

Westminster Hall Debate: GP funding in rural areas

4.00pm - 4.30pm Wednesday 11 February 2026

General practice is the bedrock of the NHS, making up the vast majority of patient contacts and in doing so alleviating pressures across the entire health service. In 2025, general practice teams in England delivered around 388 million appointments, providing increasingly complex care, yet doing so with fewer fully qualified, full time GPs than ten years ago.

The impact of this growing pressure is clear with [polling](#) consistently showing that the public's number one priority for the NHS is improving access to general practice. GPs can't carry on doing more with less - without substantial investment in our service, and initiatives to recruit and retain more GPs, some patients will continue to struggle to access our care.

This widening gap between demand and capacity is undermining access, continuity of care and patient safety, while contributing to unmanageable workloads and declining morale. **The proportion of funding allocated to general practice remains low and more action is needed to deliver the sustained funding shift necessary to underpin the provision of more care in the community.**

Key asks:

- We want the Government to replicate the successful Mental Health Investment Standard to ensure resources continue to increase for general practice. This would require the Secretary of State to report annually to Parliament on the proportion of NHS spending in general practice and primary care. Similarly, each Integrated Care Board (ICB) would be required to report this proportion annually and be held to account for ensuring this increases year on year.
- The upcoming 10 Year Workforce Plan needs to set out a clear plan of how many GPs we need, and the steps required to train, recruit and retain them, and must address the need to support GPs to move to underserved or hard-to-recruit areas through the reintroduction of a targeted enhanced recruitment scheme or similar.

General Practice: Investment

- General practice is also one of the most cost-effective parts of the NHS with the 2024 Darzi review, describing general practice as demonstrating the "best financial discipline in the NHS family"¹.
- Investing in primary care leads to better health outcomes and delivers value for money to the NHS, the economy and society as a whole. For every additional £1 invested in primary care, research has shown that at least £14 is delivered in productivity across the local community².
- Although more than 90% of a patient's direct experience of the NHS being through primary care and GP practices, currently less than 10% of the NHS budget in England is spent on primary care and core funding for general practice has fallen as a share of NHS funding.³
- Despite multi-government intention to shift patient care out of hospitals and into the community, there has not been a sufficiently sustained and substantial transfer of funding to general practice. According to the BMA, the core GP contract in 2024/25 accounted for only 6% of the NHS budget (excluding PCN DES).⁴

¹ Lord Darzi: Independent investigation of the NHS in England (2024)

² NHS Confederation (2023), Creating Better Health Value: Understanding the economic impact on NHS spending by care setting.

³ Department of Health and Social Care (2022), GP practice data available for first time - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁴ British Medical Association (2024), General practice must be funded without cuts to hospital resources, says BMA.

- Our 2025 Practice Manager Survey revealed that although 61% of practice managers say they need to expand the GP workforce to meet their patient's needs, 92% say that the lack of funding in general practice is preventing them from hiring the number of GPs they need⁵.
- **Our ask:** To ensure resources continue to increase for general practice, the Government should replicate the successful Mental Health Investment Standard. This new standard would require the Secretary of State to report annually to Parliament on the proportion of NHS spending in general practice and primary care, as is currently required for mental health spending. Similarly, each ICB would be required to report this proportion annually and held to account for ensuring this increases year on year.

General Practice: Workforce

- Workforce shortages are often greater in rural, coastal, and socioeconomically deprived areas of the UK, compounding the fact that GPs across the board are overburdened, with many considering leaving the profession. The evidence emphasises the urgent need for increased support to expand recruitment and retention programmes for new and experienced GPs, especially in under-doctored and socioeconomically deprived areas.
- The average FTE fully qualified GP now cares for more than 2,300 patients, 16% more patients than 2015, and in deprived communities this figure is significantly higher. These conditions are increasingly unsafe: **73% of GPs responding to our 2025 GP Voice survey reported that excessive workload is compromising patient safety**⁶.
- According to the NAO's analysis, the current Long Term Workforce Plan only aims to increase the number of fully qualified GPs by 4% between 2021 and 2036, compared to a 49% growth in hospital consultants.⁷ While the plan recognises the need to increase the number of GP trainees (GP registrars), the plan is noticeably weak on retention, only planning to retain an extra 0-700 extra GPs by 2036/37.⁸
- We welcome the commitment to publish a new 10 Year Workforce Plan with a stronger focus on shifting care into the community and addressing weaknesses in previous modelling. It is important that all the assumptions and modelling are published alongside the plan such as projected demand, productivity, skill mix and anticipated impact of service redesign.
- **Our ask:** The 10 Year Workforce Plan must address the need to support GPs to move to underserved or hard-to-recruit areas through the reintroduction of a targeted enhanced recruitment scheme or similar.

⁵ An online survey of UK practice managers, Fieldwork period: 16 June – 7 July 2025

⁶ Royal College of General Practitioners (2025), GP Voice Survey 2025

⁷ National Audit Office (2024), NHS England's Modelling for the Long Term Workforce Plan.

⁸ National Audit Office (2024), NHS England's Modelling for the Long Term Workforce Plan.