



Royal College of  
General Practitioners

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To: All Clinical Commissioning Groups

**Investing general practice to improve patient care and the  
*Put patients first: Back general practice campaign***

The RCGP is concerned that a chronic lack of investment in general practice is compromising patient care across the whole NHS. I am writing to you today to urge your CCG to consider how you can help reverse declining funding for general practice and empower GPs to lead a transformation of patient care in the community.

Funding for general practice in England has reached its lowest point on record – down to just 8.5% of the NHS budget compared to 10.95% eight years ago. This has happened at a time when demand for GP services has risen rapidly – from 300m consultations in 2008 to an estimated 340m today. The RCGP, in partnership with the National Association of Patient Participation, has launched the [Put patients first: Back general practice](#) campaign to highlight the impact that this funding squeeze is having on patients and the NHS as a whole. We're campaigning for the share of the NHS budget spent on general practice to be increased to 11% by 2017.

As we approach a new financial year, CCGs will have a vital opportunity to provide general practice with the boost in resources it needs to drive improvements in patient care. Two upcoming initiatives – the Better Care Fund and the implementation of a 'named clinician' for vulnerable older people – are mechanisms through which CCGs can invest in practices' ability to deliver enhanced care to patients in the community.

We would like to hear about how you are planning to use these funding streams and whether your current plans involve investing in services provided by general practice and the vital services that wrap around it in the community. We have set up a short [online survey](#) or alternatively you can send us your views via email to [policy@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:policy@rcgp.org.uk).

In turn, the RCGP is opening up a conversation with our members across the country – including through our local faculties – asking them to tell us what they are doing on the ground to develop proposals in relation to these funding streams, and to feed in to us ideas and examples of where local investment in primary care has had helped achieve positive outcomes for patients. In this way we hope to build up a bank of knowledge about what does and doesn't work in terms of investment in general practice, which we would then like to share with CCGs – so please watch this space.

## **The Better Care fund**

Your CCG may already be in the process of developing plans with your Health and Wellbeing Board for use of the £3.8bn Better Care Fund (formerly the Integration Transformation Fund) which was announced by the Government in the June 2013 spending round.

It is vital that CCGs and Health and Wellbeing Boards look at how general practice and other wrap around services in the community can deliver improvements using the Better Care Fund. Whilst some of the Better Care Fund will be spent supporting adult social care services, NHS England has explicitly assured RCGP that CCGs and Health and Wellbeing Boards will be able to use money from the Fund to commission new services from general practice.

General practice can and should play a prominent role in several of the 'national conditions' set out in NHS England's planning guidance<sup>1</sup> on the fund, namely:

- Provision, as part of agreed local plans, of 7-day services in health and social care to support patients being discharged and prevent unnecessary admissions at weekends
- Ensuring a joint approach to assessments and care planning and ensure that, where funding is used for integrated packages of care, there will be an accountable professional
- Better data sharing between health and social care, based on the NHS number

*We would like to hear from you about the following:*

- *Do your current plans for the Better Care Fund involve investment in services provided by general practice?*
- *Does your CCG have any concerns about using money from the Better Care Fund to support general practice?*
- *What are the barriers, if any, to investing in services provided by general practice via the Better Care Fund?*

## **The £5 per patient allocation to enable 'accountable GPs' to secure improved services for vulnerable older people**

As you will be aware, the Government has announced proposals for patients over the age of 75 to be assigned an 'accountable GP' to proactively manage their care outside hospital. GPs already play a crucial role in working with vulnerable older people to plan their care, and in principle RCGP supports the intention behind these plans. However, with general practice currently struggling to cope with rising demand and declining resources, we believe it will be vital that funding is set aside to support GPs and others to deliver the Government's aspirations in this area.

We were pleased, therefore, that NHS England has recently stated in its December 2013 board meeting papers that CCGs will be asked to set aside funding – around £5

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<sup>1</sup> Developing Plans for the Better Care Fund: <http://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/bcf-plann-guid.pdf>

per head of the population in their area – to be spent on commissioning additional services which practices, individually or collectively, have identified will further support the accountable GP in improving quality of care for older people. Successfully delivering this initiative will require CCGs to work closely with their local practices, who will be responsible for coming forward to bid for funding.

*We would like to hear from you about the following:*

- What is your CCG doing to engage practices and encourage them to come forward with ideas to support the introduction of an 'accountable GP' for patients over 75?*
- Do you feel confident that practices will be well placed to identify potential means of support that will help them deliver this initiative?*

### **The Prime Minister's £50m Challenge Fund**

In addition to the two initiatives described above, the Government's 'Challenge Fund' was announced in October last year and will provide £50m of funding with the aim of stimulating innovative ways of providing primary care services. Practices are currently being invited to bid to become pilot sites as part of this initiative.

We would encourage CCGs to consider what support they can give to practices in their area to take up this opportunity.

- We would like to hear about whether you are aware of local practices making use of this funding and if so, how this relates to your CCG's own commissioning plans*

We understand that, of course, resources are tight across the NHS and CCGs are facing the difficult challenge of ensuring proper investment in a range of services whilst balancing an extremely tight budget. In the context of an ageing population with patients increasingly living with multiple long term conditions, we believe there is a strong case for investing in the generalist skills that GPs and their teams provide. We are campaigning for a wider shift of investment towards the front line of care in the community to help reduce the burden on hospitals and the NHS as a whole.

We hope very much that you will give this issue your consideration. I would be hugely grateful if your CCG could find the time to engage with our campaign (further details of which can be found in our [Campaign Briefing](#)) and respond to some or all of the queries above.

Kind regards,



**Dr Maureen Baker CBE DM FRCGP**  
**Chair of Council**