Dear Chancellor,

The crisis currently facing the NHS and social care is well known and becoming increasingly severe – the government cannot remain a bystander any longer. In advance of the Budget, I am writing to call for an increase in the UK’s health spending as a proportion of GDP in line with that of other leading European economies. The ten leading economies across Europe spend an average of 10.4% of their GDP on health on the current OECD definition, in comparison with the UK’s 9.8%. We calculate this to be a gap of around £10.3bn.

The BMA has consistently highlighted the shortfall in NHS, social care and public health funding and the direct impact this is having on patient care, which is why in addition we are repeating our call for the £30bn black hole facing the NHS in England to be met. Our members report that services are truly at breaking point, with unprecedented rising patient demand met only with financial restraint and directives for the NHS and social care to make huge, unachievable savings through Sustainability & Transformation Plans across England.

Last month, the NHS announced that 135 NHS trusts finished the financial quarter in deficit. Far from being a shock announcement, this was expected and has become the norm, as was the latest announcement of the NHS missing its key waiting time targets. An entire system under such strain is not due to front-line financial mismanagement, or individual chief executives’ poor decision making, it is due to the conscious underinvestment in our health service.

We are not calling for more than other comparable nations, we are simply calling for you to match the average spending of other leading European economies. Based on our analysis of the figures available, this would, in 2015, have equated to an increase of £10.3bn for NHS funding; an increase which is desperately needed.

To put this figure in context, if just half this additional funding was invested in hospital beds it could pay for an extra 35,000 hospital beds every day – the lack of hospital beds across the NHS has been cited extensively as a reason for missing targets, patients’ operations cancelled and backlogs in accident and emergency.
If allocated to primary care, this could help to deliver a transformational increase in the number of GPs by 10,000, along with staff and premises, following an investment of just £3bn. Increasing the number of GPs has been committed to by the health secretary, we know this is not just a question of money, but year after year, this remains undelivered. Making good on the health secretary’s repeated commitments would be a huge step toward stabilising general practice and providing a system which has the time and resource to meet patient need.

Over recent years, the public health budget in England has been continually raided, with a significant impact on preventative services that will both improve the population’s health and save money over the longer term. This funding could be used to reverse the cuts already made and provide investment rather than the reductions of around 4% a year proposed until 2020. With a new, fair settlement, public health services could finally be granted the necessary resource to be able to tackle the public health challenges faced by our population.

On behalf of doctors working under intense pressure on a daily basis, across all healthcare settings, I hope you will respond positively to this call and grant the NHS the proper funding that patients so desperately need.

Yours sincerely

Dr Mark Porter
BMA council chair