

David Cameron has today launched the first chapter of the draft Conservative Party election manifesto. The chapter is called "Our Reform Plan for the NHS" and is designed to position the Conservatives as "the party of the NHS" and reaffirm David Cameron's previous commitments to the NHS as a key priority.

The draft health document criticises a decade of "top-down, bureaucratic mismanagement" under the Labour party. The Conservatives claim that this has undermined the professionalism and motivation of NHS staff, diverting NHS priorities away from patient care. In his speech this morning, Cameron stated that the gap in health outcomes between the UK and the rest of Europe had widened, despite the massive increase in spending. The Conservatives describe their reform plan as a strategy based on decentralisation, accountability and transparency.

There are no major new pledges in the document, rather it brings together a number of the pledges that the Conservatives have made in recent months about their approach to reforming the health service.

As part of the pledge for a patient-centred NHS, the Conservatives promise to scrap all of the politically-motivated process targets and to ensure that NHS providers become autonomous Foundation Trusts. They are proposing an "information revolution" in the NHS, whereby detailed data about the performance of trusts, hospitals, GPs, doctors and other staff will be available online. Patients will have greater power to choose their healthcare providers, as well as having online access to their own health records. In addition, GPs will have the right to hold patients' budgets and commission care on their behalf. The Conservatives claim that their efforts to remove the need for expensive layers of bureaucracy will cut the cost of administration by a third.

In a direct challenge to Andy Burnham's "preferred provider" policy, the draft manifesto asserts that the Conservatives will open up the NHS to include new independent and voluntary sector providers. The document states: "If they can deliver a service that patients want, to a high standard and within the NHS tariff, then they should be allowed to do so."

In a drive to make the NHS more accessible and more accountable, the Conservatives reiterate their plans to abolish mixed-sex accommodation and increase the number of single rooms in hospitals. They pledge to reform the way pharmaceutical companies are paid for NHS medicines so that any cost-effective treatment can be made available through the NHS. In his speech today, Cameron also elaborated on the plan to introduce local 'maternity networks' to ensure that mothers can easily access care.

In relation to mental health, the manifesto outlines plans to remove the rules preventing welfare-to-work providers and employers purchasing services from Mental Health Trusts.

There is a repeat of the intention to rename the Department of Health the Department of Public Health. As part of the notion of "improving the nation's public health", the Conservatives aim to tackle health inequalities through a new health premium. This will weight public health funding so that extra resources go to the poorest areas with the worst health outcomes.

The full manifesto can be found [here](#).