

The future of health policy is local?

Making an impact in a Burnham Government

In July, Andy Burnham MP became the UK's seventh Prime Minister since 2016 and, shortly afterwards, he implemented a Cabinet reshuffle, with Yvette Cooper MP handed the health and care portfolio.

As with any change in leadership in government, a flurry of discussion follows on what their priorities will be, and though health is always at the top of the list, there are many issues in health and social care that draw politicians' attention. For those of us in the nutrition world, the challenge is to show how investing in good nutritional care can support their health and care goals.

A new vision for social care

Both Burnham and Cooper have made clear that adult social care is an area where the political focus will increase. Cooper identified taking forward social care plans as one of her first priorities upon her appointment as Health and Social Care Secretary.

As Health Secretary in 2010, the Prime Minister published proposals for a National Care Service and has argued that social care should have equivalent status to the NHS.

Maternity safety

Maternity safety will command immediate attention, given the Independent National Maternity and Neonatal Investigation published its final report in June 2026 and concluded that the system was not consistently delivering safe, high-quality and compassionate care to women and babies.

The Health Secretary, announced maternity and neonatal safety as her most immediate NHS delivery priority when she was appointed.

Cancer care may see particular political focus

As a Health Minister when the first NHS Cancer Plan was introduced, the new Health Secretary has a long-standing connection to improving cancer care in the UK. Since then, she has argued locally for changes to cancer services in Yorkshire, as her home region, highlighting neighbourhood health centres, more GP appointments, brain-cancer research and hospice support.

This focus could help to drive through the development of more detail in the implementation of the Cancer Plan. Greater clarity on diagnostic capacity, workforce, treatment pathways, inequalities, as well as funding requirements are key areas the Health Secretary may face pressure to deliver.

Increased devolution vs. central control – how to deliver change and impact in a Burnham/Cooper health system

The NHS continues to experience almost perpetual reorganisation, with the new Health Bill introduced in May 2026, bringing further changes to NHS structures and accountability, including stronger ministerial powers, and the dissolution of NHS England.

The Bill's provisions give the Secretary of State stronger powers to direct ICBs and intervene in NHS organisations, and introduces representation from mayoral strategic authorities in ICB governance.

Greater Manchester is a leading example of health devolution and population-health reform, bringing together health, social care, public health and wider public services under stronger local and regional leadership.

While the Bill contains a host of centralising provisions, there is likely to be a move from the Prime Minister and Health Secretary to pursue more devolution within existing proposals.

The Manchester model also points towards a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention, bringing partners together to deliver local impact and health improvement.

This should include greater emphasis on GPs, district nurses, health visitors, social care professionals, physiotherapists, hospital consultants, dietitians and patients themselves working together with wider local partners to identify local priorities and needs, tackle inequalities and integrate services.

A stronger voice for nutritional care

Both the Ten-Year Health Plan and the Cancer Plan have prevention and early intervention at their core, yet there is little direct mention of the role of nutritional care in supporting better patient outcomes.

With a stronger role for health colleagues across each local system, there is a real opportunity for dietitians to be involved in shaping their local health services and promoting the value of nutritional care to improve health outcomes and support a sustainable health system.



About the British Specialist Nutrition Association

BSNA is the trade association representing the manufacturers of products designed to meet the particular nutritional needs of individuals; these include specialist products for infants and young children (including infant formula, follow-on formula, young child formula and complementary weaning foods), medical nutrition products for diseases, disorders and medical conditions, including oral nutritional supplements, enteral tube feeding and parenteral nutrition, as well as companies who aseptically compound chemotherapy, parenteral nutrition and CIVAS.