

23 October 2024

Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
1 Horse Guards Road
Westminster
London
SW1A 2HQ

cc: The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP

Dear Chancellor,

National Voices is the leading coalition of health and social care charities in England, with over 200 members and links to millions of people living with health conditions.

We are writing to you ahead of the Autumn Budget to highlight the importance of working with people and communities, and the VCSE organisations representing them, to democratise decision making in health and care, ensuring people living with health conditions and disability, and their carers, have their say.

We have three asks for the Treasury to ensure that the third sector and those it advocates for have the resources needed to support the Government's ambition, "halving the gap in healthy life expectancy between the richest and poorest regions in England".

VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance investment

Firstly, we urge the Treasury to maintain investment in the [VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance](#) (HW Alliance) to continue a strong strategic relationship with the VCSE.

The HW Alliance is jointly managed by system partners at the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and NHS England (NHSE), and is made up of [18 VCSE Members](#) that represent communities who share protected characteristics or that experience health inequalities. Through their networks, Alliance members serve as a key link with thousands of people, communities, and VCSE organisations across England. It is one of the last remnants of the work the last Labour government undertook to create a strong strategic relationship with the VCSE sector.

The HW Alliance programme has been running in its current form from April 2021 to March 2024, with an extension year granted for 2024/25.

In this time:

- **9,677** people experiencing health and care inequalities have had their voices heard in national policy making via Alliance activity.
- **1,415** VCSE organisations, faith groups, and local community groups co-led or supported HW Alliance projects.
- **63** policy leads from teams across NHSE, DHSC, and UKHSA directly engaged with HW Alliance work projects.
- **57%** of ICSs engaged with HW Alliance work projects

Funding for this vital programme runs out in March 2025 and we are seeking a commitment to maintain funding for the HW Alliance for one more year while the Government takes time to strategically reset its relationship with the VCSE (in line with the new NHS 10-year plan).

Introduce measures to reduce the health impact of the rising cost of living

The cost of living continues to take a terrible toll on people living in the most deprived areas of the country or from the most marginalised and minoritised groups.

In addition to the overall need to provide more equitable funding to address health inequalities, we believe the following measures will make a meaningful difference to ensuring people stay healthy during this economic squeeze and ensure costs to the NHS and wider economy, such as through unemployment because of ill-health, do not continue to rise.

- Introduce free prescriptions for all, like in Scotland and Wales, starting with the immediate introduction of free prescriptions for people with chronic conditions. In March 2024, one in 20 people reported struggling to afford the medicine they need, which will create unwarranted demand on GPs and hospitals. For people experiencing the most financial pressure, one in ten said they have avoided getting an NHS prescription, and one in five said they have avoided getting over-the-counter medication.¹
- Guarantee an NHS dentist for all, to support the wider preventative agenda.
- Provide support with the costs of hospital parking, transport to hospital and overnight accommodation for patients and their carers, to reduce health inequalities.

¹ <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/blog/2024-03-18/cost-living-remains-barrier-health-most-vulnerable>

- Extend statutory sick time periods, to support those off work for longer due to long NHS waiting lists.
- Reimburse energy costs for running medical equipment, like dialysis machines, at home, as well as costs associated with increased use of domestic appliances, such as washing machines, and heating where this is directly linked to the management of health conditions.

Review legacy donation mechanisms

VCSE organisations are increasingly reliant on legacy donations. Over the past 30 years, legacy incomes have quadrupled in value, from £0.9bn in 1993 to £4.0bn in 2023/24. But within that space, health charities are by far the largest sector for bequests, [accounting for 41% of legacy income](#). We are hearing concerns from our members that any planned changes to inheritance tax may inadvertently impact on the volume and likelihood of legacy donations in a sector that is most reliant on this income stream. We urge the government to factor this into your thinking as you review your approach to taxation.

This is a critical moment for many in our society and decisions taken now will have a significant impact now and for years to come. We hope you will use this opportunity to support those who need it most.

