

Shaping the future of healthcare: the RCP at party conferences in 2025

In late September and October, the RCP darted across the country to attend Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative party conferences. In Bournemouth, Liverpool and Manchester, senior officers and policy and campaigns staff delivered a wide-ranging programme of successful events and meetings – engaging ministers, shadow ministers and parliamentarians on key RCP priorities.

These conferences are a fantastic opportunity to bring priorities and questions shared by our members and fellows directly to MPs and other influential voices in the health sector. It is an important chance to directly engage the UK's political leaders and decisionmakers in conversations about the future of healthcare, and what the RCP thinks this should look like.

Liberal Democrat conference

In late September, Dr Hilary Williams, clinical vice president, represented the RCP at a sunny Liberal Democrat conference in Bournemouth across the United Kingdom. Building on that knowledge of professional skills moves into creating accountability frameworks and efficient patient pathways – and the challenges of this are covered in this excellent dialogue.

Hilary met with Danny Chambers MP, who is a member of the party's health team. They spoke in detail about the upcoming 10 Year Workforce Plan, including what we would like to see within it and the RCP's views on physician assistants. In July, the Liberal Democrats welcomed the 10 Year Health Plan for England, so Hilary emphasised that we must ensure that the government has the right workforce to achieve the goals set out. We know that, at the moment, there is not enough staff to meet demand; fixing this is the key to delivering care sustainably. Hilary stressed that the RCP would like to see measures to support early career and the next generation of doctors, as well as measures to reform postgraduate training, included in the new workforce plan.

Hilary also met with some Liberal Democrat backbench MPs, including Marie Goldman MP, David Chadwick MP and Susan Murray MP. They discussed the NHS workforce, digital health services and health inequalities, especially around prevention and the ability of their

constituents to access services.

Our time at the conference was productive; it was clear that health is a priority area for the Liberal Democrats, and the RCP was able to engage in wide-reaching conversations relating to health, social care and the NHS.

Labour party Conference

RCP president, Professor Mumtaz Patel and Professor Tom Solomon, academic vice president, represented the RCP at a busy Labour party conference in Liverpool at the end of September. We hosted two events at the conference on social care and air quality, which gives the RCP a direct opportunity to engage with decisionmakers and shape public opinion.

Mumtaz hosted our event on social care, in collaboration with the King's Fund and Alzheimer's Society. Alongside her on the panel were Stephen Kinnock MP, minister for social care; Sarah Woolnough, the King's Fund CEO; and Corrine Mills, interim chief executive of Alzheimer's Society.

Minister Stephen Kinnock is responsible for the government's policy on social care; on the panel he spoke about the independent commission into adult social care by Baroness Louise Casey and how important it is to ensure people's access to the social care system.

Mumtaz spoke about how social care is a vital issue for the government to tackle. Issues with access impact the wider health system as a whole, exacerbating problems such as delayed hospital discharges, a shortage of capacity and the use of temporary care environments that are unfit for patient care.

The RCP hosted a joint panel event with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) on the ever-increasing public health risk of air pollution. Professor Sir Stephen Holgate, RCP special adviser for air quality, led the charge – following the publishing of RCP report, *A breath of fresh air*, in June. This groundbreaking report demonstrated the sheer scale of air pollution's health impacts; round 30,000 deaths per year in the UK are estimated to be attributed to air pollution.

Stephen was joined by councillor Susan Hinchcliffe, leader of Bradford Metropolitan District Council; Rosamund Adoo-Kissi Debrah CBE, chief executive of the Ella Roberta Foundation; and Dr Mike McKean, RCPCH vice president of policy. Each panel member shared their

understanding of how low air quality impacts people's lives and health – and expressed frustration at the lack of action so far. The RCP will continue to raise these issues and work with our partners to push for constructive solutions, in both central and local government.

At this conference, Tom and Mumtaz spoke on several roundtables, which had a range of health leaders and parliamentarians present. They represented the RCP at a British Medical Association (BMA) roundtable on workforce and the 10 Year Health Plan; a NHS Providers roundtable on the relationship between neighbourhood care and health inequalities; and a roundtable by thinktank Re:State on NHS productivity and technology.

Mumtaz met with backbench Lizzi Collinge MP, who is keen to work with the RCP closely on health inequalities. Mumtaz explained the RCP's belief that prevention is better than a cure and how we would like to see a cross-government strategy dedicated to reducing health inequalities. The government have committed to tackling the social determinants of health in a cross-government way as part of their health mission delivery board, but Mumtaz explained that we would like to find out more about the government's current work on this commitment. Lizzi Collinge agreed to champion health inequalities in parliament.

Mumtaz stated:

'I was encouraged by conversations I had with a number of Labour MPs on the importance of clinical engagement on the upcoming 10 Year Workforce Plan. I welcome the government's decision to consult on this plan, following our calls earlier this month, and we will be contributing to that process in the coming weeks. If the government is to deliver its 10 Year Health Plan and associated three shifts, a well-resourced workforce will be critical.'

Conservative party conference

In October, Mumtaz represented the RCP at the Conservative party conference in Manchester. There, she met with the shadow secretary of state for health and social care, Stuart Andrew MP, who holds a key role in holding the current health secretary, Wes Streeting MP, to account the current. They spoke in detail about the policy priorities of the RCP and how we can work with closely with the party on these.

Onwards to 2026

With party conference season now over for 2025, the RCP will continue these conversations and work to ensure that the voice of members is heard by the government and opposition parties. Throughout the year, we will work with the parliamentarians that we met to table parliamentary questions, and work with them

to ensure that the RCP's key priorities are heard within parliamentary debates.

Influencing the way that healthcare is designed and delivered is one of the RCP's three key strategic aims. As this year ends, we will continue to listen to our members and fellows, and take your priorities to the government, the NHS, our royal college partners and others.

This feature was produced for the December 2025 edition of *Commentary* magazine. You can read a [web-based version](#), which includes images.