# Wes Streeting signals shift towards private sector to cut NHS waiting lists



Wes Streeting has expressed a willingness to increasingly leverage private healthcare as a means to decrease the substantial waiting lists faced by the NHS, which currently stands at an alarming 7.39 million patients awaiting treatment. The Health Secretary indicated a departure from traditional ideological standpoints, arguing that necessity must take precedence in the battle against healthcare delays.

In his recent remarks to the Sunday Telegraph, Streeting underscored the importance of utilising available private capacity, asserting, “Some ask if using private capacity contradicts NHS principles. Nonsense. What contradicts NHS principles is letting people suffer unnecessarily when capacity exists to treat them.” He emphasised that despite the involvement of private healthcare, the fundamental principle of treatment being free at the point of use would remain intact. His own personal experiences battling kidney cancer underscored his belief in the urgency of timely medical care. “When you’re waiting for treatment, every day matters,” he remarked, reflecting on the impact of waiting on patient wellbeing.

Streeting's comments come amidst a historically contentious backdrop within the Labour Party, where proponents of the private sector have often clashed with those who advocate for a strictly public healthcare system. Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has been vocal in accusing current leader Keir Starmer of compromising NHS principles, framing Streeting's openness to private sector engagement as a betrayal of the party’s foundational commitments.

Critics on the left of the Labour Party are likely to react negatively to Streeting’s stance. For his part, Streeting has argued that dismissing private sector involvement would be a betrayal of working-class individuals who lack access to faster private treatment options. In April 2024, he was quoted as saying that, “failing to utilise private sector capacity would betray those without the means to pay for healthcare.” His view is that a pragmatic approach is necessary to address the ongoing backlog.

Success stories from patients serve as a testament to the potential benefits of integrating private healthcare. One such individual, Darren Grewcock, a security guard who underwent successful hip replacement surgery at an independent hospital following an NHS referral, praised the expedience of the process, highlighting the advantages of supplemental private capacity. Patients groups like the Patients Association have also welcomed this evolving approach, emphasising that informed choice and communication must remain central as the NHS navigates its operational challenges.

Looking ahead, government plans indicate a strengthening of partnerships with the independent sector to address specific areas of need within the NHS. This approach aims not only to expedite treatment times but also to enhance patient choice, particularly in fields plagued by significant waiting lists, such as gynaecology and orthopaedics. In doing so, Streeting and the government seem set on forging a path that balances the demands of healthcare delivery with the values underpinning the NHS.

As discussions around public and private healthcare continue to unfold, the coming months will be crucial. Streeting’s leadership is at a crossroads, where the decisions made may either draw the party closer to modernising its stance on healthcare or voir dire the foundations of its support.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/nhs-private-care-waiting-list-streeting-starmer-b2770318.html), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/apr/08/middle-class-lefties-wont-stop-labour-using-private-sector-to-cut-nhs-backlog-wes-streeting-says)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/nhs-private-care-waiting-list-streeting-starmer-b2770318.html), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/apr/12/wes-streeting-defends-labour-plan-private-sector-cut-nhs-backlog), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/apr/12/wes-streeting-defends-labour-plan-private-sector-cut-nhs-backlog)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/apr/12/wes-streeting-defends-labour-plan-private-sector-cut-nhs-backlog), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jan/10/wes-streeting-defends-nhs-use-private-sector-but-pull-its-weight)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/nhs-private-care-waiting-list-streeting-starmer-b2770318.html), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/deal-between-nhs-and-independent-sector-to-cut-nhs-waiting-lists)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/nhs-private-care-waiting-list-streeting-starmer-b2770318.html), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/deal-between-nhs-and-independent-sector-to-cut-nhs-waiting-lists)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/nhs-private-care-waiting-list-streeting-starmer-b2770318.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/apr/12/wes-streeting-defends-labour-plan-private-sector-cut-nhs-backlog> - In April 2024, Wes Streeting, the UK's Shadow Health Secretary, defended Labour's plan to utilise the private sector to reduce NHS waiting lists. He argued that failing to do so would betray working-class individuals who cannot afford private care. Streeting emphasised that while the NHS should remain free at the point of use, leveraging private sector capacity was a pragmatic approach to address the backlog. He also criticised those who opposed this strategy, suggesting they prioritised ideological purity over patient care.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/deal-between-nhs-and-independent-sector-to-cut-nhs-waiting-lists> - In January 2025, the UK government announced a new agreement between the NHS and the independent sector aimed at reducing waiting lists and providing patients with greater choice. The deal focused on specialist areas such as gynaecology and orthopaedics, where significant backlogs existed. Health and Social Care Secretary Wes Streeting stated that the partnership would ensure timely treatment for all patients, regardless of their ability to pay, and that the NHS would remain free at the point of use.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jan/10/wes-streeting-defends-nhs-use-private-sector-but-pull-its-weight> - In January 2025, Wes Streeting defended the NHS's use of the private sector to address waiting times, stating that the independent sector must 'pull its weight' and provide genuinely additional capacity. He acknowledged the necessity of private sector involvement but emphasised that it should not replace the NHS's core services. Streeting's comments came amid discussions about the balance between public and private healthcare provision in the UK.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/apr/08/middle-class-lefties-wont-stop-labour-using-private-sector-to-cut-nhs-backlog-wes-streeting-says> - In April 2024, Wes Streeting criticised 'middle-class lefties' who opposed Labour's plan to use the private sector to reduce NHS waiting lists. He argued that those who could afford private care were being treated faster, while working-class individuals were left waiting longer. Streeting emphasised the need for a pragmatic approach to address the backlog and ensure timely treatment for all patients, regardless of their financial means.
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