessible, useful information about care options and quality of provision locally should be made available to those drawing on services and their carers

# Test 5

## Set out a clear long-term strategy for the social care workforce that ensures staff are valued and retained

### What's the problem?

There are over 150,000 vacancies in the social care sector

There has been a fall in the number of registered nurses in social care, from 52,000 to 37,000 in ten years

Pay is low, with sectors like retail and hospitality offering competitive wages and other benefits

Care staff with five or more years of experience earned only 6p more per hour than staff new to the sector

### What needs to happen?

Government needs to urgently address low pay in a way that attracts new recruits, recognises and rewards skills and experience and ensures social care is competitive

Government must address poor working conditions (including for migrants) and build career pathways in social care

Government should draw up a long-term workforce plan for social care based on modelling, changing demographics and the rising number of people needing care and support

# Test

## Bring stability, growth and steady improvement to the organisations that deliver care

### What's the problem?

Between October 2022 and April 2023, 66% of social care directors in local authorities reported closures in their area

A NAO report found that more than a third of companies providing care have debts greater than their assets

Although most providers are well rated, those rated 'poor' by the Care Quality Commission often remain so over time and some get worse

The scramble to stay afloat leaves little time or resource to improve standards, or develop new and better services

### What needs to happen?

Councils should be given multi-year budgets so that they can plan strategically and proactively drive improvement and innovation

The CQC should be stronger on regulating unsustainable and risky financial behaviour, so providers are encouraged to invest profits into improving care

Fees need to cover provider costs, and leave them with enough money to improve and innovate

The government should use national standards, and more training, development, and support for councils, to help organisations providing care to improve and to deliver better kinds of care



# Test

## Support England's unpaid carers

### What's the problem?

There are 5 million unpaid carers across the UK, far more than professional health and care staff. They play an ever more vital role supporting people as more cannot get paid support

Between 2015/16 and 2022/23 there was a 20% drop in 'direct support' to carers. Access to breaks and respite care also declined substantially, by 37%

Support for working carers remains inadequate and workplace rights lag behind other countries, with much of the available support still at the discretion of employers. On average, 600 people a day leave work to care

### What needs to happen?

As part of a wider funded reform, the government should reverse the trend of declining support for carers, and fund local authorities to do the same for services they are responsible for, such as respite care

There should be a co-ordinated effort across government departments to support carers financially and in employment

Councils should be required to collect better data on unpaid carers

Carers' workplace and employment rights should be expanded, recognising the wider value of enabling them to work

# Test 8

## Ensure social care reform works alongside other services, in particular the NHS

### What's the problem?

There are many problems for people who have health and social care needs because services are poorly connected

The lack of social care capacity contributes to people in England spending longer in hospital after they are fit to leave than in countries like the Netherlands.

70% of social care directors say their staff are having to do tasks that were once picked up by the NHS

Too often social care is seen as merely a support to the NHS and over time has not been given the political attention or financial support it has needed

### What needs to happen?

NHS bodies should be encouraged to work together with social care on local planning, for instance around workforce and technology development, instead of competing with each other for staff and resources

The government should make sure that the instructions and guidance given to 'integrated care systems' treat social care as an equal partner in running them and setting priorities