

Patients Association Statement: NHS and Social Care System Failing Most Vulnerable

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London, 25th October 2024: Today's Care Quality Commission (CQC) State of Care report reveals a healthcare system failing on multiple fronts, with deepening inequalities, critical safety concerns, and unacceptable waiting times across all services. From maternity care to mental health, from GP access to hospital discharges, the evidence shows a system that is increasingly unable to meet even basic care needs. Most worryingly, it is society's most vulnerable who are bearing the brunt of these systemic failures, as health inequalities continue to detrimentally impact patients:

- Children in the most deprived areas are twice as likely to experience tooth decay
- People in most deprived areas are three times more likely to need emergency hospital treatment
- Rural communities face the longest GP waiting times
- Black people are over three and a half times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act
- Almost half of maternity units inspected were rated as 'requires improvement' (36%) or 'inadequate' (12%)
- People with learning disabilities are being failed, with only a quarter recorded on the learning disability register
- Autism assessment waiting times have reached nearly a year (328 days) instead of the recommended 3 months.

These aren't just statistics – they represent real suffering that could be prevented. While NHS reform is crucial, health inequalities are rooted in poverty, housing, education, and employment.

The crisis extends across all healthcare settings:

- Diagnostic waiting lists have increased by 52% since 2019, with 1.62 million people now waiting
- Cancer waiting time standards are consistently being missed
- Mental health patients are waiting "several months – and in some cases several years" for treatment
- Social care delays are leaving 4,000 people stranded in hospital each day.

We're calling on the government to launch an urgent cross-department action plan that:

- Tackles poverty and its impact on health
- Addresses the rural-urban healthcare divide
- Ensures equal access to dental care for all children
- Confronts discrimination and racism in health services
- Provides proper support for all carers, particularly those from ethnic minority communities.

We need joined-up action across government departments now, before these inequalities become even more deeply embedded in our society.

-Ends-

Notes to editors

About the Patients Association

The Patients Association is an independent patient charity campaigning for improvements in health and social care for patients. We believe patients should be actively involved in decisions made about their care and in the design of the health and care system. As an independent charity campaigning for improvements in health and social care, we believe improvements can only be achieved if the system works in partnership with patients. Through our helpline and information services we provide information to thousands of people each year about the health and social care system, enabling them to advocate for themselves.

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