

### Background information

From the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, demand for a welfare state grew until it reached fever pitch after the Second World War. Reforms initiated under the Liberal Government of 1906 had proved incredibly popular and in 1942 the Beveridge Report proposed the mass expansion of these reforms into a centralised, nationalised, and free healthcare system. This was the National Health Service (NHS).

### Who made the NHS?

Credit for the NHS must be shared three ways - William Beveridge, Aneurin Bevan, and the post-war Labour government led by Clement Attlee.

**William Beveridge** wrote the *Beveridge Report* in 1942, identifying that there were 'five giants' that had to be conquered for Britain to fulfil its potential. Furthermore, and radically, it concluded that all people had the right to be free of these. They were:

- disease
- want (need)
- ignorance
- idleness
- squalor (very poor living conditions).



The report suggested several ways to improve people's lives, but most radically suggested that the government should 'take charge of social security from the cradle to the grave'. This meant that the government would have full responsibility for the health, education, and wellbeing of all people in all areas. This report became an unexpected bestseller and sold 100,000 copies in its first month.

**Aneurin Bevan** was the minister for health, and the driving force behind all efforts to actually build and staff the NHS. He was tasked by Attlee to draw up the plans for how the NHS would work, and then to put them into place. He was key in liaising with the doctors and their professional groups, in developing the plans that would regulate how the NHS would work together, and in thrashing out the final financial terms of the NHS.



**Clement Attlee** was the leader of Labour Party and Prime Minister after they won the election in 1945. He made the bold promise to implement the Beveridge Report and found a National Health Service whilst campaigning. The Conservatives did not make this promise, and the war hero Winston Churchill was voted out of office.



### What was the early NHS?

Before 1948, around eight million of the British population had never seen a doctor because they had not been able to afford to. Once the NHS was introduced, this problem vanished.

Furthermore, women became four times more likely to use the new NHS services than they were to use private medical services before, leading to a surge in women's health. Life expectancy has risen from 66 to 83 for women, and from 64 to 79 for men.

The NHS centralised all medicine in Great Britain. This meant that GPs, pharmacies, midwives, and hospitals worked together. It led to better communication of patient records, better collaboration, shared knowledge - indeed, the NHS became a hub for medical research. This greatly helped the pace of medical progress, alongside the government intervention and funding.

### Why was there opposition to the NHS?

When the NHS was proposed it was not entirely well-received. Some richer and conservative-voting people objected it because it would need a tax rise in order to pay for it. Many people did not want to pay extra tax to help other people be healthier.

Several politicians also continued to oppose the NHS because they had lingering beliefs about laissez-faire, and the appropriate role of government. Whilst no politician could now demand that the government took no involvement in public health, Conservative politicians especially argued that the NHS was unaffordable, and 'crossed the line' for the involvement of government in people's lives.

The more surprising source of opposition was from some doctors - indeed, when 45,500 doctors were surveyed in 1945 over 40,000 said they did not want an NHS! This was largely because doctors worried they would lose out on money by not being able to treat patients privately. They also did not fully trust the government to get involved in regulating health.

Bevan was the key player in overcoming this opposition. Principally, he promised doctors that they would receive a salary from the NHS, but would have the option to go part-time, and treat other patients privately in that time. Thus, private healthcare could run alongside public healthcare. However, it was not until Bevan also promised a massive expenditure upon new equipment and refitting all NHS hospitals that the doctors finally signed on.

### What else did the Labour Government do after 1945?

The Labour government didn't just establish the NHS:

- They put in place a weekly 'family allowance' for all parents with children, to put money towards raising their children well.
- The very poor were able to qualify for benefits.
- The school leaving age was raised to 15, in an attempt to give everyone a strong education and enable more to continue to university.
- The government embarked upon a programme of slum clearance, in which twelve new towns were created, and by 1948 280,000 new council houses were being built.

### What pressures does the NHS face today?

- The NHS is extremely expensive to run.
- The lifestyles of many British people remain unhealthy and this poses many challenges for the NHS.
- Some modern drugs are expensive and are increasingly being developed outside of the NHS, by private pharmaceutical groups. These groups can charge huge amounts of money for the newest drugs.
- People are living much longer, but are rarely very healthy in old age. The NHS must keep people alive, but at huge cost.
- Sugar consumption has become a huge concern for the modern NHS, causing a rise in the rate of young diabetes and obesity, and in extreme cases - cancers. To this end, the government in 2016 introduced a 'sugar tax', but the impact is yet to be seen.
- Workload is seen as a huge problem, as a national shortage of nurses and doctors means many are routinely working overtime, and facing very challenging working conditions
- The vast majority of beds in hospitals are taken up by long-term, elderly patients, who are unable to return home as they are too ill, and thus space (in terms of hospital beds), and staffing costs are becoming big problems.
- Hospitals do not have the money to reinvest in new equipment or rebuild crumbling buildings. Many of these investments were not updated since the large injection of cash after the Second World War, and a new large wave of spending is needed.
- Smoking and fast-food eating is falling, but both are factors which massively increase the 'lifestyle cost' on the NHS, where healthier living would drastically reduce the amount people need the NHS. Similarly, not enough Britons get enough exercise.
- Now, people have to pay for prescriptions, dental costs, and some other 'less essential' surgeries. It is expected that more surgeries will have to be charged to patients as financial burdens on the NHS increase.

### Tasks

1. Read the background information. Highlight or annotate the key terms and dates in this information.
2. Create profiles for those who helped create the NHS - Bevan, Beveridge, and Clement Attlee. You should include: key contributions, ratings for their effectiveness, and an overall judgement on how instrumental they were in implementing the NHS.
3. Why was there opposition to the NHS? Summarise each group, and why they opposed it, in no more than 10 words each.
4. Read over the statements under 'What pressures does the NHS face today?' Categorise these statements into three main types of challenge for the modern NHS.

**Bonus:** Why do you think the NHS is such a controversial topic? Do some research around modern debates and articles on the NHS, and see if you can work out the main arguments.