



The Conservatives and the NHS: The end of parking the bus?



FUTURE
HEALTH

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CONTENTS

- 04 **Executive Summary**
- 08 **Introduction**
- 11 **NHS Funding and Performance**
- 16 **Workforce**
- 20 **Capital**
- 21 **Public Health**
- 24 **Mental health, learning disabilities and hospices**
- 26 **International**
- 28 **What Next?**

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During his time with the Secretary of State, Richard worked across Whitehall, the NHS and local government on major policy decisions including the NHS Long Term Plan and the Prevention Green Paper.

Alongside his work at Future Health Richard is undertaking his doctoral thesis in preventative healthcare systems at Liverpool University.

ABOUT FUTURE HEALTH

Future Health is a public policy research centre focused on creating healthier, wealthier people, communities and nations.

The importance of prevention and the development of new technologies have long been seen as ways to transform health systems to improve patient outcomes and performance, but progress has often been slow.

Future Health publishes regular research papers across its three research programmes of health prevention, health technology and the links between improvements in health and economic growth.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2019 was the Brexit election. But as with any General Election the NHS was high up on the list of voter concerns. Indeed an immediate post election poll from Lord Ashcroft found that the NHS was the most regularly cited issue for people casting their vote - even more so than Brexit¹.

The Conservative manifesto made a series of eye catching pledges on the NHS to woo voters. New hospitals, more staff and better performance were all promised. Ministers whizzed around the country highlighting where new buildings would be built, kit housed and premises repaired.

Within the 2019 party manifesto there were 35 commitments related to the NHS and healthcare². Our analysis finds that the Government will meet or is on track to meet 40% of them. Another 25% have been or will be on current progress delivered in part. A quarter will not be delivered at all.

On the high profile pledges, the record is mixed. Extra funding has been allocated to the NHS. The Long Term Plan Funding Bill was enshrined in law in March 2020 and NHS funding has grown. The Government is on track to deliver 50,000 more nurses, with 44,000 more nurses currently than there were in September 2019³.

However the pledge to deliver 50 million more appointments a year in primary care looks set to be missed, with recent data showing there were just over 30 million more in the last 12 months⁴. One of the main limitations on delivering this has been the Government's failure to deliver on the commitment to deliver 6,000 more GPs. The number of GPs is 3% lower than it was in 2019⁵. Against this, the Government has though met the wider target for recruiting 6,000 more primary care professionals by March 2024⁶.

The forty new hospitals programme has been beset by issues and a recent NAO progress report concluded that: "by the definition the government used in 2020, it (the Government) will not now deliver 40 new hospitals by 2030⁷." Against this failure, the pre-election plans for twenty hospital upgrades have continued to

1 <https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2019/12/how-britain-voted-and-why-my-2019-general-election-post-vote-poll/>

2 Please note that pledges on social care do not feature in the analysis. Some pledges are difficult to disaggregate, see tables for the full list of pledges

3 <https://healthmedia.blog.gov.uk/2023/05/25/nhs-workforce-stats-for-may-2023-record-numbers-of-doctors-and-nurses-in-nhs/>

4 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/appointments-in-general-practice/july-2023>

5 <https://www.rcgp.org.uk/representing-you/key-statistics-insights>

6 <https://healthmedia.blog.gov.uk/2023/05/25/nhs-workforce-stats-for-may-2023-record-numbers-of-doctors-and-nurses-in-nhs/>

7 <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/progress-with-the-new-hospital-programme/>

proceed⁸ and the Government and the NHS have opened over 100 community diagnostic centres⁹.

Most damaging of all though has been the deterioration in performance. Waiting lists have been on a steady rise over the last decade and the pandemic made things even worse. Industrial action has stalled the recovery and despite progress on long waits the overall size of the list continues to grow.

Some people will of course point to the obvious – the impact of the pandemic. There is no doubt that operations and services were cancelled and backlogs of care built up as a result. But it is a mistake to lay the blame for the state of the service completely at Covid's door. Deteriorating performance had already set in. The four hour A&E target has not been met since 2015. The 18 week elective target since 2016¹⁰.

This is the first of two short pieces published this party conference season on each of the political parties and their approaches to healthcare and the NHS. For the Conservatives the challenges they face are complex but they broadly boil down to a political strategy on health which has served them well up until now but will no longer continue to do so.

This strategy has been to 'park the NHS bus'. On Brexit, this was quite literally the case. The Brexit campaign claimed that by leaving the European Union there would be extra money available for the NHS on the side of their campaign bus¹¹.

But the strategy is more about a decision to protect NHS revenue budgets, and in particular the amount of resource flowing into hospitals, while cutting other health related budgets such as public health, workforce, capital and social care. This approach has allowed the party to make headline statements that the NHS is 'safe in Conservative hands' while sticking to wider public spending fiscal rules.

Whether you were David Cameron, Theresa May or Boris Johnson politically this approach in the last decade worked well. It allowed the Conservatives to mostly neutralise the NHS as an issue (an issue where they traditionally trail Labour) and see themselves voted in as the largest party at each of the last four elections.

