

The 10 Year Health Plan for England: the RCP's thoughts and response

The UK government's 10 Year Health Plan for England was published in July 2025. While the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) welcomes the creation of a long-term strategy for health in England – and many of the commitments – we have also called for further investment in workforce, education and infrastructure to help deliver the plan. .

Responding to the plan, RCP president Professor Mumtaz Patel said: 'it's good to read the UK government's vision for the NHS over the next decade. We have been pleased to see commitments to a number of RCP campaign calls.'

A number of key areas long championed by the RCP were acknowledged with a commitment to change – but we have since called for more detail and clear timelines on how the government will deliver their plans.

The next generation of physicians

The plan promises to improve medical training and support resident doctors, expand training posts, tackle competition ratios and bottlenecks in specialty training, focus on career progression and increase educator and supervisor capacity.

Dr Anthony Martinelli and Dr Catherine Rowan, co-chairs of the RCP's Resident Doctor Committee, have strongly welcomed the explicit recognition of the challenges and uncertainties that NHS resident doctors face.

They also praised the proposal to expand specialty training places and commitments to update curricula to include AI and digital health.

However, they emphasised that this should only be the beginning: 'In the RCP's recent survey of over 1,000 resident doctors, respondents across the UK told us that postgraduate training is outdated and unsustainable. The review of postgraduate training must be bold to deliver training fit for the future. This is about patient safety. This plan identifies many of the right themes that are facing the future of medicine, but detail will be key. We will push for that detail and radical reform of training.'

The next generation of physicians

The RCP has also been calling for a shift towards community-based care, and the commitments set out in the 10 Year Health Plan for England reflects these. The

suggested redesigning of outpatient services reflects our *Prescription for outpatients: reimagining planned specialist care* and our recent toolkit *Time to focus on the blue dots*.

As Dr John Dean, former RCP clinical vice president, explained: 'we welcome the introduction of neighbourhood health centres across every community in England. But this shift must not be seen as simply about buildings – it's about how clinicians and patients work together across traditional boundaries to deliver joined-up, person-centred care. Specialists have a vital role to play in neighbourhood health, and we must ensure that they are supported to work across settings as part of integrated teams.'

Innovation, research and technology

Professor Tom Solomon, RCP academic vice president, said that he was delighted to see the plan's sections on clinical research, which aim to make research, development and innovation part of everyday clinical work. The RCP's *Making the case for research resource kit* sets out our vision in this area, and was reflected in the 10 Year Health Plan.

Tom highlighted the commitment to reversing the decline in clinical academic roles – but called for it to go beyond just funding, and to address systemic barriers that disincentivise clinical research.

He said: 'we particularly welcome the introduction of joint clinical research and innovation fellowships with industry, which can accelerate the development of new treatments and technologies. We need to see detail, but the creation of a Health Data Research Service, in partnership with the Wellcome Trust, is another promising step that could help position the UK as a global leader in health data science. We also look forward to seeing more detail on the proposed regulatory framework for AI and the plan to ensure that all NHS staff are AI-trained – both of which will be critical to delivering safe, effective and future-ready care.'

The RCP's digital health clinical lead, Dr Anne Kinderlerer, also highlighted the shift from analogue to digital in the plan, saying that 'digital transformation is a key enabler of more efficient, responsive services for both patients and staff'. She expanded, saying 'digital tools must be co-designed with clinicians and patients, and existing systems optimised to reduce burden and improve care. We welcome the investment in infrastructure and

standardisation, which will be critical to delivering a truly connected and inclusive digital NHS.

‘It’s also vital that staff are supported through this transformation. Reforming curricula to include training in AI and digital tools is a welcome move, but we must go further to ensure that all staff have the skills, confidence and support they need to thrive in a digitally enabled health service.’

Obesity and smoking

The NHS 10 Year Health Plan recognises that obesity treatments and ending tobacco dependence are vital parts of population health. Responding to the government’s commitment to implementing opt-out tobacco dependence treatment across all routine hospital care, Professor Sanjay Agrawal, RCP special adviser on tobacco, explained that ‘smoking remains the leading cause of preventable illness and death in the UK, and this is a vital step toward embedding effective support into everyday NHS care.’

Dr Kath McCullough, RCP special adviser on obesity, added: ‘The new mandatory healthy food standards, as well as updated nutrient profiles, have great potential to be a leap forward. This kind of prevention-first thinking is exactly what we need from the government if it is going to deliver the overarching sickness to prevention shift set out in the plan.’

What is missing?

Despite the positive commitments, the RCP has called for more delivery detail and specifics, as well as clear

timelines, with president Professor Mumtaz Patel warning that ‘it will be a real challenge to translate this ambition into reality without a detailed delivery plan.’

‘We look forward to seeing the reports of the Leng Review, 10 Year Workforce Plan and postgraduate medical training review in the coming weeks to better understand the detail of the government’s plans to ensure that the NHS has the staff it needs.’

The RCP has also called for an NHS AI in healthcare strategy, the measures in the Tobacco and Vapes Bill and a commitment to restrict junk food advertising to children.

While we have welcomed action on obesity and tobacco, we are also calling for further action to tackle the social determinants of health – including calling for a cross-government strategy to tackle health inequalities.

On workforce, Mumtaz noted that ‘the suggestion that staff numbers in 2035 will be lower than those projected in the 2023 Long Term Workforce Plan is concerning. We know that we don’t have enough staff currently to meet demand – AI and tech alone won’t solve the problem of capacity.’

‘Delivering this vision will only be possible with a medical workforce that is adequately resourced to meet demand, feels supported, valued and is equipped for the future.’

This feature was produced for the August 2025 edition of *Commentary*, the RCP’s membership magazine. You can read a web-based version, which includes images.

