



GENERAL ELECTION

What health and care need
from the next government

Dentistry

Briefing

3

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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

Address the failed dental contract

What's the problem?

NHS dental contract is not fit for purpose – it fails to attract dentists to the NHS or to keep them

Some patients cost more to treat, but the current funding system based on 'Units of Dental Activity' rewards quantity not quality

About 13% of the total NHS dentistry budget each year is unspent because the contract fails to attract enough dentists to do NHS work

Public awareness that NHS dentists have no obligation to continue to treat them beyond completing a course of treatment once started is low

What needs to happen?

Urgent reform of the dental contract to make sure dentists are funded for each person on their list

Payments for dental activity should be weighted to take account of patient need (as with GPs)

Work to balance the twin goals of securing high quality and intensive treatment for those that need it, and prevention for groups at high risk

Test 2

Expand the NHS dental workforce

What's the problem?

A dysfunctional contract and flatlining budget has driven many dentists away from NHS work

The recent Dental Recovery Plan is unlikely to result in dramatic increases to dentists doing NHS work

The increase in training set out in the Long-Term Workforce Plan will take time and it also does not cover dental nurses

In the short-term, immigration is not forecast to provide the same boost as it does for other health care professions

What needs to happen?

Ensure the NHS career pathway for dental therapists, hygienists and nurses is appealing, to help expand the workforce more quickly and avoid losing the increasing number of trainees to the private sector

Consider moving routine check-ups further apart in line with official guidance to address the acute shortage of dentists

Test 3

Rebuild a basic service for those who need it most

What's the problem?

There is a three-tier system in dental care in England - those who can afford private care, those lucky enough to find access to scarce NHS services, and those shut out of dental care entirely

Fully restoring NHS dental services is costly – the current budget of £3 billion only provides basic care to less than half of adults and just over half of children

What needs to happen?

In lieu of significant extra funding government should consider prioritising a basic service for vulnerable people and preventive care for children

Consider incentivising a targeted and immediate focus on delivering comprehensive, high quality dental care for children, pregnant women, older people and those who cannot afford private care

Without significant investment to restore a universal service, restore basic check-ups and preventive care for everyone while means-testing more advanced treatments