Poor Labour leadership, the fog of Brexit and up until 2019 the slow steady pace of deterioration in NHS performance have also certainly helped. But in 2024 the landscape will be different.

Shouting 'more, more, more' whether it be money, doctors, nurses or hospitals will no longer cut it (see the lack of any positive public polling reaction to the Long Term Workforce Plan for evidence of this). It is also unlikely to even be possible given the wider fiscal environment.

8 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835657/health-infrastructure-plan.pdf

9 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/six-new-community-diagnostic-centres-to-deliver-more-than-500000-lifesaving-checks-a-year>

10 <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-01-11/debates/A6AB0570-E1A6-4F08-B6AB-494505C8AA10/NHSLong-TermStrategy>

11 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-07-30/johnson-aims-to-meet-brexit-bus-pledge-with-health-care-boost>

This time the Government's NHS record will be on the line and voters increasingly dissatisfied with poor access to services and wanting an end to industrial disputes are looking for change and improvement¹².

Labour has sensed the opportunity. Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Wes Streeting has ditched the party's failed approach of 2019, embraced the role of the private sector in improving patient access, talked up digital services and a wider need to pivot to prevention¹³.

There is no reason the Government cannot debate these issues.

Cancer survival rates have improved greatly in the last 15 years. Digital health has been transformed by the pandemic. The private sector is already a close strategic partner to clear the backlogs. The NHS App has been downloaded 30 million times. New diagnostic centres right across the country are catching disease earlier. Innovation and new action in areas such as hypertension and diabetes has greatly improved the management and quality of care. The UK is a leader in genomic medicine.

But to do so will require the Conservatives to acknowledge and understand that the health landscape at the next election is set to be very different from the last four.

Policy wise the party will also have to confront the fact that the record funding going in has not delivered the necessary improvements on core standards.

Why is this?

When looking at what else has not been delivered from the last manifesto, nearly half of the commitments that have not been met are in the areas of prevention, public health and primary care. It is in these areas where a lack of action and progress has started to bite on the performance of the wider system¹⁴. Spending more money on more sickness is not a recipe for success.

The response from some Conservatives to this situation in the past has been to question the overall NHS funding model, claim it is unsustainable and argue that other systems (eg health insurance) or policies (e.g. patient passports, charging for GP appointments) are the solution.

Such proposals end in continued electoral defeat and years of Opposition.

There is no public appetite to change the fundamentals of the NHS.

Instead the party would be better to try and balance its approach to health policy away from a narrow NHS and principally hospital lens to a wider more encompassing approach. An approach that focuses on the goals of improved

12 <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/british-social-attitudes-satisfaction-with-the-nhs-falls-to-the-lowest-level-ever-recorded>

13 <https://labour.org.uk/missions/building-an-nhs-fit-for-the-future/>

14 <https://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/news/workload/third-of-practices-forced-to-stop-routine-appointments-in-the-past-year/#:~:text=Almost%20a%20third%20of%20GP,June%202022%20to%20June%202023>

population wellbeing, reduced levels of workplace sickness, stronger communities and faster economic growth. One that invests more in primary care, embraces improving public health through strong action and creates a more sustainable and dynamic social care system.

At the 2024 election the Conservatives will need a new strategy for health and a new approach to policy. They are no longer going to be able to park the NHS bus.

INTRODUCTION

By the winter of 2019 the NHS warning lights were flashing red. It was felt by some that running an election campaign during an NHS winter crisis would only go one way for the Government.

Perhaps surprisingly, rather than try and avoid the issue, the Government sought to lean into it hard. The announcements of new funding from the NHS Long Term Plan helped¹⁵. Ministers were dispatched across the country to talk about new investments, hospitals and equipment¹⁶. Brexit helped distract detailed examination of what was being proposed. And the Government was aided by a Labour campaign ideologically fixed on a false privatisation narrative and absurd claim that the US was going to buy up parts of the NHS in a trade deal¹⁷.

Indeed the only time NHS performance, slipping as it had, rose to the top of the news agenda was when a four year old boy was photographed sleeping on a floor in Leeds Infirmary¹⁸. The picture first in the Yorkshire Post and then picked up by the Mirror did see news coverage screech towards a discussion about the future of the NHS, but this was only fleeting.

The Conservatives were returned to office with a majority of 80, their largest since 1987. On health, the manifesto made a long list of pledges. Some were more significant than others. Seven guarantees were put on the first page, with the commitments to the NHS just below Brexit in order of priority. The headline NHS pledge read:

‘extra funding for the NHS, with 50,000 more nurses and 50 million more GP surgery appointments a year¹⁹’.

The other NHS pledge that was particularly pushed was that of building forty new hospitals. Prime Minister Boris Johnson highlighted this within his steps of Downing Street speech having been returned to office²⁰.

