



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Minister of State for Health (Secondary Care)

39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Our ref:

HM Coroner Anita Bhardwaj
Liverpool and the Wirral Coroner's Service
Gerard Majella Courthouse
Boundary Street
Liverpool
L5 2QD

By email:

24th March 2025

Dear Ms Bhardwaj

Thank you for the Regulation 28 report of 31 January 2025 sent to the Department of Health and Social Care about the death of Nicola Emma Owens. I am replying as the Minister with responsibility for urgent and emergency care.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Ms Owens' death and I offer my sincere condolences to their family and loved ones. The circumstances your report describes are concerning and I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

The report raises concerns regarding prolonged ambulance response times, operational pressures faced by the North West Ambulance Service and the impact of delayed social care packages on hospital capacity and ambulance handover delays.

In preparing this response, my officials have made enquiries with NHS England to ensure we adequately address your concerns. I understand that NHS England are also responding to your report.

The Government is clear that patients should receive the highest standard of service and care from the NHS. We acknowledge that urgent and emergency care performance has failed to deliver that standard in recent years and we are committed to restoring ambulance response times to the standards set out in the NHS Constitution. We have been honest about the challenges facing the NHS and we are serious about tackling the issues; however, we must be clear that there are no quick fixes.

As a first step, in the Autumn Budget, the Government announced an extra £22.6 billion in day-to-day spending in 2025/26 for the NHS compared to 2023/24. An additional £3.1bn further capital investment over 2 years will provide the highest real-terms capital budget since before 2010.

We recognise that investment alone won't be enough and are determined that it must go hand in hand with fundamental reform. On 5 December 2024, the Government published the Plan for Change (available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-change>), that set the mandate for the direction of change with clear milestones in five national missions, including building an NHS that is fit for the future.

On 30 January 2025, the Government published 'Road to recovery: the government's 2025 mandate to NHS England', that clearly set out delivery instructions for the NHS through the prioritisation of five key objectives aimed at driving reform within the NHS. Improving A&E and ambulance wait time was a prioritised objective in the mandate to specifically address the current challenges facing urgent and emergency care. On the same day NHS England published the 2025-26 planning guidance that contained the operational delivery detail for local NHS systems. The planning guidance included an implementation target for improving the average Category 2 ambulance response times to no more than 30 minutes across 2025-26, and practical actions focused on reducing avoidable ambulance dispatches and conveyances and ambulance handover delays.

The NHS will focus on delivering the following range of practical actions to improve performance in 2025/26:

- working towards delivering hospital handovers within 15 minutes, and implementing joint working arrangements that ensure that no handover takes longer than 45 minutes,
- improving ambulance 'hear and treat' service rates, including increasing the proportion of Category 2 ambulance incidents where an ambulance clinician provides advice and treatment over the phone,
- ensuring all 999 ambulance calls classified as Category 3 and 4 are clinically navigated, validated and where appropriate triaged in ambulance control centres, or in Single Points of Access.

Regarding the concern raised about delays to patient discharge from hospitals, this government will make sure that hospital departments are no longer blocked due to delayed discharges. By developing local partnership working between the NHS and social care, we will ensure we no longer have over 12,000 patients every day waiting to be discharged.

We are reforming the Better Care Fund to ensure pooled NHS and local authority funding spent on social care contributes to wider efforts to reduce emergency admissions, delayed discharges, and care home admissions. We will continue to join up health and care services by supporting care workers to safely take on further duties to deliver delegated healthcare activities, such as blood pressure checks and other healthcare interventions, so that people can receive more routine checks and care at home without needing to travel to healthcare settings.

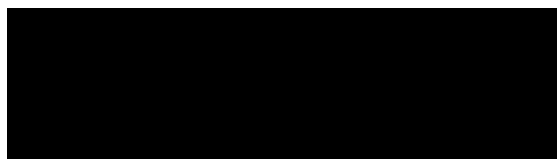
Later in the Spring, to accompany the additional investment in the NHS, the Government will publish a 10-Year Health Plan which will set out the radical reforms for the NHS. The health plan will focus on ensuring three big reform shifts in the way our health services deliver care. First, from 'hospital to community' to bring care closer to where people live. Second, from 'analogue to digital' with new technologies and digital approaches to

modernise the NHS, and third from 'sickness to prevention' so people spend less time with ill-health by preventing illnesses before they happen. The reforms will support putting the NHS on a sustainable footing so it can tackle the problems of today and the future.

In addition, we will shortly set out further actions to be taken during 2025-26 to support improvements to urgent and emergency care performance this year.

I hope this response is helpful. Thank you for bringing these concerns to my attention.

Yours sincerely,

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MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH