

UK Government and Wes Streeting Face NHS Tests Amid Doctor Strikes

July 26, 2025

— Categories: Politics & Government



The UK government, led by Health Secretary Wes Streeting, is under intense pressure as resident doctors in England begin a five-day strike over pay restoration. The strike, affecting up to 50,000 doctors, marks a critical test for the National Health Service (NHS) reform agenda under the Labour administration.

The government has dismissed the industrial action as unaffordable and unjustified, noting that junior doctors have already received pay rises between 22 and 28.9 per cent over the past three years. Ministers warn that the continued disruption will hinder progress in tackling NHS backlogs and delay patient care. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has also urged doctors to reconsider their stance, framing the strike as a barrier to meaningful reform.

Wes Streeting has characterised the strike as “holding the country to ransom,” arguing it undermines efforts to stabilise NHS services and restore public confidence. NHS England is working to mitigate the impact by prioritising emergency and urgent care, but significant disruption is expected across hospitals and GP services.

Streeting recently unveiled a “back-to-basics” strategy to address spiralling NHS overspending, reform primary care, and accelerate improvements in emergency services. The 2025 government mandate sets out priorities for redirecting funding towards frontline delivery and efficiency. In a major move earlier this year, the government announced the abolition of NHS England as an executive body, a decision Streeting praised as a necessary step to end wasteful bureaucracy and put the service under “democratic control”.

The new ten-year NHS reform plan, released in July 2025, centres on shifting services from hospitals to community-based care, expanding digital and artificial intelligence (AI) tools, and promoting preventative health measures. Proposals include integration between GP surgeries and hospitals, giving local leaders more authority to tailor care provision.

Meanwhile, rising concerns over NHS maternity care have triggered a national investigation. Maternal death rates have increased from 9.16 to 12.67 per 100,000 births, with Black women facing disproportionately higher risks. Ten NHS trusts are being scrutinised, amid accusations of poor oversight and racial disparities. Clinical negligence in maternity care has already cost over £30 billion in litigation, with more than half of future claims expected to stem from the sector.

From a centre-right perspective, Streeting's focus on financial control, performance-driven leadership, and system accountability reflects a pragmatic approach to public sector reform. While strikes remain politically and operationally challenging, the government insists that restoring discipline and efficiency to the NHS is vital to safeguarding its long-term future.