Health and Social Care Secretary Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP subsequently set out four priorities for the Government on health a few days later in a speech at Policy Exchange:

- Prevention: because prevention is better than cure
- People: because we need more people working smarter

15 <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/>

16 Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP did 125 constituency visits during the 2019 General Election campaign: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/events/keynote-speech-by-the-rt-hon-matt-hancock-mp/>

17 <https://www.facebook.com/itvnews/videos/labours-barry-gardiner-bristles-at-itv-news-question-to-jeremy-corbryn/2558738244217066/>

18 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/dec/12/johnson-aide-tried-to-stop-media-using-image-of-boy-on-hospital-floor>

19 https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf

20 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-in-downing-street-13-december-2019>

- Technology: because patients and clinicians demand better
- Infrastructure: because buildings matter too

He added that the Government 'will deliver on these and each and every commitment in our manifesto²¹.'

The manifesto pledges reflected what the public said they wanted. A poll conducted immediately after the election found the top issues were more staff and faster access to hospital and primary care²².

What has been delivered?

There were 35 pledges made in the Conservative manifesto on the NHS and healthcare²³.

Assessing performance against the pledges is not always straightforward and is in places subjective. Certain pledges are more specific than others. Some pledges have obvious data points to measure progress, whilst others do not. In addition judgements need to be made on whether pledges have been met in part or in full. On others – with still likely a year left before an election – a judgement needs to be made on whether goals are still obtainable or not.

Future Health used publicly available data-sets to determine whether pledges had been met or should be met by the next election; whether they had been met in part; or whether they had not been met or would not be met by the next election. For each pledge a reference has been included providing the evidence base for the judgement on performance.

The analysis finds that of the 35 pledges:

- 14 have been met or are on track to be met
- 9 have been partially met
- 9 have not been met or will not be met by the next election

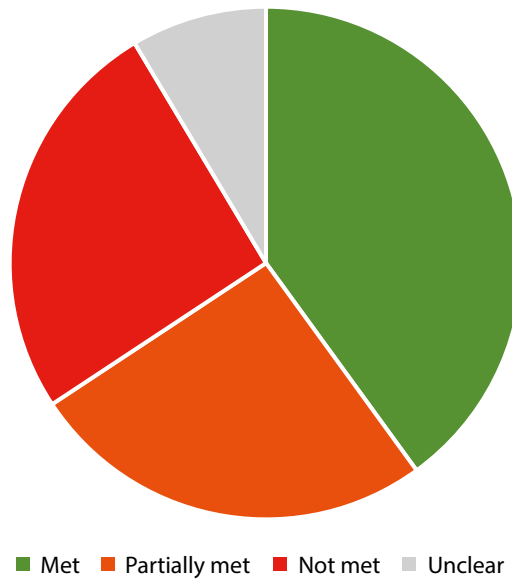
On three pledges performance is unclear due to lack of reliable data or the lack of clarity surrounding the original commitment made.

21 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/what-record-nhs-investment-means-for-each-of-my-priorities>

22 <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/The-Peoples-NHS.pdf>

23 Some pledges have been disaggregated, such as secondary care performance (A&E/electives) and cancer survival performance and investment in technology and the holding of a healthtech summit

Figure 1: Summary of Government performance against Conservative manifesto healthcare pledges



The following analysis breaks down the pledges into core policy areas to compare progress.

NHS FUNDING AND PERFORMANCE

The Government has increased NHS funding in line with the ambitions in the manifesto. A Long Term Plan Funding Bill was passed in the first months of the administration before the pandemic. Funding for NHS England has increased in line with the manifesto pledge. The Government has passed legislation to improve the integration of care through the creation of Integrated Care Systems (ICSs). Cancer survival rates have continued to improve. The Government has made changes to hospital car parking charges designed to exempt those in greatest need.

However core performance has deteriorated. Elective care waiting lists have risen steadily from 2012. They had reached over 4 million before the pandemic. They now stand at 7.7 million²⁴. In January 2023 the Prime Minister announced that reducing waiting lists was one of his five pledges, but the list has continued to grow²⁵. The number of people waiting over four hours in A&E has grown²⁶. Maternity care has not improved and recent inspections have revealed a series of quality concerns.

Elsewhere there has been some progress on agendas such as digital (particularly through the NHS App), hospital food and access to medicines.

Overall the Government is spending more, but of the 11 NHS performance and quality commitments in the manifesto, just three are set to be met in full. Five have been partially met, with two not met. It is not clear whether the Government has held a health tech summit.