With kind regards,

Jacob Lant
Chief Executive
National Voices



With the support of 65 health and care organisations, listed below:

Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director, **Age UK**

Noha Al Afifi, Interim CEO, **Arthritis Action**

Tony Thornburn OBE, Chair, **Behçet's UK**

Gaynor Pritchard, Co-founder, Trustee, CEO, **Behind the Smile**

Sophie Castell and Fiona Hazell, Co-Chairs, **Blood Cancer Alliance**

Helen Rowntree, Chief Executive, **Blood Cancer UK**

Anna Schurer, Chair, **British Dupuytren's Society**

Sarah Mistry, Chief Executive, **British Geriatrics Society**

Sasha Daly, Interim CEO, **Cancer52**

Helen Walker, Chief Executive, **Carers UK**

Charles Kwaku-Odoi, Chief Executive, **Caribbean & African Health Network (CAHN)**

Jan Hutchinson, Director of Operations, **Centre for Mental Health**

Sam Julius, Head of Influence and Communications, **Clinks**

Marianne Radcliffe, CEO, **Crohn's & Colitis UK**

Fiona Armitage, Co-founder and Secretary, **CRPS UK**

Dr Robin Dover, Chair of Trustees, **Cyclical Vomiting Syndrome Association UK**

Victoria Wareham, Director of Operations and Development, **Dystonia UK**

Emma Cox, CEO, **Endometriosis UK**

Shizana Arshad, Campaign Lead, **Equally Well UK**

Judith Potts, Founder, **Esme's Umbrella**

Nikola Brigden and Mark Oakley, Co-leads, **Forgotten Lives UK**

David Ralph, CEO/Chair, **Furness Mental Health Trust (FMHT)**

Rich Collins, Chief Executive, **GAIN (Guillain-Barré and Associated Inflammatory Neuropathies)**

Michael Chandler, CEO, **Groundswell**

Gabriela Matouskova, CEO, **Hope 4 The Community CIC**

Roger Smith, Trustee & Chair, **Hounslow Borough Respiratory Support Group**

Paul Bristow, Chief Executive Officer, **Kidney Care UK**

Sammie McFarland, Founder and CEO, **Long Covid Kids**

Ondine Sherwood, Co-founder and CEO, **Long Covid SOS**

Karen Friett, Chief Executive, **LSN**

Ed Holloway, CEO, **Macular Society**

Pippa Foster, Director of Lived Experience & Clinical Practice, **Myeloma UK**

Dr Dale Webb, CEO, **National Axial Spondyloarthritis Society**

Peter Foxton, CEO, **National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS)**

Dr Raven Bowen, CEO, **National Ugly Mugs**

Maddy Desforges, CEO, **NAVCA**

Tori Bradison, CEO, **Northern Cancer Voices**

Dympna Cunnane, CEO, **Our Time**

D R Wardell, Coordinator, **Out with Prostate Cancer**

Jo Betterton, Trustee, **Pain UK CIO**

Juliet Tizzard, Director of External Relations, **Parkinson's UK**

Sal Aziz, Medical Cannabis Patient Advocate, **PatientsCann UK**

Katie Dexter, Chair, **PCD Support UK**

Dr James Cant, Chief Executive, **Resuscitation Council UK**

Mark Winstanley, Chief Executive, **Rethink Mental Illness**

Tase Oputu, English Pharmacy Board Chair, **Royal Pharmaceutical Society**

Ian Boyd, CEO, **Self Help UK**

Maddie Kitchen FRSA, Director, **Sobriety Films UK CIC**

Kirit Mistry, Founder and Lead for Health Inequalities, **South Asian Health Action**

Dr. Maëva May, Associate Director – Systems Engagement, **Stroke Association**

Lorraine Stanley, Founder and CEO, **SWAD (Sex With A Difference CIC)**

Sarah Gray, Director of Operations and National Programmes, **Tackle Prostate Cancer**

Rachel Halford, CEO, **The Hepatitis C Trust**

John Hibbs, Founder, **The Hibbs Lupus Trust**

Miss Elspeth M W Lax, CEO & Founder, **The PXE Support Group – PiXiE**

Lindsay R Thompson, Co-founder and CEO, **The Rose Thompson Foundation**

Louise Sellar, Director, **The Thyroid Trust**

Eamonn Dunne, Partnerships & Project Development Manager, **Thomas Pocklington Trust**

Lyn Mynott, CEO, **Thyroid UK**

Sue Thomas, Trustee, **Time To Talk Mental Health UK**

Nick Carroll, Interim Chief Executive Officer, **Together for Short Lives**

Helen James, CEO, **VCSE Nutri**

Deborah Alsina, Chief Executive Officer, **Versus Arthritis**

Leslie Billy, Chief Executive, **Viewpoint**

Chris Lewis, COO, **Your SimPal**