

Health and Care Bill introduced to Parliament

The Health and Care Bill builds on the proposals for legislative change set out by NHS England in its Long Term Plan, while also incorporating valuable lessons learnt from the pandemic that will benefit both staff and patients.

The government is committed to delivering world-class care for patients and this Bill will help deliver that by building on the NHS' own proposals for reform to make it less bureaucratic, more accountable, and more integrated in the wake of COVID-19.

These changes are vital to help the NHS build back better from the pandemic. In February 2021, the government set out its proposed plans and its introduction in Parliament today follows extensive discussions with NHS England, the Local Government Association and the health and care sector to refine this blueprint.

COVID-19 has reinforced the need for closer collaboration between the NHS, local authorities and care providers to provide more joined up working, and staff and patients have rapidly adopted new technologies to deliver better care. But at times in recent years the legal framework has made this more difficult, as it was not designed with this type of collaboration in mind.

The Bill will ensure each part of England has an Integrated Care Board and an Integrated Care Partnership responsible for bringing together local NHS and local government, such as social care, mental health services and public health advice, to deliver joined up care for its local population. Clinicians, carers and public health experts will be empowered to operate collaboratively across health and care, as part of plans to tackle inequalities and level up health across the country. The Bill will also introduce measures to tackle obesity and improve oral health.

It will dispose of unnecessary bureaucracy that has held the health service back so that health and care staff can focus on patients, not paperwork, and ensure the system is able to flex to changing needs in the years to come. It will ensure NHS England is more accountable to government, and by extension Parliament, while ensuring the NHS retains everyday operational and clinical oversight.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

“The astonishing response of our health and care services to the COVID-19 pandemic has hit fast-forward on some of the bold changes the NHS set out to deliver in its Long Term Plan and shone the spotlight on other areas that require change to achieve better care for our communities.

“To help meet demand, build a better health service and bust the backlog, we need to back the NHS, as it celebrates its 73rd birthday this week, and embed

lessons learned from the pandemic. This will support our health and care services to be more integrated and innovative so the NHS can deliver for people in the decades to come.”

Sir Simon Stevens, NHS chief executive:

“This Bill contains widely supported proposals for integrated care, which have been developed and consulted on over recent years by the NHS itself. They go with the grain of what our staff and patients can see is needed, by removing outdated and bureaucratic legal barriers to joined-up working between GPs, hospitals, and community services. In doing so, these pragmatic reforms build on the sensible and practical changes already well underway right across the NHS. And by enabling mutual support between different parts of the local health and care services they will undoubtedly both help tackle health inequalities and speed the recovery of care disrupted by the covid pandemic.”

Key measures include:

- The NHS and local government coming together to plan health and care services around their patients’ needs, and quickly implement innovative solutions to problems which would normally take years to fix, including moving services out of hospitals and into the community, focusing on preventative healthcare.
- The development of a new procurement regime for the NHS and public health procurement, informed by public consultation, to reduce bureaucracy on commissioners and providers alike, and reduce the need for competitive tendering where it adds limited or no value. This will mean staff can spend more time on patients and providing care, and local NHS services will have more power to act in the best interests of their communities.
- A package of measures to deliver on specific needs in the social care sector. This will improve oversight and accountability in the delivery of services through new assurance and data sharing measures in social care, update the legal framework to enable person-centred models of hospital discharge, and introduce improved powers for the Secretary of State to directly make payments to adult social care providers where required.
- Supporting the introduction of new requirements about calorie labelling on food and drink packaging and the advertising of junk food before the 9pm watershed to level up health across the country. The pandemic has shown the impact of inequalities on public health outcomes and the need for government to act.