24 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/rtt-waiting-times/>

25 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-outlines-his-five-key-priorities-for-2023>

26 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7281/>

Funding		
Pledge	Progress	Assessment
Within the first three months of our new term, we will enshrine in law our fully funded, long-term NHS plan	The long-term plan NHS funding Bill was introduced in January 2020 and became law in March 2020 ^{27,28} .	Met
Between 2018 and 2023, we will have raised funding for the NHS by 29 per cent	The 2018/19 the NHS England budget was £114.6 billion. In 2022/23 the budget was £152.8 billion. This uplift represents an increase of a third, 4% above the 29% target ²⁹ .	Met

NHS performance and quality		
Pledge	Progress	Assessment
We will improve NHS performance, using our record funding settlement to bring down operating waiting times and improve A&E performance	On both operating waiting times and A&E; performance has deteriorated since 2019 and the pandemic accelerated this deterioration ³⁰ . The Prime Minister's pledge to cut waiting lists from January 2023 has not materialised. The waiting list now stands at 7.7 million ³¹ .	Not met
We will increase cancer survival rates	NHS England's cancer survival index finds that rates have improved by 9% since 2005 ³² .	Met

27 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nhs-funding-bill-enters-parliament>

28 <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2544>

29 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1091951/E02754802_PESA_2022_elay.pdf

30 <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/qualitywatch/nhs-performance-summary>

31 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/rtt-waiting-times/rtt-data-2023-24/>

32 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cancer-survival-rates-improve-by-almost-10>

Pledge	Progress	Assessment
We will study carefully the recommendations of the ongoing review led by NHS clinical staff into A&E and clinical performance	<p>The Government has chosen not to proceed with changes from NHS England³³ to the 4 hour waiting time standard in A&E³⁴.</p> <p>It has however decided to reduce the number of cancer standards from 10 to 3 following clinical recommendations³⁵.</p>	Partially met
We will use frontline technology to improve patients' experience, provide flexible working for clinicians, and help save lives	<p>The NHS App has had 30 million sign-ups including 7 million in 2022³⁶.</p> <p>The government has already met its target to have 68% of people in England registered with the NHS App by March 2023 and is firmly on track to meet its second target to have 75% of people registered by 2024.</p> <p>However wider technology funding has been cut back to meet other priorities such as staff pay rises³⁷.</p>	Partially met
We will also hold an annual health tech summit	It is not clear if an annual Government health tech summit has been held.	Unclear

33 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/clinically-led-review-of-urgent-and-emergency-care-standards-measuring-performance-in-a-transformed-system/>

34 <https://www.hsj.co.uk/quality-and-performance/exclusive-ministers-ditch-nhs-englands-aande-target-review/7033736.article>

35 <https://news.sky.com/story/ministers-confirm-plans-to-scrap-two-thirds-of-cancer-targets-by-autumn-but-new-faster-diagnosis-standard-has-never-been-met-12941373#:~:text=The%20government%20has%20confirmed%20that,%22into%20the%20modern%20era%22>

36 <https://digital.nhs.uk/news/2023/nhs-app-hits-over-30-million-sign-ups>

37 <https://www.hsj.co.uk/technology-and-innovation/nhs-tech-funding-falls-to-less-than-1bn/7034194.article>

Pledge	Progress	Assessment
<p>We will focus on helping patients with multiple conditions to have simplified and more joined-up access to the NHS</p>	<p>The creation of ICSs through the Health and Social Care Act 2022 is designed to provide more co-ordinated and joined-up care for patients³⁸.</p> <p>One of the themes of the Government’s Major Conditions Strategy is to help health systems manage multiple conditions effectively - including embedding generalist and specialist skills within teams, organisations and individual clinicians³⁹. The full strategy is expected in 2024.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p>We will improve hospital food alongside our wider National Food Strategy</p>	<p>In 2020 the Government published the hospital food review setting out recommendations for improvement⁴⁰. Some local progress has been identified by NHS England⁴¹.</p>	<p>Partially met</p>
<p>We will extend the successful Cancer Drugs Fund into an Innovative Medicines Fund</p>	<p>The Innovative Medicines Fund has been created to support faster access to non-cancer drugs⁴².</p> <p>It is unclear how many drugs have been made available through the Fund.</p>	<p>Partially met</p>
<p>We will make the NHS the best place in the world to give birth through personalised, high-quality support</p>	<p>In March 2023 NHS England published the ‘three year delivery plan for maternity and neonatal services⁴³.</p> <p>However an analysis of CQC inspections of maternity services published by the Observer in July 2023 found that 21 units has been rated as substandard⁴⁴.</p>	<p>Not met</p>

38 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/31/contents/enacted>

39 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/major-conditions-strategy-case-for-change-and-our-strategic-framework/major-conditions-strategy-case-for-change-and-our-strategic-framework--2>

40 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-blueprint-for-better-hospital-food#:~:text=Facilities%3A%20provide%20funding%20to%20equip,and%20diets%2C%20and%20minimise%20waste>

41 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/blog/better-hospital-food-on-the-menu/>

42 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/medicines-2/innovative-medicines-fund/>

43 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/B1915-three-year-delivery-plan-for-maternity-and-neonatal-services-march-2023.pdf>

44 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jul/09/nhs-maternity-units-crisis-care-quality-commission-substandard#:~:text=An%20Observer%20analysis%20of%20the,as%20outstanding%2C%20with%20four%20improving>

