

## Royal College of General Practitioners submission to the 2024 Spring Budget

General practice is the cornerstone of the NHS, but it is at crisis point. GPs want to deliver high-quality care but the pressures they are currently facing are making this extremely challenging.

General practice has proven to be one of the most financially efficient parts of the NHS. GPs in England have just had the busiest November on record, with more than 31m appointments delivered – a 30% increase on 2019, yet with 646 fewer fully qualified, full-time equivalent GPs.<sup>i ii iii</sup>

The average number of patients per GP in England is now 2,290, meaning each GP is on average responsible for 147 more patients than in December 2019.<sup>iv</sup>

A recent Department of Health and Social Care response to a Parliamentary question has shown that despite commitments in the NHS Long Term Plan to move the NHS away from acute care into the community, in 2023/24 the proportion of NHS England, Clinical Commissioning Groups and Integrated Care Boards spending on primary medical care is budgeted to fall to 8.4% - a smaller share than in any of the previous eight years.<sup>v</sup>

This is despite evidence showing that for every £1 invested primary care, at least £14 is delivered in productivity across the community.<sup>vi</sup>

A falling share of funding is having particular impacts on health inequalities with practices in areas with the poorest communities have on average 14.4% more patients per fully qualified GP than practices in wealthy areas, and they receive 7% less funding to cope with the additional needs of their local populations.

### NHS England Long Term Workforce Plan

The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan (LTWP) commits to a significant expansion of general practice. The plan estimates that we need 12,000 more GPs by 2031/32 including 5,000 by 2027, and sets out plans for how to achieve this.<sup>vii</sup>

This is a significant commitment, with the Government estimating that training a doctor costs the Treasury around £327,000.<sup>viii</sup>

The LTWP is not ambitious enough on retention for GPs, predicting that only between 0 and 700 GPs will be retained by 2031/32. Data shows that one in five GPs under 30 left the profession last year.<sup>ix</sup> It is vital that increasing investment in training isn't wasted with high rates of GPs leaving early.

A review by NHSE has found that retention schemes can be very effective with 79% of GPs who had been on a retention scheme saying it supported them to remain as a GP.<sup>x</sup>

If, as is being reported, responsibility for retention schemes is going to be devolved to ICS level, then it is critical that the relevant resources are ring-fenced to ensure

appropriate provision in all areas. It is deeply concerning to see reports that several primary care budgets, including the New to Partnership scheme, have been included in the list of programme budgets which ICBs have been directed re-prioritise in order to balance budgets for 23/24.

### **Primary Care Infrastructure**

The LTWP makes it clear that growth of the GP workforce can only be achieved by significantly investing in general practice buildings, but says capital is outside scope of the plan.

There is also currently no clear plan to ensure there is room for the wider Multi Disciplinary Teams within general practice buildings or a plan on how to achieve better care by co-locating community and GP teams.

In our survey:

- 73% of general practice staff said their practice has little or no capacity to increase training places without additional funding.
- 40% of general practice staff consider their premises unsuitable for their intended purpose, and nearly 75% of those who requested funding for premises upgrades in the past year were unsuccessful in securing it.<sup>xi</sup>

### **The Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS)**

ARRS is an NHS scheme which funds Primary Care Networks (PCNs) to utilise funding to support recruitment across reimbursable roles.

The current rules for ARRS funding are causing inefficiencies as they are not flexible enough to respond to locality needs for healthcare staff. In particular, the rules around ARRS do not let PCNs to hire GPs or practice nurses.

We need Treasury support to introduce a system with more flexibility to hire salaried GPs and practice nurses using ARRS funding.

### **Acute Respiratory Hubs**

It is vital that the NHS shows innovation to work more effectively and one example of this in recent years are the Acute Respiratory Hubs (ARI). ARI hubs provide suspected ARI patients with urgent, same-day appointments. They provide face-to-face assessment by an appropriate clinician in a non-hospital setting, with access to appropriate rapid diagnostics and treatments.

A review of the impact of ARI hubs last winter was carried out by NHSE. They found that ARI hubs delivered over 729,000 appointments at a cost of £48 each, compared to the average cost of £358 per ARI A&E attendance.<sup>xii</sup>

Where they were implemented, it was found that they prevented 360,000 extra A&E admissions and 360,000 GP appointments, saving the NHS over £4 for every £1 spent.

The 2023/24 NHSE winter plan listed them as one of their "10 priority interventions" but we are hearing that the number of ARI hubs has fallen by around 40%, despite the evidence of their cost effectiveness and increased patient care.

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<sup>i</sup> NHS Digital, "[General Practice Workforce, 30 November 2023](#)", January 2024. [Online] [Accessed 04/01/2024]

<sup>ii</sup> NHS Digital, "[Appointments in General Practice, November 2023](#)", January 2024. [Online]. Available [Accessed 04/01/2024].

<sup>iii</sup> NHS Digital, "[Appointments in General Practice, May 2022](#)", June 2022. [Online]. Available [Accessed 30/03/2023]

<sup>iv</sup> NHS Digital, "[General Practice Workforce, 30 November 2023](#)", January 2024. [Online]. Available [Accessed 04/01/2024]

<sup>v</sup> <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-11-17/2419>

<sup>vi</sup> NHS Cofed report: Creating better health value: understanding the economic impact of NHS spending by care setting, Michael Wood, Bridget Gorham, 23 August 2023

<sup>vii</sup> NHS Long Term Workforce Plan Document first published:30 June 2023

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-long-term-workforce-plan/>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-04-24/hl7405>

<sup>ix</sup> NHS Digital General Practice Workforce, 31 March 2023

<sup>x</sup> Unpublished review by NHSE

<sup>xi</sup> Full details from RCGP survey available on request

<sup>xii</sup> Unpublished evaluation by NHSE