

Dear MLAs,

Further to my email on 16 April referencing the BMA's previous input into the GP Access inquiry, and when the BMA announced that the contract negotiations with DoH had stalled and that it was the intention to ask GPs to vote in a referendum, today we can confirm that GPs in Northern Ireland have voted overwhelmingly (99.6%) to reject the 25/26 General Medical Services (GMS) contract offered by the Department of Health.

The online referendum was open to GPs and GP registrars from across Northern Ireland and took place from 1 May to 11 May.

Question: Do you accept or reject this offer on the 2025/26 GMS contract from the Department of Health?		
	Number of responses	Percentage
ACCEPT	6	0.4%
REJECT	1375	99.6%
Turnout	1381 votes received – 65% turnout based on March 24 BSO workforce data	

The result is clear. GPs in Northern Ireland do not think this offer is enough to stabilise or save general practice in NI.

In our negotiations, we asked the Department for a credible financial investment in general practice, one that will help stabilise the service, keep GPs in post and stem the tide of contract handbacks risking practices throughout Northern Ireland, but the Department have not listened.

What they have offered is an additional £1million into core funding, a paltry additional 0.01% of a health and social care budget of £8.39bn, for a service that delivers 200,000 consultations a week. The £5 million offered for indemnity will not fully cover the costs GPs incur and only covers to GP partners. The contribution of £3.5m to increased national insurance costs may not be enough to cover the actual cost to GPs.

Alongside the offer, the Department have issued GPs with a set of access proposals which we do not believe will create a single extra appointment for patients. What they will create is more bureaucracy for GP surgeries, taking staff away from dealing directly with patient queries. GPs agreed to work with the Department on access, to try and get a better understanding on what data they have on access issues, but they refused to agree to work collaboratively with us to co-produce a set of proposals that would actually help GPs and patients.

The BMA are asking for the Minister and the Department to come back to the negotiating table with a credible offer. Dr Frances O'Hagan has written to the Minister today (14 May) to seek an urgent meeting to work together on a solution. GPs are as frustrated as patients are

with the level of access they can provide with the current level of funding in Northern Ireland, which remains the lowest in the UK.

As part of the referendum, we also asked GPs if they were willing to take further, collective action if a better offer was not presented, and 89% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to do this. We will continue to engage and consult with GPs as this process progresses.

Best wishes,  
Phil

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