

NEWS



Five minutes with . . . Norman Lamb

Last week three former UK health ministers called for a cross party commission to be established to review the future NHS and social care funding in England.¹ *The BMJ* talked to the plan's instigator, the Liberal Democrat former health minister

Gareth Iacobucci *news reporter*

The BMJ

"There is a significant shortfall both in terms of the NHS and social care. Clearly the funding situation and the pressures are continuing to evolve. I think everyone can see what the projections are like and what the potential consequences are in the aftermath of the government's spending review. I don't think what is planned is tenable in terms of maintaining a functioning health and care system.

"Is it not bizarre that as a modern economy we are choosing to spend a reducing proportion of our national wealth on health and care, given that we know for certain that demand will continue to rise at such a significant rate? I think that needs to be challenged. And to add to that, there has been no fundamental assessment since 1948 of whether the system—particularly the divide between health and social care—still makes sense. It's crying out for a big process and a big new settlement, in terms of the money but also ensuring that the design is fit for the 21st century.

"How much as a society we are prepared to pay for our health and care system, given the growing pressures, has to be central to this. And there is a fairly inevitable conclusion that we probably have to spend more. But let's have the discussion—and let's have it with the public and the staff of the NHS. I'm also very convinced that we can spend money more effectively as well. This is not just about more cash.

"I'm a strong supporter of the NHS and the principles behind it—free at the point of need—and I talked in parliament about the sense of solidarity and decency that I think the NHS provides to this country. But in making this call I wouldn't want to prevent other people from putting their ideas forward. I think we must be willing and able to have an open conversation.

"I'd like it set up straight away, and I purposefully have not talked about a royal commission. I don't want something that ponders on this subject for three years. What I have in mind is a time limited process, but one which builds a big national conversation, and we need to find ways of bringing the public into that discussion—citizens' panels, for example. We must not think this is a Whitehall process that can come up with all the answers. We've got to inform people about the scale of the challenge so that people can understand the tough choices that we've got to make."

Norman Lamb is the Liberal Democrat MP for North Norfolk and was the minister for care services in the previous coalition government.

1 Iacobucci G. Former ministers call for commission to review NHS and social care funding. *BMJ* 2016;352:i95.

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