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Hospices Face Funding Crisis Amid Short-Term Government Fixes

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The hospice sector, a cornerstone of compassionate end-of-life care, is grappling with a deepening financial crisis that demands a robust, long-term funding strategy rather than temporary handouts. Stephen Kinnock, Labour's Minister of State for Health and Social Care, recently acknowledged this pressing need during a visit to Wigan & Leigh Hospice in Greater Manchester. However, the government's latest response, a £75 million package

shared among 170 hospices nationwide, has been met with scepticism, as it falls short of addressing the systemic shortfall strangling the sector.

Hospices, unlike the NHS, are not wholly state-funded. They rely heavily on charitable donations, which account for roughly two-thirds of their income. Last financial year, the sector faced a £60 million deficit, a gap that continues to widen as demand for palliative care surges and operational costs soar. The £75 million injection, which follows a £25 million package in February, offers temporary relief but does little to secure the future of these vital institutions. At Wigan & Leigh Hospice, for instance, the allocated £500,000 will fund essential repairs, including a leaking roof, a new heating system, and a memory garden. Yet, as Jo Carby, the hospice's chief executive, stated in a recent interview, "This is not enough. We need a sustainable solution, not stopgaps."

The human impact of this funding crisis is profound. Geoff Crook, 68, who received care at Wigan & Leigh Hospice alongside his late wife Margaret, spoke movingly of the support they received in her final days. "I don't think we would have coped without this place," he said. His story underscores the critical role hospices play in communities, particularly in regions like the North West, where 23,000 people rely on these services annually. Yet, as Carby pointed out, it is increasingly unfair to expect local communities, already stretched thin, to bear the financial burden of keeping hospices afloat.

Kinnock has pledged to negotiate increased funding for palliative care as part of the government's three-year spending review. "I want a long-term plan to take us through to the end of this parliament," he said during his visit. He insisted that his department is committed to avoiding "last-minute scrambles" and "sticking plaster" solutions. However, these assurances ring hollow when set against the backdrop of a Labour government that has yet to demonstrate a clear strategy for tackling the hospice sector's structural challenges. Critics argue that such promises, while well-intentioned, lack the urgency and ambition needed to safeguard these essential services.

The hospice sector's reliance on public generosity is no longer sustainable. With rising costs and growing demand, the government must prioritise a funding model that ensures stability and dignity for patients and their families. Short-term cash injections may keep the lights on for now, but without a bold, forward-thinking plan, the future of hospice care hangs in the balance.