

NEWS



Hunt rebukes NHS leaders for asking for more cash

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England's health secretary, Jeremy Hunt, has criticised NHS leaders for asking for more money for the health service after it received a "good settlement" last year.

Hunt made the comments at NHS Providers' annual conference in Birmingham on 30 November in response to the organisation's chief executive, Chris Hopson, who warned in his speech that the NHS could not deliver everything that was being asked of it with the funding being currently provided.

Hopson's warning came after HM Treasury failed to heed calls for extra funding for the NHS and social care in its recent autumn statement.¹⁻³

But Hunt said that it was "a misjudgment" for the NHS to adopt a tone of "Please sir, can I have some more?" because last year health had received a bigger funding boost from the Treasury than every other government department.

"I do think it was a misjudgment for NHS Providers, less than a year after a settlement for the NHS, which they themselves described as 'a good settlement,' to say that there isn't enough money," Hunt said.

"The reason is that, when we are negotiating with the Treasury for extra support for the NHS, if less than a year after you've got the biggest settlement of any government department in a period where most are seeing their budget cut you're saying, 'Please, sir, can I have some more?' you devalue the currency.

"And what you do is risk the NHS not being at the table in these discussions going forward because people will say, 'Whatever we do it's never enough.'"

Hunt also said that NHS providers was wrong to call into question the feasibility of the £22bn (£26bn; \$27.5bn) efficiency savings set out in NHS England's *Five Year Forward View*.⁴

"The reason the NHS got a £3.8bn increase [in 2015-16] is because we were able to present a united face," Hunt said.

The rebuke came after Hopson spelt out the huge challenge facing NHS trusts to make their finances work while maintaining performance and quality of care amid soaring demand. Hopson told delegates, "Demand is continuing to rise inexorably, certainly at a much higher rate than was ever predicted in the *NHS Five Year Forward View*."

"The short term plan to eliminate the provider deficit is on track. The *Forward View* provides a sound, important, longer term vision of the transformation the NHS needs, including a whole system focus, new care models, and a prevention revolution.

"The bit that is desperately missing is a credible, realistic plan for the rest of this parliament—a plan that sets out how we will close the gap at both national and local levels between what the NHS is asked to deliver and the funding available."

1 Iacobucci G. Health service finances are at crunch point, says NHS Providers. *BMJ* 2016;355:i6335. doi:10.1136/bmj.i6335 pmid:27756733.

2 Iacobucci G. Social care is "most urgent" priority for autumn statement, say leading think tanks. *BMJ* 2016;355:i5999doi:10.1136/bmj.i5999.

3 Iacobucci G. Patient care is at risk from lack of new funds in autumn statement, healthcare leaders warn. *BMJ* 2016;355:i6356. doi:10.1136/bmj.i6356 pmid:27884829.

4 Iacobucci G. NHS plan calls for new models of care and greater emphasis on prevention. *BMJ* 2014;349:g6430. doi:10.1136/bmj.g6430 pmid:25342159.

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