

# Revealed: London NHS chiefs to axe enough beds to fill a hospital in battle to plug £1bn black hole

- [Ross Lydall](#)
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Enough beds to fill an entire hospital could be shut under new plans to plug a massive black hole in the finances of London's NHS, the Evening Standard can reveal.

Health chiefs want to axe "500 acute beds" across north-west London after claiming that 30 per cent of patients in hospital do not need to be treated there. Instead, care is to be provided in the "least acute setting appropriate", either at home or in a community or GP clinic, to prevent a £1 billion overspend in health and social care in five years.

The plans today sparked concern from patient groups with the belief that they were quietly submitted while attention was focused on the mayoral elections.

Graham Hawkes, chief executive of Healthwatch Hillingdon, said it backed the aim of delivering better care to an ageing population but feared the impact of closing 500 beds.

"We understand that this will not just be general hospital beds, but include reductions in beds for treating acute mental health patients," he said.

"As we are currently seeing, hospitals across north-west London are operating under extreme pressure, with an unprecedented number of people attending A&Es, with current bed capacity already maximised.

"We are therefore sceptical that providing more services in the community and delivering care closer to patients' homes will alleviate the need for these 500 acute beds, given the forecasted population growth in north-west London."

The proposals — drawn up to comply with NHS England chief executive Simon Stevens's Five Year Forward View — are being led by Ealing clinical commissioning group boss Dr Mohini Parmar, Imperial College Healthcare chief executive Dr Tracey Batten and Brent council chief executive Carolyn Downs.

The NW London Sustainability and Transformation Plan, which was submitted to NHS England last month, states under "emerging delivery areas": "Plans to reduce 500 acute beds."

The plans will directly affect 2.1 million people living in eight boroughs, from Westminster to Hillingdon. The area has already seen the closure of two A&Es and a maternity unit under a separate shake-up, which continues next month with the closure of the paediatric department at Ealing hospital.

A spokeswoman for the North-West London strategy and transformation team said: “A hospital is not always the best place to treat people.

“Our ambition in north-west London is to provide the right care in the right place and the NHS and local authorities are working closely together to provide more care closer to home, as well as to take advantages of developments in care that mean people don’t always require lengthy hospital stays.

“This is a long-term aim and no beds would be removed from hospitals until alternative services were in place.