

This week saw the parties further outline their plans for the NHS with announcements coming from Labour as part of their 'NHS week'. Proposals have come amid fresh concerns over health service funding with the Chief of NHS England [suggesting that the projected £8 billion gap in funding will require more urgent servicing than previously thought](#). Labour have put forward a plan that builds on their commitment to repeal the 2012 Health and Social Care Act and curtail the involvement of private providers in the health service, aiming to make savings from the removal of costly competition and tendering processes introduced by the act. The Conservatives, on the other hand, have promised an extra £8bn for the NHS but have come under significant criticism for failing to explain where it would come from. This briefing will set out the plans of the two main parties and those of the Lib Dems, Greens and UKIP.

Labour's plan for the NHS

Labour's offer to the health service has been framed by three core commitments; to address a crisis in staffing levels, integrate health and social care and repeal the Conservatives' Health and Social Care Act.

[This week Labour announced an NHS rescue plan for the first 100 days of a Labour government](#) stating that 1,000 extra nurses would be recruited immediately to meet the A&E waiting time crisis. This forms part of a commitment to recruit 20,000 more nurses to alleviate staff shortages across the NHS and reduce the agency staff bill [which cost the NHS in England £485 million in 2014](#).

Labour has also pledged to increase general NHS staff numbers, [promising to finance a further 8,000 GPs, 5,000 care workers and 3,000 midwives from a £2.5 billion 'Time to Care' fund](#) with revenues from a mansion tax, a levy on tobacco firms and by tackling tax avoidance.

[£750 million from the fund is also earmarked to improve cancer care by reducing waiting times for cancer tests and results to one week by 2020](#), improving access to new cancer drugs, surgery and radiotherapy and

equipping more GP's surgeries with x-ray and ultrasound machines to improve detection rates.

These plans tie in with an effort to move health and social care closer to homes and communities to reduce the strain on hospital resources and improve care for those with complex needs. The 5,000 care workers announced as part of [Labour's 10 year plan](#) in January would deliver care to the most vulnerable and new year-of-care budgets would encourage social care providers to invest in quality care, moves Labour hope will make social care better and more accountable to users.

Underpinning these announcements is the party's commitment to repealing the Health and Social Care Act including the controversial section 75 regulations that allow CCGs to tender contracts for purchase by private providers. The expensive system would be replaced with a network of NHS 'preferred providers' with a [5% cap on the profits of private providers and restrictions on tendering to avoid certain contracts being 'cherry-picked'](#).

Labour's other key NHS pledges:

- Guarantee a GP appointment within 48 hours and on the same day for those who need it
- Join up services from home to hospital with a single point of contact for those who need it – bringing together physical health, mental health and social care
- Improve access to mental health support, with a new right to talking therapies enshrined in the NHS Constitution.
- Protect NHS from TTIP treaty.

The Conservatives' plan for the NHS

Despite the party's past insistence that the NHS is its priority; the health service is not included in the Conservatives' five pledges for the May election. Nevertheless, the party has promised to fund the NHS to the tune of an extra £8bn if elected – a hasty announcement, which the cynical observer might conclude is principally a reaction to the fact that the [electorate remain deeply distrustful of the Conservatives when it comes to the health service](#).

The extra funds are undoubtedly helpful to a health service struggling to deal with an ageing population, but given the Conservatives are not planning to renege on the reforms proposed in the Health and Social Care Act – [reforms which have been denounced by virtually every health institution in the country](#) – it's questionable whether throwing money at the problem is really the answer. The Conservatives are also not planning to reverse their decision to lift the cap on how much income hospitals are allowed to earn from private patients, or address the role of private companies in commissioning at GP surgeries. Also worrying is the lack of policy detail in the

Conservative manifesto in response to the A&E crisis. [In January of this year, seven A&E departments in London alone were threatened with closure. The walk-in centres and minor injury units set up as an alternative to GP out-of-hours services are also closing, putting further strain on A&E wards. Of the 230 opened under Labour, 53 have shut down in the past three years. In April, A&E waiting times fell to their worst in a decade.](#) A&E departments are not mentioned once in the Conservatives' manifesto.

The Conservatives' other key NHS pledges:

- Ensure you can see a GP and receive the hospital care you need, 7 days a week by 2020, with a guarantee that everyone over 75 will get a same-day appointment if they need one.
- Integrate health and social care, through the Better Care Fund.
- Lead the world in fighting cancer and finding a cure for dementia.
- Improve access to mental health treatments.

The Lib Dem's plan for the NHS

Under a Lib Dem plan the Health and Social Care Act would not be repealed wholesale with only sections that force services out to tender being targeted for reform. They have also pledged an extra £1 billion until 2017/18 on top of the £8 billion pledge to keep up with spending recommended by NHS leaders.

Half of the additional funding will go on mental health treatments including better access to talking therapies and targeted services for children, pregnant women and new mothers. By channelling these extra funds they aim to guarantee treatment for people with

conditions such as depression within 18 weeks.

The Lib Dems' other key NHS pledges

- Ensure that spending on the NHS rises in line with growth in the economy.
- For young patients experiencing psychosis for the first time treatment will be provided within two weeks of being referred by a GP.
- Establish a non-partisan fundamental review of NHS and social care funding to make recommendations about long-term spending.

The Greens' plan for the NHS

The Green's propose an NHS Reinstatement bill that would replace the Health and Social Care Act and abolish competition in the health service. They would also seek to buy out existing PFI contracts, planning to set aside £5 billion over the next 5 years to purchase services where it represents good value. The party also proposes an immediate increase in NHS funding of £12 billion a year, rising to £20 billion a year by 2020. Social care would receive an additional £8 billion a year at first, rising to £9 billion by 2020.

The party's high spending would be financed in part by taxes on alcohol and tobacco, using these revenues to fund an overall real growth increase of 1.2% per annum in the NHS budget. The abolishment of prescription

charges, re-introduction of free eye tests and the guarantee of accessible chiropody services would also be funded with new local community health centres providing services alongside GPs. It is unclear, however, exactly how these ambitious commitments would be funded in full.

The Green's other key NHS pledges

- Ensure that everyone who needs a mental health bed can access one in the local NHS
- Extend VAT to less healthy foods, including sugar, spending the money raised on subsidising around one-third of the cost of fresh fruit and vegetables.

UKIP's plan for the NHS

UKIP has said that they would repeal the Health and Social Care Act however this commitment comes after [recent comments](#) that indicate a level of support for a private insurance-based system within the party.

UKIP plan to fund an increase in frontline NHS spending by £3 billion a year by 2020 which they say would finance the recruitment of 20,000 nurses, 8,000 GPs and 3,000 midwives. UKIP MEP, Julia Reid has argued that these commitments would be funded by withdrawing from the EU, scrapping HS2 and by ending health tourism. The scale of these savings however are hugely overstated, for example the £2 billion figure UKIP hope to save by cracking down on ['health tourism' is unfounded](#).

What has Class published?

Blog: *A Tory NHS is an NHS in crisis*, Tom Riddington, April 2015 (<http://classonline.org.uk/blog/item/Tory-NHS-is-an-NHS-in-crisis>)

Election guide: *What's at stake for the NHS*, March 2015 (<http://classonline.org.uk/pubs/item/election-2015-whats-at-stake-for-the-nhs>)

Policy paper: *Duty to care* - David Price & Allyson Pollock, May 2013 (<http://classonline.org.uk/pubs/item/duty-to-care>)

Policy paper: *In place of fear* - Danny Dorling, May 2013 (<http://classonline.org.uk/pubs/item/in-place-of-fear>)