

Briefing on the 2018 party conferences

The 2018 party conference season took place following a time of intense debate within the Conservative Party over the direction of the Brexit negotiations and a challenging summer for the Labour Party. Both main parties were keen to put internal divisions behind them, uniting under the banner of “opportunity” at the Conservative Party conference and “Rebuilding Britain, for the many, not the few” at the Labour Party Conference

NHS Providers hosted a series of roundtables, focused on the NHS long-term plan at the Conservative Party conference, the review of clinical targets within the plan at the Labour conference, and how the plan could support child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) at the Liberal Democrat conference.

As member trusts will be aware, NHS Providers is an apolitical organisation. We have a presence at each of the main party conferences to ensure we maintain and develop relationships with key influencers and make the most of the opportunity to promote our messages on behalf of the membership. This briefing sets out the key announcements made by the parties at the 2018 autumn party conferences and the main discussion points from our roundtables and other events.

Key policy announcements

Conservative party conference

Health announcements

In his [speech to conference](#), health and social care secretary Matt Hancock:

- Announced an additional £240m funding for social care ahead of winter to ease pressure on the NHS by helping local authorities to ensure that there is appropriate care in place for patients discharged from hospital.
- Announced an expansion of the 100,000 genome project, aiming to sequence one million genomes, with a long term vision of 5 million sequenced, and a pledge for genomic testing to be available on the NHS for all seriously ill children and everyone with a rare cancer.
- More widely, he touched on the importance of prevention stating the NHS should “look after people as people, not patients”, and suggested prescribing exercise and arts rather than pills to tackle obesity and mental health issues.
- Stated he wanted to crack down on community hospital closures and highlighted the importance of upgrading outdated technologies citing the continued use of faxes in hospitals and manual checks on bed-capacity.

In **her speech** to conference, the Prime Minister announced:

- A new cancer strategy for the NHS, which will form a “central part” of the service’s long-term plan and be funded through the recent funding settlement.
- The bowel cancer screening age will be lowered to increase early detection rates.

Immigration system

- In **his speech to conference**, home secretary Sajid Javid announced the British citizenship test will be updated with a new “values test” and English language requirements strengthened.
- Theresa May outlined plans for a new post-Brexit skills-based immigration regime, focussed on high-skilled migrants which would see EU citizens lose preferential access and restrictions on the entry of lower-skilled workers. The proposals were broadly based on the recommendations of the Migration Advisory Committee from September.
 - The passports of short-stay tourists and business people from all “low-risk” countries would be scanned at e-gates - currently only EU citizens can do this
 - Security and criminal records checks would be carried out before visits, similar to the system of prior authorisation in the US
 - Workers wanting to stay for longer periods would need a minimum salary, to “ensure they are not competing with people already in the UK”
 - Successful applicants for high-skilled work would be able to bring their immediate family, but only if sponsored by their future employers
 - The new system will not cap the number of student visas
- The home secretary is reviewing the current cap on 20,700 highly-skilled workers. A white paper outlining how the new immigration system will work is set to be published in the autumn, ahead of a new immigration bill which will be published next year.

NHS Providers’ view

Reacting to the announcement of an extra £240 million for social care, the chief executive of NHS Providers, Chris Hopson, said:

“The funding announced today by the health and social care secretary for local authorities to spend on ensuring patients can be discharged promptly into appropriate care this winter will be strongly welcomed by trusts. This is exactly what NHS Providers called for in September and it’s good to be heard.

“Delays in transferring patients to care outside of hospital have been a focal point of winter pressure on the health system. These waits are not good for patients, families or NHS staff working under pressure. Trusts and local authorities have worked incredibly hard over the year to reduce these delays. But after a difficult summer of record-breaking demand, trusts are not in the position they would want to be in heading into winter. This extra money will definitely help and we therefore welcome it.

“For the long-term the government’s forthcoming green paper must propose bold action to put social care on the sustainable footing it so desperately needs.”

Labour party conference

Health announcements

In [his speech to conference](#), shadow health secretary Jonathan Ashworth committed to:

- Voting against accountable care organisations in Parliament, repealing the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and bringing forward legislation to “begin the process of renationalising our National Health Service”, as well as establishing a National Care Service
- Ending privatisation and ending private finance initiatives (PFI), as well as blocking transfers of hospital staff to wholly owned subsidiary companies
- Ending hospital car parking charges and charging for television in hospitals
- Investing an extra £10 billion in infrastructure
- Safeguarding the rights of all NHS and social care staff from the EU and end hostile restrictions on international recruitment
- Reinstating bursaries for nurses and midwives
- Introducing a specific target to narrow health inequalities
- Fully funding child and adolescent mental health services, investing in eating disorder services, end out of area placements and deliver “true parity of esteem for mental health services”
- Covering the cost of travel to and from hospital for children being treated for cancer

Separately, Mr Ashworth committed to provide £13.5m of funding to ensure of all of England’s district general hospitals have alcohol care teams.

Other relevant announcements

In [his speech to conference](#), shadow chancellor John McDonnell announced:

- Labour would “end Treasury bias against investing in regions and nations outside London” and rewrite Treasury rule books on how it makes decisions about what, when and where to invest
- The party would ensure workers will have trade union rights whether a full time, part time or temporary worker, banning zero hour contracts and tackling the gender pay gap

NHS Providers events

Conservative roundtable – the NHS 10 year plan: changing times, lives and places.

Andrew Selous MP, Health and Social Care Select Committee member, addressed the roundtable. The roundtable was attended by senior health and care stakeholders and again chaired by Nick Timmins. Attendees discussed the challenges and practical solutions for the health and care sector in a changing NHS and addressed the question of what can realistically be achieved in the NHS plan.