Pledge	Progress	Assessment
<p>We will end unfair hospital car parking charges by making parking free for those in greatest need, including disabled people, frequent outpatient attenders, parents of sick children staying overnight and staff working night shifts. This will eliminate costs for those in need, while making sure there are enough spaces for everyone</p>	<p>Government NHS car parking guidance in 2022 sets out that those in most need will benefit from this policy⁴⁵.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p>We will also improve the early diagnosis and treatment of all major conditions</p>	<p>In some important major conditions such as cancer, early diagnosis rates have improved⁴⁶. However in other conditions rates have yet to recover from the pandemic. For example the dementia diagnosis rate remains below the two thirds target⁴⁷.</p>	<p>Partially met</p>

45 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-patient-visitor-and-staff-car-parking-principles/nhs-patient-visitor-and-staff-car-parking-principles>

46 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2022/11/nhs-catching-more-cancers-earlier-than-ever-before/>

47 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/primary-care-dementia-data/july-2023>

WORKFORCE

The Government looks set to meet one of its headline pledges of 50,000 more nurses but miss another – recruiting 6,000 GPs – by a substantial amount. Within primary care the Government has met its ambition for recruiting 6,000 more primary care professionals.

More widely ongoing industrial action has impacted the delivery of services and staff retention, particularly after the impact of the pandemic, is a major challenge⁴⁸.

In July 2023 the Government published its Long Term Workforce Plan which set out future projections for the recruitment and training of NHS staff⁴⁹.

Of the workforce pledges in the manifesto, half have been met and half have not been met.

Workforce		
Pledge	Progress	Assessment
6,000 more doctors in general practice	<p>In November 2021 then Health and Social Care Secretary Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP admitted that the commitment to recruit 6,000 more GPs would not be met⁵⁰.</p> <p>In July 2023 there were there are 27,177 fully qualified full time equivalent GPs, 3.4% less than in December 2019⁵¹.</p> <p>If GPs in training are included in the figures then the number of GPs has increased but not at the rate needed to meet the manifesto commitment⁵².</p>	Not met

48 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jul/01/revealed-record-170000-staff-leave-nhs-in-england-as-stress-and-workload-take-toll#:~:text=Revealed%3A%20record%20170%2C000%20staff%20leave,take%20toll%20%7C%20NHS%20%7C%20The%20Guardian>

49 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-long-term-workforce-plan/>

50 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/02/no-10-set-to-break-promise-of-6000-more-gps-in-england-sajid-javid-says>

51 <https://www.rcgp.org.uk/representing-you/key-statistics-insights>

52 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/general-and-personal-medical-services/31-july-2023>

Pledge	Progress	Assessment
6,000 more primary care professionals, such as physiotherapists and pharmacists and 20,000 primary care professionals that we have already announced	The Government has delivered on its commitment to increase the number of primary care professionals by 26,000 ⁵³ .	Met
This is on top of the 7,500 extra nurse associates we have already announced	The target of delivering 7,500 nurses associates by March 2020 was not met ⁵⁴ . The NMC register in 2022 recorded 6,874 nurse associates in England ⁵⁵ .	Not met
50,000 more nurses	The Government is on track to meet the 50,000 more nurses commitment - with over 44,000 more nurses in March 2023 than there were in September 2019 ⁵⁶ .	Met (On track)

53 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-meet-target-1-year-early-to-recruit-primary-care-staff#:~:text=The%20government%20has%20delivered%20on%20its%20manifesto%20commitment%20of%20recruiting,and%20nurses%20to%20do%20so>

54 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmpubacc/408/40807.htm>

55 <https://tinyurl.com/3nz489s6>

56 <https://healthmedia.blog.gov.uk/2023/05/25/nhs-workforce-stats-for-may-2023-record-numbers-of-doctors-and-nurses-in-nhs/>

Pledge	Progress	Assessment
<p>We will improve staff morale with more funding for professional training and more supportive hospital management</p>	<p>The Government has not met the headline commitment on staff morale. The latest NHS staff survey finds that 57.4% of staff would recommend their organisation as a place to work, down from 63.4% in 2019⁵⁷. Industrial action is ongoing. Large numbers of staff leaving the NHS were recorded last year⁵⁸.</p> <p>There are some signs of improvements in the view of hospital management with the ‘compassionate leadership’ sub-score were similar to or slightly improved compared with 2021, with the sub-score remaining at 6.9 overall⁵⁹.</p> <p>The Long Term NHS Workforce Plan does commit to increased training budgets⁶⁰.</p>	<p>Not met</p>
<p>We will introduce an NHS Visa. Our NHS People Plan will ensure that we train and employ tens of thousands more NHS professionals here in the UK</p>	<p>In July 2020 the Government announced the NHS Visa to fast track healthcare professionals into the UK⁶¹. The Long Term Workforce Plan sets out plans to train more healthcare professionals over the coming years⁶².</p>	<p>Met</p>

57 <https://www.nhsstaffsurveys.com/results/national-results/>

58 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jul/01/revealed-record-170000-staff-leave-nhs-in-england-as-stress-and-workload-take-toll>

59 <https://www.nhsstaffsurveys.com/results/national-results/>

60 <https://healthmedia.blog.gov.uk/2023/06/30/nhs-long-term-workforce-plan-fact-sheet/>

