



Incisive Health
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24 for 24

Incisive Health's 24
Prospective Parliamentary
Candidates to watch on
health in 2024

From championing particular diseases to exposing system shortfalls, every parliament sees MPs who make the political weather on health. The 2024 intake will be no different. With the largest turnover of MPs since 2010 expected, the General Election will see the arrival of many new personalities. Newly elected parliamentarians will bring their own priorities and be determined to make their mark. Many will have prior experience on health issues to draw on. We profile 24 potential members of the class of '24, who will shape the debate on health and care in years to come.



Heidi Alexander Labour

Constituency:
Swindon South
(boundary change)

Incumbent:
Sir Robert
Buckland,
Conservative

Majority:
6,600

Having previously served as Shadow Health Secretary 2015-16, Heidi Alexander will be well-known to many health stakeholders. Disillusioned with Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, Alexander stood down from Parliament to serve as Deputy Mayor of London for Transport under Sadiq Khan, and was tasked with maintaining London transport during the COVID-19.

Now seeking election in the newly established seat in her native Swindon – precisely the sort of seat that Labour must win if it is to form a government. Should Alexander be elected, she could be expected to rise up the ministerial ranks relatively quickly, although she will no doubt draw on her experience of health during any time on the backbenches. If she does re-join the frontbench, she will hope for a better experience than last time, when she described the Shadow Cabinet as being “*entirely dysfunctional.*”



Josh Babarinde Liberal Democrat

Josh Babarinde is hoping to win Eastbourne, a seat that typically swings between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives. To do so, he must overturn a moderate majority, which polls and by-elections suggest is well within reach.

Babarinde has experience working on social impact projects across education, tech, the arts and health. Early in his career, he worked as policy assistant at the African Health Policy Network. During the pandemic, Babarinde volunteered as a COVID-19 vaccinator. Babarinde is a Forbes 30 Under 30 Entrepreneur, awarded for the tech repair company he founded, which is staffed by young ex-offenders and at-risk youth. Expect him to be a proponent of the use of social enterprises to support the public sector.

Constituency:
Eastbourne

Incumbent:
Caroline Ansell,
Conservative

Majority:
4,300



Rupert Harrison Conservative

Constituency:

Bicester and Woodstock (new constituency, no incumbent)

Few advisors were more influential in shaping the economic policies of David Cameron and George Osborne than Rupert Harrison, who now seeks to make the leap to frontline politics as Conservative candidate for the new constituency of Bicester and Woodstock. It should be a safe Conservative seat, but recent polls suggest that a Liberal Democrats upset win could be on the cards.

Following his time at the Treasury, Harrison combined a lucrative career at BlackRock with occasional media commentary (notably for his old boss at the Evening Standard). If he does get elected, many have Harrison marked as a future leadership candidate. He has called for *“an ever-stronger focus on value for money and productivity”* in the NHS and described data suggesting a post-pandemic decline in health service productivity as *“extraordinary and concerning.”*



Simon Opher Labour

A GP of 30 years with special interests in eye care and mental health, Simon Opher has served as Chair of Stroud Locality NHS, a campaigning group based in the constituency. Opher believes that the solution to health challenges *“isn't medical, it is political”* and says that is why he is standing as an MP.

Opher was awarded an MBE for his work on social prescribing and helped to organise and deliver the local Stroud COVID vaccination service. Labour needs to win seats such as Stroud if it is to have any chance of forming a government. If he succeeds, Opher will provide another clinical voice in Parliament.

Constituency:

Stroud

Incumbent:

Siobhan Baillie,
Conservative

Majority:

3,800



Primesh Patel Labour

This seat is a good litmus test; if Patel wins, then Keir Starmer will be headed for number 10.

Constituency:

Harrow East

Incumbent:

Bob Blackman,
Conservative

Majority:

8,200

Primesh Patel has a long history of working in the NHS, saying that when he started work at the Royal Bolton Hospital after sixth form *“it was only meant to be a short Summer job but the health service quickly became my passion”*. He has worked in the health and social care sector for coming up to two decades, currently for health regulator, the Care Quality Commission. He has also served as a councillor and is an active trade unionist. Expect him to draw on his time in the NHS if he is elected.



Nic Puntis Conservative

Nic Puntis is hoping to maintain the Conservative majority in Chippenham, taking the baton from Cabinet Minister Michelle Donelan, who will instead fight the new parliamentary constituency of Melksham and Devizes.

An estate agent by trade, Puntis began to engage in health campaigning when he was diagnosed with a rare cancer, and his wife with breast cancer. Thankfully they are both now cancer free, but Puntis has continued to be an advocate for rare cancers, being Chair of the Board of Trustees for GIST Cancer UK and board member of Cancer 52.

Constituency:

Chippenham

Incumbent:

Michelle Donelan,
Conservative

Majority:

11,300



Joe Robertson Conservative

Constituency:

Isle of Wight East
(new constituency,
no incumbent)

Barring an electoral wipeout for the Conservatives, Joe Robertson is set to become the MP for the new constituency of Isle of Wight East. A solicitor with expertise in the health sector, Robertson works for Dementia UK, advising on legal, governance and regulatory matters. A former leader of the island's Conservative group of councillors, he has been vocal in calling for better travel support for islanders needing healthcare.

