

Fair Pay for NHS Staff

Introduction:

The National Health Service (NHS) is the backbone of the UK's healthcare system, providing vital care to millions of people. However, the NHS is currently facing a staffing crisis, with high vacancy rates and a workforce that feels undervalued and overstretched. Fair pay for NHS staff is crucial to address these challenges, ensure safe staffing levels, and provide high-quality patient care. This document outlines the need for action, key calls to action, and the projected policy impacts of implementing a fair pay strategy for NHS staff.

The Need for Action:

1. NHS staff vacancies remain high at 121,070 in England alone, putting patient care at risk. (UK data)
2. Public sector wage growth lags behind the private sector, with NHS pay falling in real terms. (UK data)
3. Cost of living increases have eroded recent pay raises, hitting lowest-paid staff hardest. (UK evidence)
4. 44.8% of NHS staff reported feeling unwell due to work-related stress in 2022. (UK data)
5. The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan relies on ambitious assumptions around productivity, retention, and recruitment, but lacks a serious pay strategy. (UK projection)

Call to Action:

1. Implement an above-inflation pay rise for all NHS staff in 2024/25 as a first step to address real-terms pay decline.
2. Allocate specific funding to unblock pay barriers to career progression within Agenda for Change.
3. Commit to a clear timeline for restoring NHS pay to competitive levels, valuing staff as skilled professionals.
4. Develop a comprehensive, fully funded pay strategy to underpin the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan.
5. Reject divisive proposals for a separate pay spine for nurses; instead, improve Agenda for Change to benefit all staff equitably.

Projected Policy Impacts:

1. Improved staff retention and reduced vacancies, ensuring safe staffing levels and quality patient care.
2. Every £1 invested in the NHS workforce generates £4 in wider economic benefits. (UK evidence: The Health Foundation, 2019)

3. Enhanced staff morale, productivity, and wellbeing, enabling the NHS to meet rising demand.
4. The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan projects a need for up to 360,000 additional staff by 2036/37. (UK data)
5. Increased ability to attract and retain skilled professionals in a competitive labour market, securing the NHS workforce for the future.

Conclusion:

Fair pay for NHS staff is not just a matter of economic necessity; it is a moral imperative. The dedicated professionals who work tirelessly to care for the nation's health deserve to be valued and compensated fairly for their skills and commitment. By implementing an above-inflation pay rise, unblocking career progression barriers, and developing a comprehensive pay strategy, the government can address the staffing crisis, improve patient care, and secure the future of the NHS.

The British Dietetic Association urges the government to take decisive action on NHS pay. We call on policymakers to work with unions, professional bodies, and NHS employers to develop a fair and sustainable pay framework that recognises the value of all NHS staff. By investing in the workforce, we can build an NHS that is resilient, responsive, and equipped to meet the healthcare challenges of the 21st century.

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