Labour roundtable – Targets and the 10 year plan: meet reform, or scrap?

Justin Madders MP, shadow health minister, and Health and Social Care Select Committee member, Dr Paul Williams MP, addressed our roundtable. The roundtable was attended by senior health and care stakeholders and chaired by author and journalist Nick Timmins, senior policy fellow at The King's Fund and senior fellow at the Institute for Government. Attendees discussed the role of targets and how they may be revisited to measure and drive performance in a changing NHS.

Liberal Democrat roundtable – Child and adolescent mental health services in the NHS 10 year plan.

Our roundtable focused on child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and how the long-term plan could address the challenges seen in these services. Two members of the frontbench gave opening remarks, Baroness Tyler of Enfield (the mental health spokesperson in the Lords) and Norman Lamb MP (chair of the Science and Technology Committee). Attended by senior mental health and education stakeholders, the roundtable was chaired by NHS Providers deputy director of policy and strategy, Miriam Deakin.

Key issues raised at party conference events

As well as hosting a series of roundtables, NHS Providers staff participated in several other events and meetings. A summary of the discussions of all the events we participated in, hosted and attended follows.

Workforce

Issues raised by health and care representatives

- The fragmented nature of national workforce planning
- High demand for services and increased pressure leading to staff attrition and adding to recruitment challenges.
- Some said that action needed to be taken immediately to solve the workforce challenge in the short term, advocating expansion overseas and an incentive return to work scheme.

Party responses

- Conservative representatives were conscious of the workforce pressures across health and social care, and acknowledged it was a huge task to ensure public sector professionals feel valued and appreciated. They noted that services require sufficient staff if we want any extra investment to improve productivity and outcomes.
- Labour representatives raised concerns about the impact of Brexit and short-term decision making on the sustainability of the workforce.
- Liberal Democrat representatives noted that it will take time to train the number of mental health staff required, and suggested using psychology graduates in the meantime, who are keen to work in the NHS.

Finance

Issues raised by health and care representatives

- The complexity of mental health funding streams was highlighted, as well as the importance of securing adequate funding for frontline mental health services.
- Some felt the toxicity of the financial system sets up primary care and secondary care in opposition to each other, with the current funding model creating perverse incentives.
- Some argued that the deep deficits that providers find themselves in and the deep surpluses that to commissioners are in, balance each other out.
- It is difficult for the NHS to plan where it will be without knowing what the future social care funding situation is.

Party responses

- Labour representatives spoke about the importance of funding public health and social care and investing sufficiently in infrastructure, maintenance backlogs, technology, genomics and personalised care.
- They believed the ten year plan must reflect demographic change and encourage a shift in prevention.
- Liberal Democrat representatives advocated a mental health investment standard to ensure much-needed funding reaches the frontline and greater transparency in how funding was being spent.

Mental health

Issues raised by health and care representatives

- The importance of adopting a 'health in all policies approach' was highlighted, commenting that the health service cannot be expected to solve all of the nation's problems, and that if a holistic approach to prevention across other policy areas is taken, money and lives could be saved.
- The high economic cost of mental ill health to our lives. They advocated an industrial strategy type approach to tackling mental ill health across all areas of government policy.
- The need to better link up education and health services and staff.
- Shortages in the education workforce and in mental health capacity is leading to long waiting times which is challenging.

Party responses

- Liberal Democrat representatives stated the green paper was a missed opportunity, failing to adequately address joint working with parents and carers, social care, the voluntary sector or wider community care.
- They believed it fell short in other areas, particularly in relation to the transition from young people's services to adult services, prevention, early intervention and helping vulnerable groups.

Social care

Issues raised by health and care representatives

- The importance of tackling the social care challenge, the pressures on the system and the ensuing impact on the wider health sector.
- The importance of health representatives making the case for extra support for social care.
- The importance of valuing social care staff, understanding the pressures of social care staff and forging good relationships.
- The need to ensure health and social care services are adequately integrated and centred around the patient.

Party responses

- Conservative party representatives acknowledged the importance of tackling the social care question. They also spoke about the importance of valuing the social care profession and, separately, the NHS and social care services valuing each other and understanding their perspectives.

Targets

Issues raised by health and care representatives

- Whilst there was consensus that it is important to have a set of targets that expresses the quality of care that should be provided, system-wide targets, that reflect and communicate the picture across the system, were advocated.
- Whether it was more helpful to talk about standards rather than targets – which more clearly guarantees a minimum expectation of care quality as opposed to a target.
- While staff feel targets are still needed and relevant, they are often unrealistic, overlook staff wellbeing and the quality of care provided.

Party responses

- Labour party representatives stated it was indisputable, that when used correctly, performance targets can improve patient outcomes and they provide verifiable information which helps make the case for further investment.
- Targets shouldn't be ditched when it is politically convenient. Holding the appropriate bit of the system to account for money and performance is central for making the NHS work effectively.
- However, this doesn't mean that current targets shouldn't be reviewed. Labour's test will be whether it will improve patient experience. They separately suggested the idea of a target aimed to narrow health inequalities.
- Liberal Democrat representatives said the NHS long term plan represents an opportunity to ensure that young people have adequate access mental health treatment, and discussed the possibility of ensuring a mandated target for ensuring no young person has to travel over an hour to access care.

NHS Providers conference resources

- Our party conference infographic: *The NHS at 70* provides an overview for the provider sector as the NHS enters its 70th year.
- Kerry Racher, NHS Providers external affairs advisor, reflects on [the health and care discussions](#) at the conferences.