Robertson stood in the safe Labour seat of Erith and Thamesmead in 2019 against Labour's Abena Oppong-Asare, the current Shadow Minister for Women's Health and Mental Health.



Alex Ballinger Labour

Constituency:

Halesowen (new boundaries)

Incumbent:

James Morris, Conservative

Majority:

12,000

If Alex Ballinger overturns a Conservative majority in the tens of thousands to win Halesowen, a seat which has been subjected to boundary changes, then we will be in landslide territory. If he is successful, he can be expected to be a keen advocate for action on mental health. He is CEO of St Germain's Wellbeing, a charity providing community based mental health support for people suffering anxiety and depression across Birmingham and the Black Country.

Ballinger will also draw on his experiences in the Royal Marines and the Civil Service, where he focused on humanitarian issues, including leading aid programmes in Northwest Pakistan and the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.



Juliet Campbell Labour

Juliet Campbell will need to overturn a majority of 5,300 to win her hometown seat of Broxtowe, which has been Conservative since Anna Soubry first won the seat in 2010.

If successful, Campbell is likely to draw on more than 15 years of experience working in public health, covering issues such as teenage pregnancy, school health, tuberculosis and carers engagement. Campbell is no stranger to difficult decisions, having sat on the NHS Independent Funding Review Panel for NHS Greenwich. She also served as a patient voice representative on a panel for NHS England (London).

Constituency:

Broxtowe

Incumbent:

Darren Henry, Conservative

Majority:

5,300



Allison Gardner Labour

Constituency:

Stoke-on-Trent
South

Incumbent:

Jack Brereton,
Conservative

Majority:

11,300

Should Allison Gardner take Stoke-on-Trent South, an iconic red wall seat, then it will be a sign that Labour is destined for a sizeable majority. Although she faces a steep challenge in overturning a majority a majority in the tens of thousands, it was only in 2017 that the Conservatives won the constituency for the first time in 82 years.

Should she be elected, Gardner will be an expert voice on AI and the adoption of innovation more generally. She is currently a Senior Scientific Research Fellow at NICE, data science academic at Keele University and Co-Founder of Women Leading in AI. Accolades include being listed as a 'Most Influential Women in UK Tech' by Computer Weekly and being named as one of the '100 Brilliant Women in AI Ethics' by Women in AI Ethics. She describes her priorities for health as including improving access to GPs and dentistry, and better mental health care.

Mattie Heaven Conservative



Constituency:

Coventry South

Incumbent:

Zarah Sultana,
Labour

Majority:

400

Given the current political context, it would be a major shock if Mattie Heaven succeeded in overturning Zarah Sultana's Labour slim majority in Coventry South. Should she defy the odds, Heaven has described one of her missions as being to: "*address the health effects of poor air quality on people whose health is most impacted by air pollution*". A councillor in Coventry, she is also a trustee for MIND Coventry and Warwickshire.



Chandra Kanneganti Conservative

Constituency:

Stoke-on-Trent
Central

Incumbent:

Jo Gideon,
Conservative

Majority:

700

Part of the 'red wall', Stoke-on-Trent Central swung to the Conservatives in 2019, giving Jo Gideon a small majority. With Gideon standing down, the task of defending the seat against former MP Gareth Snell falls to Chandra Kanneganti. As well as serving as a local councillor, Dr Kanneganti is a GP and Executive Director of North Staffordshire GP Federation. He is also a member of the BMA General Practitioners Committee and is the National Chair of British International Doctors Association.

His clinical special interests include diabetes, contraception and medical leadership – areas which he could be expected to be active on if elected.



Nick Timothy Conservative

Nick Timothy has been selected for the safe Conservative seat of West Suffolk, following former Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock's suspension from the party and decision to retire from Parliament. Timothy is a well-known figure in Westminster, having served as joint Chief of Staff to Theresa May. He was the architect of May's proposed social care reforms, which resulted in accusations of a 'dementia tax' and forced a U-turn mid-election campaign.

Post Number 10, as a columnist at the Daily Telegraph, Timothy has written a number of opinion pieces on the state of the health sector. He is unafraid to criticise the NHS, generating headlines such as "[*Too many institutions put their reputations ahead of the public*](#)", and "[*Covid exposed the folly of turning the NHS into an unaccountable quango*](#)". However, his ambitions are likely to go beyond the NHS: many see him as a future leadership candidate.

Constituency:

West Suffolk

Incumbent:

Matt Hancock,
Independent,
formerly
Conservative

Majority:

23,200



Steve Yemm Labour

Constituency:

Mansfield

Incumbent:

Ben Bradley,
Conservative

Majority:

16,300

To win Mansfield, Steve Yemm needs to overturn a significant majority. Whilst Ben Bradley has held the seat since 2017, this was the first time the seat has been represented by a Conservative since its creation in 1885. If the former red wall crumbles for the Conservatives, then Yemm could be a surprise victor on election night.