61 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-health-and-care-visa-to-ensure-uk-health-and-care-services-have-access-to-the-best-global-talent>

62 <https://healthmedia.blog.gov.uk/2023/06/30/nhs-long-term-workforce-plan-fact-sheet/>

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<p>We will introduce an NHS Visa. Our NHS People Plan will ensure that we train and employ tens of thousands more NHS professionals here in the UK</p>	<p>In July 2020 the Government announced the NHS Visa to fast track healthcare professionals into the UK⁶⁷. The Long Term Workforce Plan sets out plans to train more healthcare professionals over the coming years⁶⁸.</p>	<p>Met</p>

63 <https://www.nhsstaffsurveys.com/results/national-results/>

64 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jul/01/revealed-record-170000-staff-leave-nhs-in-england-as-stress-and-workload-take-toll>

65 <https://www.nhsstaffsurveys.com/results/national-results/>

66 <https://healthmedia.blog.gov.uk/2023/06/30/nhs-long-term-workforce-plan-fact-sheet/>

67 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-health-and-care-visa-to-ensure-uk-health-and-care-services-have-access-to-the-best-global-talent>

68 <https://healthmedia.blog.gov.uk/2023/06/30/nhs-long-term-workforce-plan-fact-sheet/>

CAPITAL

On capital the Government’s record is again mixed. Community Diagnostic Centres including cancer diagnostics have been rolled out across the country, building on work undertaken during the pandemic and the recommendations of a review by Professor Sir Mike Richards⁶⁹.

However the 40 new hospitals programme will not be delivered and problems with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) have led to shifts in prioritising which hospitals are rebuilt first⁷⁰. The Government has ruled out PFI projects for capital investment, but the nature of the manifesto commitment is vague and it is unclear how to measure performance against it.

Capital		
Pledge	Progress	Assessment
We will build and fund 40 new hospitals over the next 10 years	A report on progress with the programme from the National Audit Office in July 2023 found that: ‘by the definition the government used in 2020, it will not now deliver 40 new hospitals by 2030 ⁷¹ .’ In the summer of 2019 the Government did announce 20 hospital upgrades to upgrade outdated facilities and equipment ⁷² .	Not met
We will roll out cancer diagnostic machines across 78 hospital trusts to boost early diagnosis	The Government has opened 106 community diagnostic centres which include cancer diagnostics ⁷³ .	Met
We will continue to repair the damage done by Labour’s disastrous PFI deals	This pledge is unclear and difficult to assess. A commitment to not go ahead with any PFI projects was made in 2018 ⁷⁴ .	Unclear

69 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/diagnostics-recovery-and-renewal-independent-review-of-diagnostic-services-for-nhs-england-2.pdf>

70 <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/New-hospital-programme-report.pdf>

71 <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/New-hospital-programme-report.pdf>

72 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-extra-18-billion-for-nhs-frontline-services#:~:text=Visiting%20a%20Lincolnshire%20hospital%20today,and%20ultimately%20save%20more%20lives>

73 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/six-new-community-diagnostic-centres-to-deliver-more-than-500000-lifesaving-checks-a-year>

74 <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/921/managing-the-expiry-of-pfi-contracts>

PUBLIC HEALTH

In the summer of 2020 the Government announced the disbanding of Public Health England⁷⁵. The subsequent restructure saw health promotion responsibilities pass to the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) and health protection responsibilities pass to the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

While there have been notable achievements on the Covid vaccination programme in particular, along with action to tackle gambling, increase access to screening and expanding social prescribing; on the core public health agenda the Government has failed to deliver on its ambition. The target for delivering five years of healthy life expectancy will not be met, a health inequalities strategy has been discarded and most of the measures in the 2020 obesity strategy delayed or ignored.

Of the seven public health commitments just two will be met, two will be partially met and three will not be met.

Public Health		
Pledge	Progress	Assessment
A long-term strategy for empowering people with lifestyle-related conditions such as obesity to live healthier lives, as well as tackling childhood obesity, heart disease and diabetes	<p>A cohesive public health strategy has not been forthcoming. A health inequalities white paper was developed but never published⁷⁶.</p> <p>An obesity strategy was published in the summer of 2020⁷⁷. But many of the pledges within it have been delayed or watered down⁷⁸. Childhood obesity rates have risen since the pandemic⁷⁹.</p> <p>There has been specific action on distributing blood pressure monitors to tackle heart disease⁸⁰ and expanding the national diabetes prevention programme⁸¹. However the broader ambitions of the manifesto have not been met.</p>	Not met

75 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/08/15/hancock-axes-failing-public-health-england/>

76 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/sep/29/therese-coffey-scraps-promised-paper-on-health-inequality>

77 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-obesity-government-strategy/tackling-obesity-empowering-adults-and-children-to-live-healthier-lives>

78 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-backs-publics-right-to-choose-with-delay-to-bogof-restrictions>

79 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn03336/>

80 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/clinical-policy/cvd/home-blood-pressure-monitoring/#:~:text=What%20is%20NHS%20England%20doing,via%20a%20remote%20monitoring%20platform>

