

Association of British Paediatric Nurses' position statement in relation to Lord Darzi's report 'Independent Investigation of the National Health Service in England'

Purpose

The purpose of this position statement is to set out the Association of British Paediatric Nurses' (ABPN) views on the key findings of the [Independent Investigation of the National Health Service in England](#). It has been produced by officers and members of the Association in line with our role to promote the development of children's nursing through evidence-based information about practice and education. Further details of the review can be read in the background paper [www.abpn-uk.co.uk]

This paper aims to provide a call to action for the UK government to commit to the improvement of child¹ health by providing an overview of the key findings of the Darzi review in relation to the health and well-being of children and young people.

Background

In brief, in July 2024 the government announced an independent investigation led by Professor Lord Darzi. The investigation aims to provide a rapid review the NHS's performance and identify the challenges it faces in England.

Professor Lord Darzi is a surgeon and a former health minister. His previous review of the NHS, 'High Quality Care for All'² was published in 2008.

Current situation

A recent Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) report³ [From left behind to leading the way: a blueprint for transforming child health services in England](#) identified that children are waiting longer than adults to access healthcare, children's services are not recovering at the same rates as adult services, and there is a growing gap between demand and capacity. Anecdotal reports say that the situation is similar in other countries of the UK

A long-term lack of Government investment in children's services combined with no clear direction for children's services is adversely affecting the health and care of children.

Our position

The Association of British Paediatric Nurses believe that children and young people's health and well-being has fared badly before, during and since the Covid pandemic and

¹ The term child refers to infants, children, young people and young adults up to 25 years of age

² DHSC (2008) High quality care for all: NHS Next Stage Review final report

³ RCPCH (2024) From left behind to leading the way: a blueprint for transforming child health services in England

there is a need for urgent reform of services and of ways of working to improve health outcomes for our young population. We believe that children's nursing care should be led and delivered by Registered Children's Nurses⁴ and that all professional carers must have recognised training in key element of care.

We welcome Lord Darzi's report and support the recognition that *"The problems faced by all NHS patients are similarly encountered by children and young people. At the moment, too many are being let down. Childhood is precious because it is brief; too many children are spending too much of it waiting for care. It is apparent that the NHS must do better and that national policymaking on care for children and young people needs to be more joined up"*.

We recognise the key challenges in providing solutions to the situation as:

- A lack of clear direction for children's health services as the specific needs of children are overlooked in Government policies and priorities
- Gaps in the children's healthcare workforce, despite an increase of 75% in numbers of nurses within children's hospitals, in 2023 the NHS Nursing Directorate identified 3000 children's nursing vacancies. Staff shortages have a detrimental impact on the care of children and young people and their families. Clinical skills, knowledge and expertise are fundamental to the quality of care and outcomes
- Ongoing inequity with adult services

ABPN are calling upon the UK Government to

- Set up a cross-departmental process to ensure that national policymaking on care for children and young people is more joined up.
- Urgently set out their plans to deliver solutions to address the major deficits which are impacting on children's immediate and long-term physical, emotional and mental health and well-being and end the long-term disparity in children's health care.
- Deliver a workforce strategy to address the gaps in the current workforce and to ensure a suitably qualified and skilled workforce for the future, including investment in education and training opportunities for those wanting to become children's nurses.
- Address socioeconomic challenges to address child poverty and the impact of poverty on health including investment in public health and early prevention services especially in relation to health visiting and school nursing services.
- Invest in primary care for children, to ensure that children can access appropriate, equitable community services, especially Community Children's

⁴ A Registered Children's Nurse is a professional who is qualified to provide nursing care to children and young people and is registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

Nursing (CCN) services and explore new ways of working, for example empowering general practice by providing children's nurse advanced practitioners in GP surgeries.

- Establish equitable child and adolescent mental health and emotional well-being services across the UK, including urgently addressing excessive waiting times for assessments in relation to neurodiversity including learning disability and autism.
- Invest in health promotion services to overturn the £191 million cuts to services for young children.

Date: September 2024

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