

Funding for Health and Social Care

Health and social care services are in a state of crisis. After years of underinvestment our hospitals are crumbling and there is now a staggering £6.5 billion backlog of repairs, meaning that many of our hospitals are not fit for purpose and lack money even to repair leaky roofs and replace windows. The workforce feels undervalued and services are struggling to retain staff. Local authorities have been starved of resources and are using up their reserves to try and cope with the demand for social care. More than a million people are unable to get the care they need. Too often, people are left stranded in hospital after they finish their treatment and no longer need to be there because the follow-up care and support they need to go home is not available in the community.

Liberal Democrats are the only party with a long-term plan for health and care services: Labour and Conservatives make short-term promises but have no long-term vision for ensuring the sustainability of these services. We know that any party seeking to lead the country at this election should be prepared to take bold action to safeguard health and social care. This isn't about doing the easiest thing, it is about doing what is right and what is essential. To tackle the immediate problem, we will:

- Raise £7 billion a year additional revenue which will be ring-fenced to be spent only on NHS and social care services. This revenue will be generated from a 1p rise on the basic, higher and additional rates of Income Tax (this revenue will be neither levied nor spent in Scotland.)
- Use this cash to relieve the crisis in social care, tackle urgent workforce shortages, and to invest in mental health and prevention services. This represents the most efficient and effective way of spending these extra resources – ensuring they will have the greatest impact on the quality of care patients receive.
- Also use £10 billion of our capital fund to make necessary investments in equipment, hospitals, community, ambulance and mental health services buildings, to bring them into the 21st century.

In the longer term, to put the funding of health and care on a sounder footing we will:

- Commission the development of a dedicated, progressive Health and Care Tax, offset by other tax reductions, on the basis of wide consultation and extensive engagement with the public. The intention is to bring together spending on both services into a collective budget and set out transparently, on people's payslips, what the Government is spending on health and social care.
- Establish a cross-party health and social care convention that builds on the existing body of work from previous conventions, select committees and the 2018 citizens' assembly to reach agreement on the long-term sustainable funding of a joined-up system of health and social care. We will invite patients' groups, professionals, the public and the governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to be a part of this work. Introducing a cap on the cost of care as provided for in the Care Act but not so far delivered by the Conservatives would be a key starting point for Liberal Democrat participants.

- Introduce a statutory independent budget monitoring body for health and care, similar to the Office for Budget Responsibility. This would report every three years on how much money the system needs to deliver safe and sustainable treatment and care, and how much is needed to meet the costs of projected increases in demand and any new initiatives – to ensure any changes in services are properly costed and affordable.

Our ultimate objective will be to bring together NHS, Social Care and public health seamlessly – pooling budgets in every area and supporting integrated care systems. We want to see services that work in a more joined-up way for the people who depend on them and with local democratic accountability and transparency.
