

Opposition Day Debate: Social Care

House of Commons

Tuesday 25 February 2020

About the BMA

The BMA (British Medical Association) is a professional association and trade union representing and negotiating on behalf of all doctors and medical students in the UK. It is a leading voice advocating for outstanding health care and a healthy population. It is an association providing members with excellent individual services and support throughout their lives.

Key Points

- Social care is at crisis point. This is putting additional strain on the NHS at a time when services are already under huge pressure.
- An immediate funding boost is needed to ensure the social care crisis does not deepen with further ramifications for NHS performance.
- More needs to be done to make health and social care more preventative and proactive.
- It is vital that the Government urgently set out plans for the long-term future of social care. The BMA is calling for personal adult social care to be made free at the point of need, financed out of general taxation and provided as part of the comprehensive health service.
- Any future social care plan must address workforce challenges. With an estimated 115,000 workers from the European Union currently filling positions in England's social care sector, the Government's immigration plans could lead to exacerbating current workforce shortages in social care¹.

Background

- The population in the UK is set to grow an estimated 10.2m to 14.1m between 2018-2035, with over 65s being the largest growth cohort². People are living longer and pressures are increasing, with more people experiencing multiple or complex needs.
- Since 2010, despite an increase in demand for adult social care, financial eligibility thresholds have not been revised, and are estimated to be 12% lower than in 2018/19 (real terms)³.
- Since 2010, health and social care funding across the UK has not kept pace with demand. Spending on social care has fallen by 5% in real terms since 2010/11 resulting in levels of service and investment in social care workforce at an all-time low⁴.

BMA Analysis

¹ The King's Fund (2019) [Brexit: the implications for health and social care](#)

² Skills for Care (2019) [The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England](#)

³ [Long term funding of adult social care \(2018\)](#)

⁴ Health Foundation (2019) [Investing in the NHS long term plan](#)

Social care is currently under huge pressure as a result of inadequate resourcing, driven by funding cuts to local councils and a lack of clarity around its future. This is having a negative impact on the NHS, which has had to increasingly care for patients who can no longer rely on well-resourced social care support in the community. The NHS needs social care to be properly resourced and adequately staffed to provide the best care for patients.

The Government's election manifesto pledge announced increased funding for social care, however these funding commitments are unlikely to produce change beyond the short-term. Long-term funding proposals under wider social care reform are required.

Why more funding and urgent reform is needed

The effectiveness and outcomes of our health system are increasingly dependent on the functioning of social care. The resourcing of social care and health must be considered jointly as their fortunes are so closely tied to each other. Problems in social care affect the NHS directly – putting increased pressure on A&E and primary care and making it more difficult to discharge patients who have been treated in hospital back into the community. There were over 148,000 delayed bed days in NHS hospitals in December 2019 as a result of delayed transfers of care, a 15% increase compared to the 129,000 delayed days that occurred in December 2018.

Current total health spending in England is at £137bn compared to public spending on adult social care which is around £18bn⁵. The LGA (Local Government Association) estimates the social care sector could face a £3.5bn funding gap by 2025 just to maintain current levels of care⁶. The Government must set out plans to invest in and reform social care as early as possible this year. Further delay will compound the uncertainty and pressures being caused by current lack of social care provision in many local areas. A recent Health Foundation study into the current NHS system found that there was support from the general population for paying more taxes to maintain and improve health and social care – 62% surveyed said that if the government decided to increase spending on social care, this should be funded through some form of tax increase⁷.

The BMA is calling for

- An immediate funding boost to ensure the social care crisis does not deepen leading to further ramifications for NHS performance.
- The current system simply is not working, which is why we believe it is time for social care, like the NHS, to be publicly funded and provided free at the point of delivery.
- Closer integration between social care and health is required to provide the best possible care for patients.

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⁵ Health Foundation (2019) [Health and social care funding](#)

⁶ LGA (2018) The lives we want to lead: <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-launches-own-green-paper-adult-social-care-reaches-breaking-point>

⁷ Health Foundation (2019) <https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/news/two-thirds-of-people-want-tax-increase-to-pay-for-health-and-social-care>