Thousands of job losses across National Health Service as Labour's cull of workforce begins

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Thousands of jobs are being slashed throughout the National Health Service (NHS) as the Labour government implements its plans for increased privatisation of health care.

Last month, Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and Health Secretary Wes Streeting announced the abolition of NHS England, which oversees public hospital and GP services, and its merger with the Department of Health and Social Care.

Aping the rhetoric of Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (Doge), Streeting claimed to be attacking "bureaucracy" and "waste". In the United States, DOGE is firing tens of thousands of federal workers as it sets out to slash £2 trillion from government spending.

Streeting claims that abolishing NHS England will free up resources for frontline services, but the elimination of staff across admin, HR, finance, communications and other support roles will impact frontline patient care.

Around half those employed by NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) will lose their jobs—equivalent to at least 9,000 jobs. But the *Guardian* has reported that "many thousands more" staff at the NHS's 42 integrated care boards (ICBs) will have their jobs axed. ICBs are regional health bodies that oversee NHS trusts, employing 25,000 people.

On top of these job cuts, ICBs have been instructed to slash their costs by 50 percent from October 2025, while local trusts have been ordered to cut "corporate costs".

Streeting claims Labour's abolition of NHS England is aimed at "democratising" the NHS and ending "the world's biggest quango", but the NHS Confederation, representing NHS Trust managers, has warned of 100,000 job cuts across the health service as a result of Labour's plans.

It reports that some trusts believe the targeted cuts could mean axing 3 to 11 percent of their total workforce—between 41,100 and 150,700 people. There are 215 trusts in the NHS employing 1.37 million workers.

Many trusts slashed tens of millions of pounds from their budgets last year as the outgoing Conservative government kept NHS spending to a minimum.

This policy is not only being maintained by Labour—its additional £26 billion to the NHS is a drop in the ocean—some of the cuts announced by local trusts are even larger this year.

An even tighter spending regime is already in place, with Labour announcing deep cuts across all government departments to boost military spending. Chancellors Rachel Reeves' Spring Statement ensured that the NHS's funding increase for 2026/27—which averaged 4 percent historically—will drop to just 1.8 per cent in real terms.

Sir Jim Mackey, outgoing interim chief executive of NHS England, is tasked with enforcing austerity and is demanding that local NHS leaders cut services to prevent a £7 billion spending deficit in the coming financial year. The NHS in England will receive £183 billion for 2025-26, but current spending plans by trusts exceed this by £6.6 billion, according to NHS England.

Most funding for NHS services in England is distributed via the ICBs, which must submit individual cost-cutting plans for government approval by the end of May. Some NHS trusts were planning to spend up to £12 million on redundancies this year, while others were looking to achieve savings through natural attrition as they are unable to afford redundancy payments on the scale required.

Savage cuts being planned across the NHS include:

• NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board (ICB) emailed thousands of NHS workers across the county urging them to consider resigning and taking redundancy under a "Mutually Agreed Resignation Scheme" (MARS). Meanwhile, the **University Hospitals Dorset Trust** has announced plans to transfer thousands of staff, including porters, estate workers, maintenance and procurement staff to private contracts. Workers are opposed to these plans and have no faith in official claims that there will be "no change" to pay, terms

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and conditions.

• **University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust** plans to cut its wages bill by £34 million per year as part of overall cuts of £67 million. Last year's cuts saved £56 million. The trust employs 11,000 people, with Unison estimating the cuts are equivalent to about 600 full-time staff.

• **Portsmouth Hospitals University Trust** and nearby **Isle of Wight Trust** are planning to cut 798 full-time equivalent roles—7 percent of their combined workforce. Board papers suggest this will save £39 million, not even half the £82 million in savings being demanded for 2025/26. The Trust proposes cutting 549 admin, HR and other support jobs at the Queen Alexandra Hospital. The Isle of Wight Trust plans 249 job losses.

• **University Hospitals Bristol and Weston Trust** has announced it will need to reduce staffing by 2 percent to meet a required minimum budget reduction of 5 percent. The trust employs more than 15,000 staff at seven hospitals and clinics in the city, with at least 300 jobs threatened. A second Bristol hospital trust, **North Bristol NHS Trust**, which runs Southmead Hospital, has announced plans to axe 211 positions to help achieve £40 million of savings in 2025/26.

• **East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust** (ESNFT), which runs Ipswich and Colchester hospitals, and West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (WSFT), which runs West Suffolk Hospital, have agreed 468 jobs cuts (3 percent of their workforce). WSFT is making the cuts after having to overspend by £20 million, stating this means making savings of £32.7 million next year.

• **Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust** (CUH), which runs Addenbrooke's Hospital has announced plans for 500 job losses among non-clinical staff, equivalent to 4 percent of its workforce. The cuts follow more than £53 million in savings last year. A Trust spokesperson revealed the newest job cuts would be needed to cut "the cost of our support functions to April 2022 levels".

• **Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust**, which runs Royal Berkshire Hospital in the city of Reading, has announced a "mutually agreed resignation scheme" to achieve "financial stability".

• **Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust** that provides a large part of NHS services across London, including Guy's hospital and St Thomas' hospital, as well as Evelina London Children, Royal Brompton and Harefield hospitals, is planning to axe 58 percent of jobs across its in-house team. *London News Online* reported, "Jobs at risk include roles such as fire safety, water quality, major projects, maintenance and minor construction work," adding that according to the Unite union, "All workers in the department will also be required to reapply for their jobs… with many of the new posts being paid at a lower rate."

Labour's onslaught against the NHS is being facilitated by the health unions, which have long opposed any coordinated fightback. At most, only local protests are being held at this or that hospital. This policy of divide-and-rule is underpinned by the trade union bureaucracy's alliance with the Labour government.

Unison, with almost half a million NHS members across Britain, is the largest health sector union. It held its annual national health conference this week, with Streeting invited as a keynote speaker. Streeting, who speaks contemptuously of the NHS as a vast "black hole" (sucking in government money), depicting its workers as "obstacles" to reform, was met by a silent protest by some delegates holding up "NHS Not For Sale" and "Vote Labour to Sell Our NHS" placards.

But he was granted a warm welcome by Unison leader Christine McAnea, who exulted: "We have finally seen the back of the Tories". Labour taking power was a "once-in-a-generation opportunity to boost our members' status and security in workplaces right across the country."

Streeting's Thatcherite policies aimed at laying the ground for privatisation were presented in favourable terms as "all moves in the right direction. And unions like ours … are demanding that ministers hold true to their promises."

She took care to avoid any mention of the staggering number of job losses being made by NHS trusts to facilitate Labour's cuts, instead proposing a minimal campaign over Labour's proposed 2.8 percent pay offer to staff.

McAnea said, "we are not looking for trouble, but if we have no choice, we will come out fighting." Her "fighting" proposal was for yet another indicative (non-binding) ballot for industrial action, "Unison will soon be asking NHS workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland how far they'd be prepared to go over this year's pay rise when it comes."

To all NHS workers, share your stories with the World Socialist Web Site and join NHS FightBack to link up with other healthcare workers in the struggle to secure high-quality healthcare for all, provided by a valued and supported workforce.

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