

12.2B Into the twenty-first century

The welfare state

The new labour government, led by Clement Atlee, kept its promise: within the next few years, they put many of Beveridge's reforms into practice:

- The National Health Service (NHS) was set up in 1948 to provide health care for everyone. This made all medical treatment – doctors, hospitals, ambulances, dentists and opticians – free to all who wanted it.
- A weekly family allowance payment was introduced to help with childcare costs.
- The very poor received financial help or 'benefits'.
- The school leaving age was raised to 15 to give a greater chance of a decent education, and more free university places were created.
- The government's programme of 'slum clearance' continued as large areas of poor-quality housing were pulled down and new homes were built. Twelve new towns were created and by 1948, 280,000 council homes were being built each year.

Fact

The NHS scheme was originally opposed by doctors who didn't want to come under government control. Many felt that they would see a decline in their income because they could no longer charge what they wanted for their services. In a survey of around 45,500 doctors, nearly 41,000 didn't want a National Health Service! However, Aneurin Bevan, the Minister of Health, won them over by promising them a salary and allowing them to treat private patients as well.

Development of the NHS

Aneurin Bevan was the Minister of Health appointed by the government to introduce the NHS. And almost immediately, the NHS made an enormous impact. Up until 1948, around eight million people had never seen a doctor because they couldn't afford to. Now everyone could get free medical treatment and medicines.

It seems that Bevan's words hit home with health care providers – women's needs became a priority and they are now four times more likely to consult a doctor

SOURCE D From a speech by Aneurin Bevan in 1946:

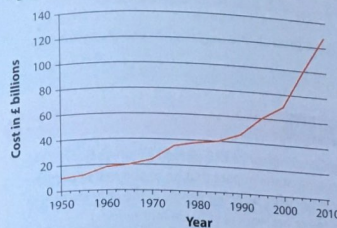
A person ought not to be stopped from seeking medical assistance by the anxiety of doctors' bills ... medical treatment should be made available to treat rich and poor alike in accordance with medical need and no other criteria. Worry about money in a time of sickness is a serious hindrance to recovery apart from its unnecessary cruelty. Records show that it is the mother in the average family who suffers most from the absence of a full health service. In trying to balance her budget she puts her own needs last.

SOURCE E From an interview with Frederick Rebman, speaking in 2004, remembering the introduction of the NHS:

We were sorry to see Churchill voted out – he was our war leader, but he never promised to give the new ideas a go. The Labour Party did you see, and they publicised this in all the papers ... servicemen like me expected so much after the war, perhaps Utopia, and the welfare state seemed to be a good start. I didn't mind paying a bit more of my salary to know that a doctor or a dentist was there if I needed them. I felt it was worth it, that the government cared about us a bit more I suppose. I think there was a bit of a rush when the NHS first started. There were stories of people going and getting whole new sets of teeth, new glasses, even wigs. Perhaps they'd have struggled on before with their short-sightedness or their painful teeth, but now they didn't have to.

than men. Life expectancy for women has risen from 66 to 83 since 1948, and for men the figure has risen from 64 to 79. However, even in these modern times, your life expectancy can be affected by your wealth and living conditions. For example, in 2014, life expectancy for newborn baby boys was highest in the wealthy London areas of Kensington and Chelsea (83.3 years) and lowest in Blackpool (74.7 years), where there is far less wealth.

SOURCE F The cost of the NHS, 1950–2010



Costs of the welfare state

Of course, this all cost money. All workers had to pay for the NHS service through taxation, and over the years, the cost of welfare state services like the NHS rocketed. In fact, the NHS did not stay totally free for long. Working people today have to pay for doctors' prescriptions and dental treatment, for example, but the NHS ensures that no one is deprived of services such as family planning, physiotherapy, child care, cancer screening, asthma clinics and minor surgery simply because they can't afford it.

Healthcare in the twenty-first century

The NHS is rarely out of the news, mainly due to the fact that it has problems: waiting lists seem to be getting longer and doctors and nurses are overworked. There is rarely a month that goes by without some big media scandal about 'dirty wards', 'crumbling hospitals' or 'nurses doing long hours', or a news headline such as 'Doctors strike in UK-wide protest over pensions'. The main problem, of course, is money. Modern drugs are very expensive and modern medicine means that people are living longer – so there are more elderly people than ever before, and older people tend to use the services of the NHS more than younger people. The NHS has always been, and should continue to be, a really hot topic in British society.

The quest to improve medical treatments and public health continues today. Healthy eating campaigns and new laws try to protect Britain's citizens and prevent them from needing expensive medical care in the future. Tobacco advertising, for example, was banned in 2005 and in 2007 a smoking ban made it illegal to smoke in all enclosed public places. In 2015, drivers in England were banned from smoking in cars while carrying children as passengers.

Initiatives such as checking for the early signs of cancer, understanding how to spot (and deal with) a potential stroke victim, and trying to encourage people to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day are all aimed at making Britain healthier. In 2016, the British government unveiled plans to introduce a 'sugar tax', adding an additional cost to the price of high-sugar drinks, particularly fizzy drinks.

Technological breakthroughs and developments will also continue to improve the health and wellbeing of people. 'Digital therapy', for example, is designed for patients who need at-home care or who can't travel to a doctor's surgery or hospital. It is hoped that, in the future, mobile technology, combined with artificial intelligence (AI), will provide patients with a daily to-do list and a tracker for diet and exercise, based on results provided from patient scans.

Work

- 1 How did Beveridge and the Labour government win doctors over to accept the NHS?
- 2 Read **Source D**.
 - a Who was Aneurin Bevan?
 - b What point does he make about women in his speech?
- 3 Read **Source E**.
 - a According to the source, why did the Labour Party win the election in 1945?
 - b Why do you think people rushed out to get 'whole new sets of teeth, new glasses, even wigs' when the NHS first started?
- 4 Why do you think the NHS is still such a controversial topic today?

Practice Question

Have governments been the main factor in the development of public health?

16 marks
SPaG: 4 marks

Study Tip

Write about two more factors, for example, the role of individuals and religion. Refer to earlier periods in your answer.