

A 'whole-of-government approach' needed to tackle causes of ill health and reduce NHS demand, finds new report

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New research from the [NHS Confederation](#) – the membership body for the UK’s healthcare system – explores how the new government can tackle economic inactivity driven by long-term sickness.

NHS Confederation has partnered with the [Boston Consulting Group](#) to set out actions needed to introduce a ‘whole-of-government’ approach to health, focusing to begin with on addressing the challenge of economic inactivity driven by long-term sickness.

Since 2020, economic inactivity in the UK has risen by 900,000, with 85% of this due to those who are long-term sick. The UK is an outlier among its peers over this period.

In the report, [“Improving our Nation’s Health: A Whole-of-Government Approach to Tackling the Causes of Long-Term Sickness and Economic Inactivity”](#), the analysis shows that reintegrating between half and three-quarters of people who have dropped out of the workforce for reasons of ill health since 2020 could deliver an estimated £109-177 billion boost to the UK’s GDP (2-3 per cent in 2029) and unlock £35-57 billion in fiscal revenue over the next five years.

The causes of ill health and labour inactivity are multi-faceted, which is why the NHS Confederation working with BCG is keen for the new administration to break down the departmental silos that have held back the collaboration that is needed and why we believe that the Prime Minister’s promised Mission Board for Health should be central to driving forward this ambition, including with a new Health Improvement Strategy.

Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, said: “The UK faces a series of enormous health challenges as seen in the sharp rise in the number of people out of the workforce due to long-term sickness.

“This spike has defied European trends and requires both additional investment in the NHS alongside coordinated and sustained action across government departments focused on building the nation’s health.

“There is broad consensus that the NHS requires major transformation to respond to the changing needs of its patients, to be financially sustainable and to achieve better outcomes. However, this cannot be realised that without more money and without tackling what is contributing to such high levels of demand today.

“No single part of government can solve this alone. Our report with the Boston Consulting Group offers a blueprint for how a ‘whole of government’ approach can be taken forward, chiefly through the Prime Minister’s Mission Boards for Health and for Growth and the development of a much-needed Health Improvement Strategy, which considers the broad range of factors that determine outcomes.

“Getting this right will lead to a more productive NHS, support more people to be in work and provide a major boost to the economy. Failure risks rising waiting lists and the proportion of public spending spent on the NHS crowding out other forms of investment, which will then only weigh down the economy.”