



Rt Hon Theresa May MP, The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
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15 July 2016

Dear Prime Minister,

CONGRATULATIONS AND AN OFFER OF HELP

Congratulations on becoming the new Prime Minister, we look forward to working with you.

National Voices is the national coalition of health and care charities. We champion a stronger voice for patients, carers and citizens in health, and the vital role of the voluntary and community sector. We are a strategic partner of the Department of Health.

I want to draw your attention to some key issues affecting the health and wellbeing of the population, and to offer our help.

The country faces serious long term population health challenges including obesity, the growing prevalence of chronic health conditions, mental ill-health and huge inequalities. The demands on health and care services are rising, and will continue to rise.

The Government already has a shared departmental plan with the NHS, aligned to the Five Year Forward View, that has the potential to meet these challenges and ensure the sustainability of health and care services. That plan is in jeopardy.

The NHS cannot do it on its own

The NHS received additional funding in the last spending review, but the NHS cannot meet the health and wellbeing challenges on its own.

Social care is now at a tipping point, and the initiative to use council tax precepts to prop it up has been shown to be inadequate. The public health system is equally underfunded for the task of addressing population health and promoting better health. Without investment in both social care and public health, the NHS will face avoidable and costly additional demand it will not be able to meet.

The national budgeting process needs to be re-set as early as the coming Autumn Statement. Revised funding should reflect the need for adequate resourcing of all sectors of the health and care system (including the voluntary and community sector) to meet demand, fund preventive work, transform services, support population wellbeing and achieve sustainability.

Better health education

We look forward to the upcoming publication of the Childhood Obesity Strategy. Schools can be a key place to entrench health education for the lifetime of the child, but school health work is being restricted rather than expanded. We need a new approach to embedding health education for children through their school years, as a key building block for health promotion, prevention and better mental health.

Mental health impacts physical health and productivity

Despite recent initiatives, people's mental health needs are much less likely to be met than their physical needs, and the two types of service are not joined up. This has implications for wellbeing, for physical health, and for our economic productivity.

Engaging people and supporting the voluntary sector

Plans for sustainable health and care in the future are predicated on working in new ways with families, carers and communities. People and their families need to be better supported to manage their own health, and services should be integrated and coordinated around the person, rather than organisational priorities. The voluntary, community and social enterprise sector is an essential enabler of these approaches, but has lost significant funding and cannot play its part without greater access to resources.

Tackle inequalities

In your leadership speech on 11 July, you referred to the inequalities in our society. As the Marmot review comprehensively demonstrated, tackling inequalities is a prerequisite for improving the health and wellbeing of the nation. In order to reduce health inequalities, we need a new drive to improve the health and wellbeing of those with the poorest health, and a broader strategy for greater community cohesion and resilience.

Mitigate the negative impacts of Brexit

The health and care system may suffer further pressures and risks as the UK prepares to withdraw from the European Union. In particular, we are concerned about the impact on EU nationals working in health and care now and in the future, and the likely reduction in research and innovation funding. We urge you to ensure that in the Brexit processes, all efforts are taken to mitigate these risks.

National Voices and its members will continue to offer our support, advice and services to the Government, helping to ensure that the voices of patients, carers, citizens and voluntary organisations are brought into the development and implementation of policy.

With best wishes



Jeremy Taylor
Chief Executive