

Health and Social Care Secretary sets out plan for patients with new funding to bolster social care over winter

- Health and Social Care Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister Thérèse Coffey will set out an expectation that anyone who needs an appointment should get one at a GP practice within two weeks – and patients with the most urgent needs should be seen within the same day
- To help people get out of hospitals and into social care support, the government is launching a £500 million Adult Social Care Discharge Fund
- Plan also reflects changes to pension rules to retain more experienced senior clinicians and exploring strengthening how we use volunteers in the health service, including to support ambulance services

Our Plan for Patients will inject £500 million of additional funding into adult social care to help people get out of hospitals and into social care support. The Plan was unveiled by the Health and Social Care Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister today [Thursday 22 September 2022].

In her first major intervention in her new role, Thérèse Coffey announced a package of measures to ensure the public receives the best possible care this winter and next. The Adult Social Care Discharge Fund will help speed up the safe discharge of patients from hospital this winter to free up beds as well as helping to retain and recruit more care workers. With 13,000 patients in beds who should be receiving care in the community, this will improve the flow in emergency departments and help reduce ambulance delays.

The plan also sets out interventions to improve access to general practice appointments, with the expectation that everyone who needs one should get an appointment at a GP practice within two weeks – and that the patients with the most urgent needs should be seen within the same day.

As well as more support staff, an enhanced role for pharmacists and new telephone systems, changes will also be made to NHS pension rules to retain more experienced NHS clinicians and remove the barriers to staff returning from retirement, increasing capacity for appointments and other services.

This includes extending retirement flexibilities to allow retired and partially retired staff to continue to return to work or increase their working commitments without having payment of their pension benefits reduced or suspended, and fixing the unintended impacts of inflation, so senior clinicians aren't taxed more than is necessary.

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Thérèse Coffey said:

Patients and those who draw on care and support are my top priority and we will help them receive care as quickly and conveniently as

possible.

That is why we are publishing Our Plan for Patients, which will help empower and inform people to live healthier lives, while boosting the NHS' performance and productivity.

It sets out a range of commitments for our health service, ensuring we create smoother pathways for patients in all parts of health and care.

Alongside the government's plan to ensure patients get the best possible care, the Health and Social Care Secretary called for a "national endeavour" to support the NHS. This includes encouraging more volunteering across the health service, as well as exploring strengthening how we use volunteers, such as supporting NHS ambulances in the areas of greatest need.

Local health and care partners will be able to decide how best to use the social care funding to improve hospital discharge, and to retain and recruit social care staff.

Funding of £15 million this year will help increase international recruitment of care workers. The funding will enable local areas to support care providers with activities such as visa processing, accommodation and pastoral support for international recruits. This will complement a national domestic recruitment campaign, which will launch shortly.

The Health and Social Care Secretary acknowledged the scale of the challenges facing the NHS in the wake of the pandemic and Our Plan for Patients builds on the NHS Winter Plan, including the roll-out of Covid boosters and flu jabs already underway to help protect the most vulnerable. The plan sets out actions to ensure the best possible care for patients under each of her A, B, C and D priority areas – ambulances, backlogs, care and doctors and dentists.

Prime Minister Liz Truss said:

On the steps of Downing Street this month, I pledged that one of my earliest priorities as Prime Minister would be to put our health and care system on a firm footing.

These measures are the first part of that plan and will help the country through the winter and beyond. Ultimately my mission in government is to grow our economy, because that is the best way to support the NHS and social care system and ensure patients are receiving the frontline services they deserve.