81 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2022/03/nhs-prevention-programme-cuts-chances-of-type-2-diabetes-for-thousands/>

Pledge	Progress	Assessment
<p>We are committed to reducing health inequality</p>	<p>There is a lag in the data on national health inequality measurement making a definitive assessment here challenging. OHID’s Slope Index of Inequality finds that inequalities in life expectancy have increased for both men and women between 2011-13 and 2018-20. The data also find there has been little change in healthy life expectancy.⁸²</p> <p>One proxy measure that may indicate levels (or lack of) progress is on the relative increases in the NHS waiting list by levels of deprivation. In the pandemic period the relative increases in the elective waiting list have been greatest in the most and second most deprived quintiles⁸³.</p>	<p>Not met</p>
<p>We will continue to promote the uptake of vaccines via our national vaccination strategy</p>	<p>The Covid vaccine programme is rightly seen as a major success of the pandemic response.</p> <p>However evidence shows that the wider uptake of vaccinations is falling⁸⁴⁸⁵.</p> <p>A vaccination strategy was first promised in July 2019⁸⁶ but has understandably been delayed due to the pandemic.</p>	<p>Partially met</p>
<p>We will extend social prescribing and expand the new National Academy of Social Prescribing</p>	<p>Both the Government and NHS England have expanded social prescribing schemes and activity⁸⁷⁸⁸.</p>	<p>Met</p>

82 <https://analytics.phe.gov.uk/apps/health-inequalities-dashboard/>; based on slope index of inequality data

83 <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2021/09/elective-backlog-deprivation-waiting-times>

84 <https://www.bmj.com/content/378/bmj.o2353>

85 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2022-to-2023/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2022-to-2023#:~:text=have%20provided%20data.,National%20vaccine%20uptake%20rates,Table%201%2C%20Figure%201>

86 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-orders-urgent-action-to-improve-vaccination-uptake>

87 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/36-million-social-prescribing-funding-to-bolster-mental-health-support-and-ease-pressure-on-gps>

88 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/>

Pledge	Progress	Assessment
We'll uphold our commitment to extend healthy life expectancy by five years by 2035	The Government is well off track to meet this target. Analysis from the Health Foundation has estimated that the Government is 192 years away from meeting this pledge for men ⁸⁹ .	Not met
We will continue to take action to tackle gambling addiction	A Government white paper includes a levy on industry profits but has been delayed and faced criticism as it did not include restrictions on gambling advertising ⁹⁰ . The number of NHS gambling clinics has been doubled in 2023 ⁹¹ .	Partially met
We will overhaul NHS screening and use new technology and mobile screening services to prevent ill health	The Government has expanded the numbers of mobile screening units for cancer ^{92,93} . The new digital health check is expected to identify tens of thousands of cases of hypertension ⁹⁴ .	Met

89 <https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/charts-and-infographics/healthy-life-expectancy-target-the-scale-of-the-challenge>

90 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/gambling-white-paper-consultations-published-in-step-forward-for-reform>

91 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2023/07/nhs-doubles-gambling-clinics-as-referrals-soar/>

92 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-breast-cancer-screening-units-to-speed-up-diagnosis#:~:text=The%20life%2Dsaving%20investment%20includes,out%20ultrasounds%20and%20X%2Drays>

93 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2022/04/hundreds-of-people-diagnosed-with-cancer-early-through-life-saving-nhs-lung-checks/>

94 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-digital-health-check-to-tackle-deadly-cardiovascular-disease>

MENTAL HEALTH, LEARNING DISABILITIES AND HOSPICES

In June 2022 the Government published a draft Mental Health Bill⁹⁵. The Bill was a response to a review led by Sir Simon Wessley into the Mental Health Act published in December 2018⁹⁶. The draft Bill does look to deliver on the manifesto asks, but time to deliver in this Parliament is slipping away. A Government response to a parliamentary committee on areas to strengthen the Bill from January 2023 has yet to be published⁹⁷.

The Government did deliver a cash injection of £25m for hospices. However inflation has reduced the value of the grant and there is uncertainty about what happens after March 2024.

Mental health, learning disabilities		
Pledge	Progress	Assessment
We will treat mental health with the same urgency as physical health. We will legislate so that patients suffering from mental health conditions, including anxiety or depression, have greater control over their treatment and receive the dignity and respect they deserve	The Government published a draft Mental Health Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny in June 2022 ⁹⁸ . The draft Bill includes actions to strengthen the voice of patients ⁹⁹ .	Partially met

95 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-mental-health-bill-2022>

96 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modernising-the-mental-health-act-final-report-from-the-independent-review>

97 <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/605/joint-committee-on-the-draft-mental-health-bill/news/175494/government-urged-to-strengthen-draft-mental-health-bill/>

98 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-mental-health-bill-2022>

99 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1085872/draft-mental-health-bill-explanatory-notes.pdf

