

To: Local authority chief executives  
Directors of adult social services  
Directors of children's services

*Richmond House  
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3 April 2012

Dear colleagues

The Health and Social Care Act has now passed into law. In less than a year's time, all the new structures will be in place, and patients and staff will start to see the improvements the new system will bring.

I am writing to you today to set out what the Act means for you.

At the heart of the reforms are two simple principles. First, patients should have more control over the care they receive. Second, those responsible for patient care – the doctors, nurses and others who work in our NHS – should have the freedom and power to lead an NHS that delivers continually improving care for its patients.

Many of you will know these have been long-standing aims of health policymakers for decades. But, in all efforts to realise them, the contribution of one part of the public sector has too often been overlooked - local government. The Health and Social Care Act puts that right, placing local government in its rightful place at the core of the health and care service.

The Health and Social Care Act explicitly supports the core principles of the NHS - care provided free at the point of use, funded from general taxation, and based on need and not ability to pay. Although it helps make the NHS genuinely locally accountable, it is only the beginning of the journey. To benefit the local communities you serve, the ambitions we want to achieve in health and social care can only be realised with the enthusiastic contribution of local government.

The Act tasks local authorities with establishing health and wellbeing boards. These boards will take on familiar roles, such as conducting needs assessments of your local areas. But they will also be the way you work with your local partners, including the NHS, to determine the strategy to meet the needs of your local area.

- For the first time since the 1970s, local authorities will have statutory responsibility for commissioning public health services. I know how some of you have been frustrated by the fragmentation of public health responsibilities, which has existed for decades. The Act puts that right, by bringing that responsibility back together – allowing you to develop holistic, integrated public health services that are more effective at tackling long-term health challenges like obesity, smoking, and alcohol misuse.

- Local authorities will help make sure their local Healthwatch is a truly effective organisation that champions the needs and wishes of patients and members of the public. In addition, through health and wellbeing boards, local Healthwatch will bring the voice of patients and the public directly to the decision-making table.

For too long, local government has been left on the sidelines when it comes to health services. The powers you had were only the powers of protest, rather than powers of participation. The Health and Social Care Act will help ensure you are no longer bystanders in the decisions that affect your local communities.

The Health and Social Care Act represents an important step that will put patients at the heart of the NHS, and deliver a clinically-led NHS. I hope you will take maximum advantage of your new powers and freedoms to ensure the NHS makes this journey in the way that best suits the needs of your local communities. I look forward to hearing of your progress.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Lansley'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

ANDREW LANSLEY CBE