

Draft statement of the Left Unity Health Policy Commission

Policies to improve health

Move to minimise social and economic inequality. Every step that reduces inequality can be shown to improve the health of all parts of society. All Left Unity policies should consider their impact on the social determinants of health.

The development of new, and improvement of existing, social factors on health such as improved social housing, access to good education, healthy food, healthy environment, exercise facilities etc.

Healthcare planning and provision should include a focus on the social determinants of health as a means of preventing ill health. This means that resources should be distributed across the country according to the pattern of need.

Defence of the environment to minimise any health impacts.

Healthcare Policies

The NHS is central to healthcare provision. The following policies are vital to defend and improve it:

The Secretary of State for Health should be responsible for all NHS healthcare provision.

Every part of the NHS should be defended as a publicly run, publicly owned system providing free care. Where this is not the case it should be reversed.

Access to health care should be universal and equitable.

Health care should be funded out of taxation (and borrowing where necessary – e.g. as GDP fluctuates annually).

Market forces have no place in state healthcare provision.

Better ways of integrating the provision of healthcare and social care should be investigated and implemented.

Health education ties the health system to the education system and should be developed as a form of co-operation between the two.

Healthcare provision and planning should be based on evidence and outcomes and excellence should be the norm.

Mental health services have been shamefully neglected over decades and need to be expanded and integrated into the broader NHS. Workforce planning and training of staff should be dependent upon the needs of the NHS.

Health care planning and provision should include a focus on workplace health and ensuring that the physical, chemical, biological and psychological risks in all workplaces are aggressively minimised.

A real weakness of the original NHS is that of poor democratic accountability. We need a modern system in which employees, councillors, patients and carers are represented on all appropriate health bodies. This should help to ensure that the NHS has the flexibility to ensure that local and regional needs are catered for.

In accordance with Left Unity policy, members must consider joining Keep Our NHS Public and other relevant bodies. They should also consider involvement in public health bodies like Clinical Commissioning Groups, Healthwatch and Hospital and other Trusts. The purpose being to defend the remains of an integrated service and resist commodification and especially privatisation at every opportunity.

As a long-term goal, we need to work towards a single integrated NHS. An integrated NHS would eliminate the so-called purchaser/provider split. This is a costly way to create an internal market. It sets parts of the NHS against each other to no good purpose and costs up to 14% of the entire NHS budget annually just to maintain.

A genuine NHS could control the behaviour of the drug companies. This would mean ensuring that fair prices are paid for drugs. It would also mean that the excessive use of drugs would be ended. Once drug companies cannot promote their products directly to doctors the unnecessary reliance on pharmaceuticals can be ended. A unitary NHS would be in a powerful position to deal with global businesses. The possibility of pharmaceutical production within the NHS must be considered.

Health research is essential and the intense competition for funds should be scaled back. The money saved on sterile bidding for funding could be used to expand the total amount of research. Research has to be encouraged at all levels of provision and aimed where the NHS requires it. This goes from work on genetics to the study of the daily practice of GPs and community health workers.

Immediate Demands for discussion at Policy Conference:

The 10 point plan to re-instate, protect, and improve the NHS:

1. Repeal the Health and Social Care Act to restore the NHS as a publicly delivered, publicly funded and publicly accountable healthcare system, and re-establish the position of the Health Secretary as fully accountable for providing comprehensive health care. The most practical solution is to back Lord Owen's NHS re-instatement bill, which we fully support. (<http://www.opendemocracy.net/ournhs/david-owen/nhs-reinstatement-bill-and-explanatory-notes-updated>)
2. Re-instate the NHS as the preferred provider of healthcare. This will protect the NHS as a public service by minimising private sector takeover of NHS services
3. Abolish the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renegotiate and buy out contracts at realistic value.

Any publicly owned banks must cancel PFI contracts before re-privatisation. Stop and reverse the outsourcing of clinical and support services related to PFI projects.

4. Moratorium on A+E and hospital closures. Any reconfigurations must be clinically, not financially driven, and must show they have won public and professional support for alternative, improved services.

5. Reduce the Department of Health's reliance on expensive external management consultants who have too much influence on health policy. Instead the DH should re-engage with the representative bodies of frontline NHS professionals, as well as patient groups, to develop and plan future NHS policy in the most clinically effective and sustainable manner
6. Ensure evidenced-based adequate staff to patient ratios and bed numbers in order to maintain safe, effective, and high quality patient care.
7. Improve accountability and transparency of the NHS by empowering community health bodies and combining them with external peer review of hospitals and GP practices. Reviewing and strengthening the NHS complaints process and improving the ease of access, and protection for whistle blowers will also contribute to patient trust and confidence.
8. Use the purchasing power (monopoly status) of the NHS to improve NHS procurement practices in order to reduce costs of drugs, medical devices and general supplies.
9. Strongly focus on dealing with the social determinants of health, such as poverty, income inequalities, unemployment, poor housing, social exclusion, lack of child care etc. Prioritise public health and social care.
10. Exempt the NHS from the EU/US Free Trade Agreement, which otherwise threatens to open up our healthcare system to irreversible privatisation