

HEALTH AND LIFE SCIENCES

MACRO ANALYSIS

Despite the brief interruption of a heckler, there will be sighs of relief after today's launch of Labour's manifesto. As predicted there were no surprises and many of the big policies had been briefed well in advance. What it demonstrates is quite how serious Sir Keir is about winning the election and reassuring the swing voters he needs for a healthy majority.

The five 'missions' are padded out a little but the focus is undeniably one of economic growth and reassurance that Labour can be trusted on the economy. Will everyone be happy with the manifesto? Well no, there are already grumblings on the left of the party that it's not radical enough. But as Sir Keir made abundantly clear in the Sky News debate last night – his priority is country not party, and today's manifesto is a clear reflection of this mantra.

Jennifer Gerber, Senior Political Advisor, WA and former Labour Special Advisor

POLICY ANALYSIS

While we have some positive details on the beginning of the innovation pathway and steps that will be taken to start fixing the NHS at the coalface, it's the bits in between that remain in a 'wait to shape' status. Reaffirmation of an NHS Innovation and Adoption strategy, and a Regulatory Innovation Office, will give hope to industry that a Labour government will create opportunities to fix the many access and reimbursement challenges. But will Streeting have the money, levers and powers needed to make the changes needed? Expect a post-election strengthening of the hand of the DHSC, and a need to go in hard with the Treasury to achieve these ambitions.

Nathaniel, a terminally ill cancer patient, was one of four speakers who introduced Keir Starmer in this morning's manifesto launch event. It was a stark and emotional reminder of the real-life impact of long waiting lists and highlighted the Labour Party's desire to focus on healthcare as a key election battleground.

As with other sectors, the manifesto's commitments on healthcare come as no surprise. They mirror the policies and priorities that we have heard from Keir Starmer and Wes Streeting in recent months. Following 30 pages of scene setting on the dire fiscal situation that the Labour Party would be inheriting, the manifesto is clear that on the NHS, reform, alongside limited investment, will be needed to tackle growing waiting lists and the workforce crisis. We have heard this time and again from Streeting.

Where there is investment, it is fully costed and funded, an ironclad rule that Labour has applied to each policy in the manifesto. The commitment to deliver 40,000 more appointments every week, which Starmer has driven as a key message to voters in the campaign, will be paid for by closing non-dom tax loopholes and cracking down on tax avoidance.

A desire to take a preventative approach to healthcare and better management of long-term conditions features strongly in the manifesto, which the party aims to achieve through better leveraging community care and transforming diagnostic services. The party would rely heavily on technology and AI to achieve the latter.

UK life sciences is one of just three sectors called out as a “great British industry”, with the manifesto reaffirming commitments set out earlier this year in its ‘Prescription for Growth - Plan for the Life Sciences’.

This includes the creation of a Regulatory Innovation Office (RIO), to support cross-sector regulators -including the MHRA - to speed up timelines and update regulation. It is framed as both a short-term need to fix challenges in the regulatory process, and a longer-term incentive measure to attract UK innovation. The party also has ambitions to streamline the rest of the medicines pathway, aiming to set out a plan for this through an ‘NHS Innovation and Adoption Strategy’.

Overall, a pro-business sentiment features strongly throughout the manifesto, in an attempt to solidify the Labour party’s mission to take the “Party of Business” title from the Conservatives. How Labour policy evolves in life sciences, and the role that life sciences leaders play in both the new Industrial Strategy Council and a boosted Life Sciences Council, will be a key focus in the early days of a potential Labour Government.

To discuss WA’s manifesto analysis and what it means for your organisation, please email **Dean Sowman**, Head of Health at deansowman@wacomms.co.uk.

HEADLINE POLICY ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Labour Party manifesto includes commitments to:

- Deliver on the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan and ensure the publication of regular and independent workforce planning across health and social care.
- Support the NHS to become a ‘Neighbourhood Health Service’, through more GP appointments,
- Increased powers for pharmacists to prescribe and a ‘Neighbourhood Health Centre’ trial to bring multi-disciplinary healthcare professionals under one roof.
- Deliver a reduction in smoking rates through all hospitals integrating an ‘opt-out’ of smoking cessation services for routine care, and implementing the smoking ban for the next generation.
- Harness the opportunities of data and artificial intelligence to speed up and improve the accuracy of diagnostics. Double the number of CT and MRI scanners.
- Establish a Regulatory Innovation Office (RIO) and an NHS Innovation and Adoption Strategy to speed up access to medicines.

WA ADVISORY BOARD ANALYSIS

There is no illusion about how challenging the health brief will be for an incoming government. Wes Streeting has been clear in demonstrating that he will take bold steps and make the tough decisions in reforming the health service so it can meet the needs of patients. Cutting waiting times is a key plank in the manifesto which also talks a lot about innovation in health and giving patients more choice – a clear nod to the New Labour days of Tony Blair.

Jennifer Gerber, Senior Political Advisor, WA Communications and former Labour Special Advisor

For a Labour Manifesto, this is relatively cautious. A good set of aspirations and clear direction on data, diagnostics and technology, but less detail in areas like mental health and women’s health than we saw in the Conservative manifesto, and more detail is clearly there to be thrashed out on the role of the private sector. The real battles over the future of funding and the wider system are all to come.

Sir Philip Rutnam, Chair of the Advisory Board, WA Communications

The relationship between Starmer, Streeting and Reeves is complex. In opposition, Streeting has been the star of the shadow cabinet, a brilliant interviewee and admired by the media for his focus on 'reform'. Starmer and Reeves share his enthusiasm for using the private sector to meet the capacity crisis, but are more sceptical about a much wider role. Although a Blairite reformer, Streeting knows he'll need additional cash beyond that raised by the non-dom tax. Reeves may not be in a position to provide him with much in the opening years. Streeting has allies in Starmer's team, and that will give him more leverage over Number 10 compared with most cabinet ministers.

Steve Richards, Senior Adviser, WA Communications