

Health and Social Care Secretary to set out new plan for patients and call on public to play a part in national endeavour

- Building on the NHS winter plan, Health and Social Care Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister Thérèse Coffey will outline measures across the priorities that matter most to patients – ambulances, backlogs, care and doctors and dentists
- Package of measures will improve access to general practice so all patients who need an appointment can get one within two weeks, with plans to free up over one million appointments per year
- Alongside the government’s plan, the public will be called on to do their bit as part of a “national endeavour” to support the NHS and social care

A new drive to improve access to general practice appointments will be the centrepiece of a new Our Plan for Patients that will be unveiled by the Health and Social Care Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister tomorrow [Thursday 22 September].

As the first step in her efforts to put the NHS and social care on a resilient footing, Thérèse Coffey will set out her 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.

The plan will include changing funding rules to recruit extra support staff so hardworking GPs can focus on treating patients – freeing up over one million appointments per year, as well as more state-of-the-art telephone systems to make it easier for patients to get through to their GP surgeries.

There will also be more information available for patients, with appointments data published at a practice level for the first time ever.

Pharmacies will help ease pressures on GPs and free up time for appointments by managing and supplying more medicines such as contraception without a GP prescription, which could free up to two million general practice appointments a year, and taking referrals from emergency care for minor illnesses or symptoms, such as a cough, headache or sore throat.

As part of Our Plan for Patients, Dr Coffey will also call on the public to take part in a “national endeavour” to support the health and social care system, calling on the one million volunteers who stepped up during the pandemic to support the NHS to come forward again. This will include a push for more volunteering across the NHS and social care.

Health and Social Care Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister Thérèse Coffey is expected to say:

I will put a laser-like focus on the needs of patients, making their priorities my priorities and being a champion for them on the issues that affect them most.

Our Plan for Patients will make it easier to get a general practice appointment and we will work tirelessly to deliver that, alongside supporting our hardworking GP teams.

We know this winter will be tough and this is just the first step in our work to bolster our valued NHS and social care services so people can get the care they need.

From November, the NHS will accelerate the roll-out of new cloud-based telephone systems to make it easier for patients to get through to their general practice, with more phone lines to take calls from patients and provide information about their place in the queue, or direct them to the right place for help.

As part of the extra staff to support GPs to focus on seeing patients, the government will free up funding for practices to employ more roles, including GP assistants and more advanced nurse practitioners, in addition to the roles they are already able to recruit such as pharmacists, mental health practitioners and nursing associates. This supports the government's commitment to deliver 26,000 more primary care staff to help improve access to appointments.

Our Plan for Patients will build on the NHS winter plan and set out further detail on how the public will receive the care they need this winter and next across the Health and Social Care Secretary's A, B, C and D priorities – ambulances, backlogs, care and doctors and dentists.

Amanda Pritchard, NHS chief executive, said:

I know how much patients value timely, convenient access to GPs and primary care, the front door to the NHS, which is why we are continuing to drive improvements, including new roles to better meet patients' needs and new tech to make contacting your local surgery easier.

NHS staff are working incredibly hard to deliver record numbers of GP appointments for patients, with 11 million more this year so far than the same period last year, and more than four in five people who need an appointment seen within two weeks, including more than two fifths within one day.

We will work with the government so we can support NHS staff to deliver these new ambitions for patients, underpinned by the

development of a long term workforce plan.