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Alcohol Harm:

There are around one million hospital admissions relating to alcohol each year and alcohol-related deaths have increased to the highest on record, with poorer communities disproportionately affected. Alcohol harm has wide-ranging impacts on individuals, families, and wider society.

Helping people who are struggling with alcohol-dependency should be a key public health priority. But Health Foundation analysis reveals that, since 2015/16, adult drug and alcohol services in England have seen their budgets cut in real terms by 17%. And funding for young people's addiction services has been cut by 28%.

I am concerned that addiction services have been left neglected, overwhelmed, and underappreciated for the critical work they do in improving the lives of vulnerable people in our society. I agree with the Royal College of Psychiatrists that public health cuts are a "false economy", as more people end up presenting to already overstretched A&E departments for treatment.

The Government said it has no plans to introduce a standalone alcohol strategy nor to commission an independent review into alcohol harm. The Health and Care Act, which became law last year, was absent of any proposals to tackle alcohol harm. I supported an amendment to the legislation that would have required ministers to publish an annual statement about the spend and impact of alcohol treatment funding. Disappointingly, the amendment was defeated by Government MPs.

Alcohol is linked to 200 different diseases and injuries, including heart disease, liver disease and stroke. And it costs the NHS £3.5 billion every year.

In my view, we need to reform health and care services to build an NHS fit for the future, with a fully costed plan to radically expand the NHS workforce, shift the balance of resources to focus on prevention, reduce health inequalities, and improve healthy life expectancy.

I support a holistic approach to public health – and within that stronger proposals to tackle alcohol harm – to ensure that specialised alcohol treatment services can deliver for their communities. Alongside boosting capacity in local public health teams, I believe we must embed long-term planning to ensure there is health in all policies across all departments, improving the wider determinants of health - the social, economic, and environmental factors that affect people's ability to lead healthy lifestyles.

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