# Government targets £2.2bn boost for NHS services in coastal towns to tackle health inequalities



The government is preparing to funnel additional funding into NHS hospitals and GP surgeries in coastal towns hardest hit by health inequalities, aiming to address the "coastal effect" that has long plagued these communities. Weston-super-Mare, with its overstretched medical resources and complex health needs, stands at the centre of this initiative, though the precise benefits for Weston General Hospital and local GP practices remain uncertain.

Weston and similar seaside towns wrestle with disproportionately high levels of physical and mental ill health compared to many inland areas. Substance and alcohol addictions, often compounded by the presence of rehab clinics that can alter neighbourhood dynamics, pose ongoing challenges. The town's ageing population, attracted by retirement by the sea, brings added pressures linked to morbidity in later life. These health struggles are exacerbated by systemic issues such as poverty, deprivation, poor housing, and a fragmentation of health services, all contributing to worse outcomes and lower life expectancy.

Labour’s proposed 10-Year Health Plan seeks to directly confront these long-standing disparities. The plan prioritises working-class and coastal communities that have been historically overlooked, redirecting £2.2 billion of funding to under-resourced areas where health outcomes are poorest. This funding is intended to combat the inverse care law — the phenomenon where those in greatest health need receive the lowest quality care. The aim is to implement fundamental reforms that guarantee equitable healthcare access across the country, with a specific focus on coastal towns like Weston-super-Mare.

Weston General Hospital has faced significant challenges over the years. It was once the smallest NHS trust in England before merging with University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust. The hospital was rated 'inadequate' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the health regulator’s lowest rating, reflecting systemic problems around staffing levels, patient safety, and financial management. However, an inspection in August 2022 upgraded the hospital’s rating to 'requires improvement,' acknowledging considerable progress. The CQC found dedicated staff and noted improvements but highlighted ongoing issues such as stretched staffing, surgical unit concerns, and the need for better risk identification in patient care. There were also worrying reports of racist behaviour towards staff that must be addressed.

The health crises facing Weston and similar towns have been increasingly recognised at national levels. Four years ago, England’s Chief Medical Officer, Professor Sir Chris Whitty, underscored the urgent need for a national strategy to tackle coastal health inequalities. He warned that without decisive action, preventable illnesses would persist and worsen with ageing populations. More recently, the government has also responded to parliamentary inquiries into the future of seaside towns, acknowledging the unique challenges these communities face, including inadequate health service funding and the impact of transient populations.

Despite these difficulties, coastal living can offer genuine health benefits, such as improved mental health from access to nature and outdoor exercise, stress reduction from the calming influence of the sea, and potential heart health benefits. Nevertheless, even these natural advantages are under threat. Weston’s beaches, essential for both local well-being and the town’s tourism-dependent economy, suffer from pollution. The Environment Agency grades water quality there as 'poor' due to bacterial contamination from livestock, sewage, and urban runoff. This pollution risks undermining the health of residents and visitors alike, as well as the town’s reputation as a seaside resort.

In tandem with government funding, academic-led collaborations are playing a pivotal role. A national partnership involving the Universities of Bristol and Liverpool has secured £2.4 million to tackle health disparities in coastal areas, including Weston-super-Mare. This programme emphasises mental health, substance misuse, and life-limiting conditions, seeking to embed creative community resources within health and social care systems to enhance local well-being.

The cumulative picture is one of significant challenge, but also cautious optimism. Health services in Weston are under undeniable strain, but targeted funding, systemic reforms, ongoing improvements at Weston General Hospital, and innovative community-focused interventions provide hope that the tide may turn for the health of this coastal town.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.thewestonmercury.co.uk/news/25294133.making-waves-column-health-plan-good-medicine-weston/), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-plan-to-rebuild-nhs-in-working-class-communities), [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-of-seaside-towns-government-response-to-the-liaison-committee-report/future-of-seaside-towns-government-response-to-the-liaison-committee-report)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.thewestonmercury.co.uk/news/25294133.making-waves-column-health-plan-good-medicine-weston/), [[7]](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldseaside/320/32008.htm)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.thewestonmercury.co.uk/news/25294133.making-waves-column-health-plan-good-medicine-weston/), [[4]](https://www.cqc.org.uk/press-release/cqc-find-improvements-weston-general-hospital), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-63996905)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.thewestonmercury.co.uk/news/25294133.making-waves-column-health-plan-good-medicine-weston/), [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-of-seaside-towns-government-response-to-the-liaison-committee-report/future-of-seaside-towns-government-response-to-the-liaison-committee-report), [[7]](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldseaside/320/32008.htm)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.thewestonmercury.co.uk/news/25294133.making-waves-column-health-plan-good-medicine-weston/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.bristolhealthpartners.org.uk/news/national-partnership-to-tackle-health-inequalities-in-coastal-communities-awarded-2-4-million/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.thewestonmercury.co.uk/news/25294133.making-waves-column-health-plan-good-medicine-weston/), [[4]](https://www.cqc.org.uk/press-release/cqc-find-improvements-weston-general-hospital), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-63996905)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thewestonmercury.co.uk/news/25294133.making-waves-column-health-plan-good-medicine-weston/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-plan-to-rebuild-nhs-in-working-class-communities> - The UK government has announced a 10-Year Health Plan aimed at addressing health inequalities in working-class communities and coastal areas. The plan includes significant funding reallocations to regions with the greatest need, aiming to tackle the inverse care law where those in most need receive the least care. The initiative focuses on fundamental reforms to the health system to ensure equitable access to healthcare services across the country.
3. <https://www.bristolhealthpartners.org.uk/news/national-partnership-to-tackle-health-inequalities-in-coastal-communities-awarded-2-4-million/> - A national partnership led by the Universities of Bristol and Liverpool has been awarded £2.4 million to address health inequalities in coastal communities, including Weston-super-Mare. The project focuses on mental health, substance misuse, and life-limiting illnesses, aiming to integrate creative community assets into health and social care systems to improve well-being in these areas.
4. <https://www.cqc.org.uk/press-release/cqc-find-improvements-weston-general-hospital> - The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has rated medical care at Weston General Hospital as 'requires improvement' following an inspection in August 2022. This is an improvement from the previous 'inadequate' rating. The inspection found that staff were dedicated and improvements had been made, though challenges remain in areas such as staffing levels and patient safety.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-63996905> - Weston General Hospital has been upgraded from an 'inadequate' to a 'requires improvement' rating by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) after an inspection in August 2022. The CQC found that staffing was stretched but sufficient to keep patients safe. Areas needing improvement include the hospital's surgical unit and the identification of blood clot risks. Concerns were also raised about racist behaviour towards staff.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-of-seaside-towns-government-response-to-the-liaison-committee-report/future-of-seaside-towns-government-response-to-the-liaison-committee-report> - The UK government has responded to the Liaison Committee's report on the future of seaside towns, acknowledging the challenges faced by coastal communities, including health inequalities. The response outlines initiatives such as the Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HDRCs) to address these disparities and improve health outcomes in these areas.
7. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldseaside/320/32008.htm> - The House of Lords Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities has highlighted that coastal health services often lack the resources to meet the challenges they face. The report discusses issues such as inadequate funding formulas for local health services and the impact of transient populations on public health services in coastal areas.