

# RCGP Briefing: Increasing the number of GP appointments.

*Health and Social Care Oral Questions: 25th of April 2023*

## General Practice and the NHS

General Practice is the cornerstone of the NHS, helping around 50 million people in England every year, carrying out 339.5 million appointments in 2022.

GPs and their teams work tirelessly to deliver safe, timely and appropriate care, and to give patients the choice of appointment they want. **Around 85% of appointments in general practice are already happening within two weeks of being booked, and almost half are delivered on the day they are booked** - and those taking longer than two weeks after booking may be routine or regular appointments for which the timing is therefore appropriate.

GPs share their patients' frustration when they struggle to access our care. But this is not down to GPs and their hard-working teams, it is due to decades of under-funding and poor resource planning. GPs are delivering more appointments overall compared to before the pandemic, but in the face of surging demand and dwindling GP numbers – **there are now 852 fewer full-time fully qualified GPs compared to 2019.**

The RCGP are calling on politicians and decision makers with responsibility for the NHS in England to urgently commit to a bold new plan to provide GPs and patients with the support that they need.

## Key statistics

- General practice is at breaking point and workforce and workload challenges are forcing many out of the profession early creating an ever-worsening crisis, **42% say that they are planning to quit the profession in the next five years.**
- Years of under-investment in general practice means there is a chronic shortage of GPs and other members of the practice team, **the number of patients per GP is 2286 as of February 2023, this is an increase of 6.8% since 2019.**
- This workload increase is unsafe for GPs and their patients, **68% of GPs say they do not have enough time in appointments to adequately assess and treat patients.**
- We simply do not have enough GPs to safely meet the needs of the population. **As of February 2023, there are 27,277 fully qualified full-time equivalent GPs, 7.1% less than in 2015.**

## The future of general practice

It is not too late to turn this dire situation around to revitalise general practice as a clinician's career of choice, and restore continuity of care for patients.

The forthcoming primary care recovery plan and long-awaited NHS workforce plan will be key opportunities to do this. We hope these plans will contain the necessary resources needed to ensure GPs can deliver the high-quality, complex care they are dedicated to.

As outlined in our campaign - [Fit for the future: a new plan for GPs and their patients](#) - the RCGP are calling for:

- A new recruitment and retention strategy that allows us to go beyond the target of 6000 more GPs, backed by a £150 million annual GP retention fund, increasing the number of GP training places by at least 10% year on year, and changes to the current visa rules to make it easier for international GP trainees to stay and work in the UK.
- An NHS wide campaign to free up GPs to spend more time with patients by cutting unnecessary workload and bureaucracy, including through a review of contractual requirements and improving coordination between primary and secondary care.
- Improving patients' experience of accessing care by investing in a new suite of IT products and support for practices, making it easier for patients to choose to see the same GP or the next available member of the team.
- Allocate a bigger share of the NHS budget to general practice to return funding to 11% of total health spend - with £1 billion additional investment in GP premises, more funding for practices serving deprived communities, and extra money for primary care networks to provide preventative care and promote population health.