NHS is facing year-round crisis, says British Medical Association

**Unprecedented pressures on the health service during winter are likely to continue into the summer**

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The unprecedented pressure on the [NHS](https://www.theguardian.com/society/nhs) this winter is likely to continue into the summer, the British Medical Association said.

The health service has come under huge strain this winter with almost 150,000 patients in England having waited more than 30 minutes before being admitted to A&E, according to [NHS](https://www.theguardian.com/society/nhs) figures.

Official data shows patient waiting times, bed shortages and ambulance queues have hit record levels. While the situation would normally ease in the summer months, the BMA said hospitals are braced for more of the same problems this year.

Using official data from the last five years, the BMA’s health policy team forecast a number of scenarios for this summer’s NHS performance, measured in terms of A&E attendances, waiting times, admissions and trolley waits.

In the the worst-case scenario, the health service will suffer a repeat of scenes experienced during winter 2016.

Dr Chaand Nagpaul, BMA council chairman, said: “The winter crisis has truly been replaced by a year-round crisis. Doctors and patients have just endured one of the worst winters on record ... we cannot accept that this is the new normal for the NHS.”

The BMA’s predictions are based on data from NHS England, which suggest that in the worst-case scenario for July, August and September, 6.2 million people could attend A&E, along with 774,000 people waiting more than four hours to be seen.

This would equate to just 87.5% of patients being seen, admitted or discharged within four hours, with 147,000 trolley waits of four or more hours and 1.57 million emergency admissions.

The best-case scenario would be comparable to the winter of 2015, with 5.89 million A&E attendances over the summer and 89.6% meeting the target of patients being seen, admitted or discharged within four hours.

The BMA said for some trusts this meant winter contingency plans would remain in place. It gave the example of University [Hospitals](https://www.theguardian.com/society/hospitals) of North Midlands NHS Trust, which is planning to keep its extra winter capacity open until the summer.

The association estimates that health funding in England is more than £7bn a year lower than comparable European countries, and the gap could rise to more than £11bn over the next three years. It said that long-term funding plans for the NHS must be met with urgent and tangible new investment.

An NHS England spokesperson said: “The NHS has faced continued pressure after one of the coldest March months in 30 years. Over the decade ahead our health service is inevitably going to have to respond to the needs of our growing and ageing population, which is why now charting a 10-year plan for the NHS makes such sense.”

A Department of [Health](https://www.theguardian.com/society/health) and Social Care spokesperson said: “We know that demand continues to grow, and that staff have never worked harder, which is why we gave a pay rise to more than 1.2 million dedicated staff.

“The prime minister and health and social care secretary have committed to a fully funded, long-term plan for the NHS, which will be agreed with NHS leaders, clinicians and health experts.”