# Anas Sarwar's call to declare NHS waiting times emergency reveals deeper issues



Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar's recent pronouncements about declaring a "waiting times emergency" in the National Health Service (NHS) highlight a glaring oversight: the current government's inadequate handling of Scotland’s healthcare crisis. Sarwar's rallying cry, delivered at his party conference in Glasgow, comes as nearly 636,238 patients languish on waiting lists, a shocking figure that reveals the NHS is in deep trouble—under one in nine Scots are facing unacceptable delays for treatment.

While Sarwar vows to act decisively against what he frames as a "waiting times emergency," one can hardly overlook the failures that have culminated in this predicament. His plans suggest a reliance on drastic measures such as facilitating treatment outside patients' local areas, including other parts of the UK. This is a dangerous signal that Labour, despite their newfound seats in Parliament, has no real solutions to offer beyond band-aid fixes. Additionally, the insinuation of utilising the private healthcare sector raises questions about Labour’s commitment to a publicly funded NHS, underlining a retreat from the party's traditional values.

As Sarwar attempts to present himself as a champion of immediate patient care, he also aims to push for a reform of NHS funding. However, the notion of incentivising health boards based on performance merits scrutiny. Will this not lead to a competitive environment that prioritises profit over patient welfare? Sarwar highlights unused capacity and dwindling operation numbers, but his silent acknowledgment of the central role his own party could have played in reforming a clearly ailing system rings hollow.

His critique of the Scottish National Party (SNP) for their management of the NHS fails to hold water when considering Labour's historical complicity in the very same issues. Sarwar’s claims that SNP policies have led to unacceptable waits are ironic, as his party has been part of the political milieu contributing to these delays. The insinuation that patients in Glasgow face insurmountable barriers while those in Tayside receive timely treatment reminds us that the issue is systemic, not merely a matter of leadership.

Against Sarwar's sweeping claims, Health Secretary Neil Gray defended the SNP's record, suggesting that tangible improvements are on the horizon as a result of ongoing government initiatives. He rightly critiqued Labour's lack of substantive proposals during the Budget process, pointing towards the SNP's efforts that aim to enhance NHS services rather than undermine them in a political blame game.

The forthcoming elections in 2026 place immense scrutiny on how parties address the pressing concerns surrounding NHS performance. As the political discourse unfolds, the public must critically assess who truly stands ready to ensure that patients come first—not just in words, but in actionable policies that steer clear of the outdated systems and bureaucratic red tape that have left Scotland’s healthcare at a crossroads. Without genuine reform, any promise to put patients first will merely serve as another empty campaign slogan rather than a path toward meaningful change.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/sp/?id=2025-01-23.2.43> - This URL supports the claim about the crisis in Accident and Emergency departments across Scotland, highlighting long waiting times and the government's efforts to address these issues.
* <https://www.strath.ac.uk/whystrathclyde/news/2025/pandemicexacerbatednhsstruggletomeetdemand/> - This URL corroborates the assertion that the pandemic exacerbated Scotland's NHS struggles, particularly in meeting demand and managing waiting lists.
* <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/pressures/nhs-under-pressure-scotland> - This URL provides evidence of the growing waiting lists and pressures on the NHS in Scotland, including both elective care and emergency services.
* <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/sp/?id=2025-01-23.2.43> - This URL also highlights the political discourse surrounding NHS waiting times and the Scottish government's response to these challenges.
* <https://www.strath.ac.uk/whystrathclyde/news/2025/pandemicexacerbatednhsstruggletomeetdemand/> - This study further emphasizes the need for increased capacity to clear the backlog of non-emergency cases in Scotland.