

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to you, as a group representing primary healthcare services, to congratulate you on your recent appointment as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and to ask for the opportunity to meet with you to offer our joint constructive input to your drive to improve health outcomes.

Our collective experience is that our National Health Service (NHS), and health outcomes generally, have suffered at the hands of recent administrations that have talked much about the importance of properly integrating and funding primary care but not followed through with action.

The National Health Service needs to move to a Neighbourhood Health Service, with more care delivered in local communities to spot problems earlier. To achieve this, we must over time shift resources to primary care and community services. We urge you to provide primary healthcare services with sustainable investment, placing them at the core of our healthcare system to ease the pressure off other areas of the NHS.

High-quality primary healthcare is the foundation of a sustainable and effective healthcare system. Countries with good primary care are shown to have lower health costs. At a time when the NHS is facing immense pressure, primary healthcare services working in tandem with each other can improve health outcomes, whilst easing the burden on hospitals and each other.

Despite increasing demand and repeated official statements on the importance of primary healthcare, the proportion of spending focussed on primary healthcare has continuously fallen. In 2021/22, primary care received just £14.9 billion, whilst acute hospitals received £83.1 billion, the largest proportion. Pharmacists, General Practitioners (GPs) and dentists have all been asked to take on more responsibility without the sustainable funding needed. GPs routinely face unsustainable pressure and unmanageable workloads as they take on more work as a result of hospital waiting lists. Amid rising demand and real-term cuts to funding, practices are being forced to consider cutting back on services. Attempting to ease pressure on GPs, the previous Government launched the Pharmacy First Scheme earlier this year. Whilst pharmacists welcomed the recognition of their role in the primary healthcare system, the lack of sustainable funding has actually meant an increase in their financial and workload pressures. In addition, a 'broken' reimbursement system, medicine supply shortages, and a funding shortfall have left many pharmacists facing debt and the prospect of closure. Dentists are also facing chronic underinvestment and the current NHS Dental contract is not fit for purpose. It has created a system which caps the number of procedures dentists receive payment for annually. This leaves some struggling to cover their operating costs and has led dentists to stop taking on NHS patients. This has put further pressure on our hospitals as patients end up there for teeth extraction due to tooth decay. Optometrists are already providing additional eye care services to cut the 600,000-long ophthalmology waiting list and to reduce pressure on GPs and A&E services. But optometry can do more. Widening the prescribing powers of all optometrists by revising a decades-old 'entry level exemptions' list of medications will enable optometry to create capacity for millions of GP appointments.

As the front door to the NHS, embedded within the communities surrounding our practices, we are best placed to understand and address local healthcare needs. But the system is not set up in a way to secure maximum benefit from our services.

We view your appointment as an unprecedented opportunity for change. With sustainable support we can help realise Labour's mission to build an NHS fit for the future. We hope you are persuaded of the need to ensure that our primary healthcare services are integrated and resourced so that they can play their full part in your mission to improve the health situation.

With the above in mind, we request the opportunity to meet with you so we can more fully explain how we can support your objectives as the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to ensure the NHS can meet the challenges it is facing.

Yours Sincerely,



Professor Aruna Garcea – Chair of the Primary Care Network, NHS Confederation



Dr Leyla Hannbeck – CEO of Independent Pharmacies Association



Dr Eddie Crouch – Chair of the British Dental Association



Carolyn Ruston – Director of Policy Association of Optometrist