

Press release on behalf of Keep Our NHS Public - for IMMEDIATE use

NHS Campaigners and staff to deliver petition to Downing Street calling for more funds in Spring budget

Tomorrow (Tuesday 22nd March) NHS staff and health campaigners [1] from the alliance SOS NHS [2] together with MPs from across political parties [3], will hand deliver their petition of over 170,000 signatures [4] to Downing Street. The petition calls on Chancellor Rishi Sunak to deliver increased NHS funding ahead of the Spring budget on Wednesday. Campaigners hope to raise awareness of the urgent need for extra money in the Spring budget to help the NHS recover from the pandemic and obtain fairer pay for health workers during a recruitment and retention crisis.

Prior to the hand in, NHS staff in uniform and MPs will travel around central London on an open-top bus performing speeches. They will assemble at 2.15pm at Old Palace Yard for a visual stunt around the budget (to include red briefcases and Rishi Sunak masks) before then marching to Downing Street for the petition hand in at 3pm. Petition deliverers will be wearing black armbands as a mark of respect to the thousands that have died during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Nurse Holly Johnston from the grassroots campaign *NHS Workers Say No* who started the petition, says:

"It is clear that the situation for patients and staff in the NHS will not improve without urgent funding. The safety of patients continues to be compromised, we have waiting lists that are never-ending and staff are leaving due to their conditions and pay. Meanwhile the cost of living crisis continues to grow and will put even more pressure on the NHS as health-inequality deepens and staff are unable to pay for fuel to be able to work and struggling with bills. We are taking our petition to Downing Street as part of the SOSNHS campaign. As a frontline staff member I have seen first hand what happens when the NHS is deliberately underfunded and understaffed. We won't let our patient's be at risk, the situation needs addressing urgently if we want to continue to see free care for future generations with a workforce that is valued."

Dr John Puntis, Co-Chair of *Keep Our NHS Public* (part of *SOS NHS*) says:

"If austerity politics had not reduced the historical annual uplift to funding, the NHS would have had £200bn more in its coffers. With current spending plans this funding gap will rise to £300bn by 2025. Rather than waste money by throwing it at the private sector, we are calling on the chancellor to invest in the NHS, pay staff properly and make a £20bn down payment to begin urgently needed work to start putting services back on their feet. The NHS is a crucial component of the social wage and even more vital as inflation and cost of living rises continue to wreak havoc on households and consign millions to poverty."

[ends]

For interview, further information and logistics ahead of the day please contact Press and Media Officer for *Keep Our NHS Public*, Samantha Wathen on 0777 6047472 or email press@keepournhspublic.com

On the day logistics: Please contact Lewis Baker (Campaigns officer for Keep Our NHS Public) on: 07455219308

Notes to editors

1. To include: Nurse Holly Johnston (petition starter) Nurse Holly Turner (NHS Workers Say No) Dr John Puntis (Co-chair of Keep Our NHS Public) Dr Andrew Meyerson (A&E Doctor) and Alia Butt (NHS Psychotherapist and a member of Keep Our NHS Public)
2. *SOS NHS* is the largest coalition yet formed in defence of the NHS comprised of over 50 campaign groups, trade unions, health and care staff, social movements and civil society organisations. The coalition believe this money is needed to provide funds for urgent staff needs, tackle soaring costs for backlog maintenance and reopen almost 5,000 NHS beds that have not been used since the pandemic began. To stop the continued worsening of the crisis in the NHS, the coalition aims to persuade the Government to take immediate, concrete steps to relieve the crisis in hospitals, mental health, primary, community and social care, make a major U-turn and revise the Spending Review. <https://sosnhs.org/>

3. MPs participating in the action confirmed so far are: Barry Gardiner, Jeremy Corbyn, Zarah Sultana, Nadia Whittome, Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Charlotte Nichols, Cat Smith, Richard Burgon, Kate Osborne, Bell Ribeiro-Addy, Clive Lewis, Sam Tarry Órfhlaith Begley
4. Petition on Change.org: 'Rishi Sunak: We demand emergency funding for the NHS now! #SOSNHS' <https://www.change.org/p/sosnhs-emergency-funding-now>