Pledge	Progress	Assessment
<p>We will make it easier for people with learning disabilities and autism to be discharged from hospital and improve how they are treated in law</p>	<p>New higher threshold tests for the detention of people with learning disabilities and autism are included in the draft Mental Health Bill which if enacted are expected to see a decline in the numbers of people detained¹⁰⁰.</p>	<p>Partially met</p>
Hospices		
Pledge	Progress	Assessment
<p>We will support our precious hospices, developing the plans already announced by Boris Johnson to secure their future, with a £25 million cash injection in August to support 200,000 people at the end of their lives</p>	<p>This was based on pre-existing commitment from July 2019 to deliver £25m to hospices¹⁰¹.</p> <p>It is unclear how many people have benefitted from the policy. The long term future of the hospice grant beyond March 2024 remains uncertain¹⁰².</p>	<p>Met</p>

100 <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/get-act-mental-health-act-2022#:~:text=In%20June%202022%20the%20government,the%20Joint%20Committee%20Inquiry%20stage>

101 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-announces-25-million-cash-boost-for-hospices-to-secure-their-future>

102 <https://inews.co.uk/news/health/child-died-birth-childrens-hospice-funding-saved-2423684>

INTERNATIONAL

In July 2023 the Government announced that it was increasing the NHS surcharge paid by overseas visitors to £1,035¹⁰³. The pandemic and long waiting lists have seen fewer health tourism style stories appear in the media. With regular and reliable data not readily collected it is unclear what if any progress has been made. Indeed recent newspaper coverage has instead highlighted stories about people seeking treatment overseas due to long NHS waits¹⁰⁴.

In recent documents and as part of trade talks, the Government has continued to re-iterate that the NHS, the amount it pays for drugs and the services it provides will not be on the table.

Health tourism		
Pledge	Progress	Assessment
We will clamp down on health tourism, ensuring that those from overseas who use NHS services pay their fair share	Health tourism data is not readily collected. But with waiting lists rising there is anecdotal evidence of reverse tourism with patients going abroad to find treatment ¹⁰⁵ . There are also cases of people within the different UK nations travelling between countries to seek treatment ¹⁰⁶ .	Unclear
We will increase the NHS surcharge paid by those from overseas	The Government announced a planned increase to the Immigration Health surcharge in the summer of 2023 ¹⁰⁷ .	Met

103 <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-07-13/debates/677D41A0-5A85-4869-8167-69044929D759/PublicSectorPay>

104 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jan/21/not-medical-tourism-desperation-britons-resort-treatment-abroad>

105 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2023/02/27/how-nhs-waiting-lists-driving-british-health-tourism-boom/>

106 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12402927/Patients-escape-Welsh-NHS-England-hospitals.html>

107 <https://www.nhsemployers.org/news/immigration-health-surcharge-uplift-and-visa-fees-increase>

Trade policy		
Pledge	Progress	Assessment
When we are negotiating trade deals, the NHS will not be on the table. The price the NHS pays for drugs will not be on the table. The services the NHS provides will not be on the table	Pledges within the approach to a trade deal with India highlight that this remains the Government position. The Government commits to: "uphold the government's manifesto commitment that the National Health Service (NHS), its services, and the cost of medicines are not on the table. To this end we will not accept any provisions that would increase the cost of medicines for the NHS. Protecting the NHS is a fundamental principle of our trade policy, and our commitment to this will not change during our negotiations with India ¹⁰⁸ ."	Met

108 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1046839/uk-india-free-trade-agreement-the-uks-strategic-approach.pdf

WHAT NEXT?

In many areas delivering on the 2019 manifesto is mixed. More funding, but poorer performance. More nurses, but fewer GPs. Community diagnostic centres and hospital upgrades delivered but the 40 new hospitals programme well off track.

The Government's inability to deliver on some of its 2019 manifesto health policy commitments is multi-faceted, but also a warning as work begins on the next manifesto.

The last manifesto pushed the 'more, more, more' model for the NHS that voters in focus groups and polls said that they wanted. The strategy of relative funding protection for the NHS whilst under-investing in other parts of the healthcare system to meet fiscal rules has worked well for the Conservatives politically for the last 13 years. But the limitations of this approach have now been exposed. It will no longer work for the Government and the public will no longer buy it. Public satisfaction with the NHS is now at its lowest level since 1983¹⁰⁹.

Reflecting back on the last manifesto one is struck by the lack of a compelling NHS and wider healthcare story and a series of disjointed pledges and policies. Some of the targets are notably vague, some inadequate and others such as the 50,000 more nurses target arbitrary.

'Are you better off now than you were four years ago?' was Ronald Reagan's famous quote to voters about the economy during the 1980 US Presidential Election¹¹⁰.

In the UK in 2024 voters will be asking themselves the same question about the state of the NHS.

Without both an immediate story for how investment is driving change and improving access for patients and a medium term health policy framework that looks out beyond the NHS to improve the nation's health and reduce sickness the NHS will once again become the Conservatives electoral Achilles' heel.

109 <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/british-social-attitudes-satisfaction-with-the-nhs-falls-to-the-lowest-level-ever-recorded>

110 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rU6PWT1rVUK>



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