

# Which party will care for the NHS and put my patients first?

**Our aim:** To make year-on-year improvements in the health of Britain's people and the quality of the National Health Service.

**The problem:** The NHS has been squeezed between rising demand and government underfunding, and disrupted by repeated changes in government policy. Morale amongst NHS professionals is falling, and bureaucracy has grown at the expense of front-line patient care, while numbers of nurses and hospital beds have fallen.

**Our commitment:** Liberal Democrats will increase funding for the NHS and secure funding for the future. We will maintain the NHS as a comprehensive service, free at the point of need and funded primarily from general taxation. We will immediately tackle the crisis in the hospital sector, make the NHS more accountable and begin a long term shift towards preventive medicine.

## Our priorities are to:

- Halt all finance driven closures for 6 months, pending an independent audit of needs and facilities.
- Invest £200 million each year to recruit more staff for front-line patient care. This would be enough, for example, for 10,000 extra nurses or 5,000 extra doctors.
- Cut hospital waiting lists to a maximum of 6 months over 3 years.
- End the two-tier system in the NHS.
- Restore free eye and dental checks.

## Raising standards in the NHS

Whilst many of the recent reforms to the NHS have been beneficial, they have resulted in the creation of a two-tier health service. The standard of health care a person receives is increasingly becoming a lottery. The length of time people have to wait, the chance of treatment being postponed and the quality of health care vary enormously from one part of the UK to another.

## We will:

- **Match NHS facilities to needs.** We will place an immediate 6-month halt on the finance driven closure of beds and wards, and set up an independent audit of needs and facilities.
- **End the built-in two-tier service in the NHS.** We will end the present system where treatment depends on the type of GP people go to. We will treat all GPs equally, with a common basis for funding. We want all GPs to have the benefits of flexibility and access to services currently enjoyed by fundholders. Those who choose to manage their own affairs will be able to do so on their own or as part of a consortium. Those who do not will be able to leave management to the local health authority.
- **Raise standards of care in all areas.** We will set up a National Inspectorate for Health

and Social Care to improve standards and promote patients' interests. This body will work with the Audit Commission to ensure that all spending is monitored and results in real improvements in patient care.

## Funding the Health Service

The NHS is underfunded. Too much goes into bureaucracy and not enough into patient care. There is a crisis in the NHS, especially in hospitals. Morale is dropping, standards of care are at risk from underfunding and highly qualified doctors and nurses are leaving the profession.

## We will:

- **Invest more in the NHS.** We will invest at least an extra £540 million every year in the NHS to pay for our policy priorities. This will be paid for by closing the loophole that allows employers to avoid paying National Insurance contributions on certain benefits in kind and by putting 5p on the price of a packet of 20 cigarettes. We will use these extra funds to tackle the crisis in staffing, especially in the hospital sector, and begin a shift to preventive care. We will ensure that the NHS budget keeps pace with increasing cost pressures.
- **Shift money from unnecessary bureaucracy into patient care.** We will move from annual to at least three yearly contracts between Health Authorities and Trusts, and shift the money saved into front-line patient care. We will replace time consuming local pay bargaining with a new national pay structure and a single NHS-wide Pay Review Body that covers all pay, from the cleaner to the chief executive.