

RCGP Briefing: Autumn Budget Debate 2024

What does the Budget mean for General Practice

National Insurance employer contribution increase

- Although the Budget set out a cash-injection into the NHS to help stabilise services, the College has serious concerns regarding the impact of the increase in National Insurance employer contributions on general practice.
- While the public sector and the rest of the NHS have been protected from this tax rise, general practice has not received the same assurance. We are concerned about the potential impact on practices that already face significant budget constraints and staffing challenges due to chronic underfunding.
- We are calling on the Government to urgently clarify this issue and ensure practices will receive the necessary funding to cover these additional costs.

Infrastructure

- With 33% of our members working out of practice buildings that are inadequate for providing care, we welcome the Government's promise of more funding for the NHS estate, including a dedicated fund to improve 200 GP practices. However, this equates to just 3% of the GP estate. Equally as crucial is the need for more GPs to work in these practices, ensuring that people are in place to care for patients on the frontline.
- The upcoming Spending Review must set out much more detail on how GPs and their teams will be supported to deliver the Government's plans to shift resources into the community, and bring around lasting change for the NHS. There needs to be a clear financial plan to achieve the Government's commitment to transfer more care from hospitals to the community setting out year by year estimates that can be measured and tracked.

Points to raise during the Budget debate

- With GP practices already under immense financial pressure, can the Minister confirm that the extra costs that practices will now face because of increases to employer national insurance will be reflected when setting the 2025/26 GP contract?
- Can Ministers confirm that the upcoming Spending Review will include a clear financial plan to start shifting spending to primary care, and to increase the overall percentage of departmental spending on general practice that they promised in their manifesto?
- Can Ministers outline more details of the £100 million dedicated fund to deliver around 200 upgrades to GP surgeries across England intended to support improved use of existing buildings and space, boosting productivity and enable practices to deliver more patient appointments?
- Does the Minister agree that the current lack of action to retain GPs in the workforce makes no sense for the NHS or for the taxpayer, and that the Government must invest in the health of the nation by developing a National GP Retention Strategy, backed by ring-fenced funding?
- Can Ministers outline how the Government will meet its promise to move more care into the community, without putting the necessary further funding in place to provide adequate GP infrastructure, beyond helping 200 practices out of the 6,256 in England?

If you have any questions, please contact Alaw.Davies@rcgp.org.uk

Key stats to raise during the Budget debate

- **Funding:** It's clear that general practice and primary care services are the bedrock of the healthcare system, with a majority patient interactions taking place in primary care. But general practice currently receives less than 10% of overall NHS funding.
- **Demand:** Demand for general practice services is currently outstripping supply. General practice delivered 14% more appointments in 2023 compared to 2019, but as of September 2024, NHS England has the equivalent of 1,557 fewer FTE GPs than it did in September 2015.
- **Ratios:** The increase in patient need paired with a decline in GP numbers means that each GP is now responsible for 6.3% more patients on average than in 2019.
- **Workloads:** GPs are feeling the pressure like never before and are reporting dangerously high levels of workload. 77% of GPs have said that excessive workload has impacted patient safety.
- **Unnecessary bureaucracy:** GPs estimate they spend a third of their time on unnecessary workload and bureaucracy, rather than spending time with their patients.
- **Workforce crisis:** Unsustainable levels of work forcing GPs to leave the profession, with 48% of GPs reporting struggling with their workload pressure, and 60% of GPs experiencing a decline in their mental health over the past year. This added strain accelerates burnout, further exacerbating the workforce crisis with 42% of considering leaving the profession within the next five years.
- **Infrastructure:** General practice infrastructure is also falling apart. 30% of GPs report that their work PC or laptop software is not fit for purpose, 33% say their practice building is inadequate for providing care for patients.