

# Health and Social Care

The NHS, our greatest war memorial, a living institution which embodies the principles on social justice; care at the point of need, not based on the ability to pay, is emblematic of the 'Spirit of 45', a time when veterans and women campaigned for a truly just United Kingdom. As a Party which is committed to protecting the fruits of British democracy, our defence of the welfare state is non-negotiable. The concept of care from 'cradle to grave' was hard won by our forefathers at the close of World War 2 and we believe this underpins the value of life in the United Kingdom. We will continue to support the NHS – and its staff – in Northern Ireland. Our Health service has suffered from chronic underfunding and today doctors, nurses and surgeons struggle to carry out their jobs in difficult circumstances. We are committed to addressing the socio-economic factors that influence health. In particular we are committed to working to combat ill-health associated with multiple deprivations.

- (I) We are unrelentingly opposed to policies and decision which will result in, or contribute to, any reduction in the standard of care for the sick and disadvantaged. In particular we fully oppose the privatisation, dismantling and handing over the welfare state to PPP/PFI initiatives and unaccountable trusts.
- (II) By extension we oppose the 'Transforming Your Care' social policy which recommends the closure of NHS care homes which would undermine the values of the NHS which prides itself in providing healthcare free at the point of delivery. The growing elderly generation are deserving of equal healthcare, dignity and support where necessary to ensure minimal disruption to their lives and lives of their families.
- (III) NI mental health services have undergone and are still undergoing significant reconfiguration in recent years. We believe that we need time to embed these changes. The year-on-year cuts to mental health budgets are putting good quality care in jeopardy through staff shortages and closures of much needed rehabilitation services for the most vulnerable in society. Historically mental health services in NI have been chronically underfunded, receiving proportionately less money than physical health services, and less money than English mental health, despite the higher needs here. Psychiatric bed numbers across NI have dramatically reduced in the last fifteen years in response to patient and professional calls for alternatives to hospital and better community care. The money saved by closing wards was meant to be reinvested into community-based services, but through funding cuts, this has not happened at the rate intended. We believe Government should urgently invest in the creation and development of dedicated psychiatric liaison teams to all general hospitals and reinvest the money saved into other health care initiatives. We also believe there is a need for more investment in the provision of specialist supported accommodation and rehabilitative day centres for people recovering from serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, and other issues such Alcohol Related Brain Injury, and learning disabilities. Better investment is needed in the community and voluntary sector with access to talking therapies and mental well being activities for common mental health problems before they develop into more severe or engrained disorders. We commit to tackling the disparity between physical and mental health, and stop the year on year disproportionate cuts to mental health budgets. We must also seek to prioritise a Zero Suicide Strategy, we believe that a zero suicide goal is realistic and achievable; however it requires political commitment, prompt crisis intervention and coordinated action from the health and justice systems.
- (IV) It is necessary to provide training to managers and employees to demystify mental health problems, and give them skills to support people who are showing symptoms such as stress, anxiety, paranoia or depression. We will continue to promote the extension of 'return to work' rehabilitation and retraining schemes which support those with a history of ill-health, and in particular mental ill- health, return to appropriate employment.
- (V) We would seek a review of the Department's provisions for sexual health care. Good sexual health is important to individuals, but it is also a key public health issue. Our aim is to reduce inequalities and improve sexual health outcomes, build an honest and open culture where everyone is able to make informed and responsible choices about relationships and sex, reduce the rate of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) using evidence-based preventative interventions and treatment initiatives whilst tackling the stigma, discrimination and prejudice often associated with sexual health matters.
- (VI) Each year 1400 people in Northern Ireland suffer an out of hospital cardiac arrest; the current survival rate for an out of hospital cardiac arrest is 7.5%. Research proves that using a defibrillator in conjunction with administering CPR can increase the survival rate to over 70% whilst allowing time for paramedics to arrive on the scene. The Progressive Unionist Party has supported calls on the NI Executive to devise a strategy that will see an increase in provision of defibrillators in public buildings and to ensure compatibility with the NI ambulance service systems.