Should he be elected, Yemm will bring a fresh perspective on the life sciences sector. He has over 20 years of experience in the field, and is currently Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) of Optibrium, a developer of software and AI solutions for drug discovery.



Anna Dixon Labour

Constituency:

ShIPLEY

Incumbent:

Philip Davies,
Conservative

Majority:

6,200

Having worked for the Department of Health, The King's Fund and the World Health Organisation among others, Anna Dixon has been on the health policy scene since 1998.

If elected, Dixon can be expected to be a prominent and respected voice on health issues. Her focus may well be on ageing and social care, reflecting the direction her career has taken in recent years, having served as the CEO of the Centre for Ageing Better and as Chair of the Archbishops' commission on reimagining care. In 2021, Dixon received an MBE for her work on ageing.



Joshua Fenton-Glynn Labour

Joshua Fenton-Glynn will hope that it is fourth time lucky for him, having unsuccessfully stood for election in Calder Valley in 2015, 2017 and 2019. This time, the incumbent is standing down and the local councillor will be hopeful of overturning the moderate majority.

Having been the Calderdale Council Cabinet member for Adult Health and Wellbeing since 2021 and working for the General Medical Council since 2018, Fenton-Glynn can be expected to take an active interest in health policy. He cites some of his proudest achievements as *"leading the campaign that forced the government to abandon plans to close Halifax A&E"* and taking action on introducing a living wage for all care staff.

Constituency:

Calder Valley

Incumbent:

Craig Whittaker,
Conservative

Majority:

5,800



Melanie Onn Labour

Constituency:

Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (new boundaries)

Incumbent:

Lia Nici, Conservative

Majority:

7,300

Melanie Onn was singled out as one to watch after being elected to represent her hometown of Grimsby in 2015. Swept away in the landslide of 2019, Onn needs to overturn a sizeable majority to reclaim her seat, another which has been subject to boundary changes.

During her time as MP, Onn served as Shadow Housing Minister and was vocal in the Commons on the intersection between housing and health. Having experienced homelessness herself as a teenager, Onn says it is her accomplishments in housing she is most proud of.

As a sufferer of Crohn's disease, she has spoken about the difficulties of managing a long-term condition and a career in politics: *"My health took quite a bad hit. I was really very, very unwell for quite a long time. But you can't stop, you just have to keep going, because there is an expectation from your party, from your constituents."* If returned, we can expect to hear more from her on the topic of chronic conditions.



Chris Webb Labour

With current Blackpool South MP Scott Benton facing Commons suspension over a lobbying scandal, the possibility of a by-election will allow Chris Webb the opportunity to overturn Benton's majority before the general election.

Webb has an active interest in mental health, chairing the board of trustees for the charity Counselling in the Community (CITC). In October, he spoke at The New Statesman's Future of Healthcare Conference on revolutionising mental health, where he advocated for more governmental support for mental health charities like the CITC.

Constituency:

Blackpool South

Incumbent:

Scott Benton, Conservative

Majority:

3,700



Zubir Ahmed
Labour

Constituency:

Glasgow South West

Incumbent:

Chris Stephens, SNP

Majority:

4,900

Vascular and transplant surgeon Zubir Ahmed needs to overturn an SNP majority to win Glasgow South West. Previously a Labour stronghold, the SNP won the seat in 2015 and have held it ever since. Should Ahmed be elected, it will be a clear sign that Keir Starmer is headed for Downing Street. However, Ahmed has experienced electoral disappointment before, having stood in the nearby Glasgow Pollok constituency in 2021, coming second.

With more than 20 years of experience as a surgeon, including operating on children at Great Ormond Street Hospital, Ahmed would add an experienced clinical voice to Westminster.



Wilma Brown
Labour

Few constituencies were as emblematic of Labour's implosion in Scotland as Kirkcaldy, when Gordon Brown's political home fell to the SNP in 2015. The seat is another which has been subject to boundary changes. Now Wilma Brown (no relation) is tasked with overturning the slim SNP majority in the new seat. Her task will be made easier by the defection of Neale Hanvey from the SNP to Alex Salmond's Alba Party.

A former theatre and anaesthetic nurse, Brown was an Employee Director of NHS Fife from 2009 until she stood down in 2023. She is UNISON Scotland's Health Committee Chair, and sits on its UK Health Service Group, working at UK level. Expect her to emerge as a key voice if and when a future Labour government seeks to improve relations with health workers, whilst balancing NHS budgets.

Constituency:

Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy (new boundaries)

Incumbent:

Neale Hanvey, Alba Party (formerly SNP)

Majority:

1,200



Sandesh Gulhane
Conservative

Constituency:
East Renfrewshire

Incumbent:
Kirsten Oswald,
SNP

Majority:
5,400

Following only a short stint in Holyrood, serving as a regional MSP for Glasgow since 2021, Dr Sandesh Gulhane MSP has his eyes set on a move to Westminster. As the current Conservative Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Gulhane is a familiar face in Scottish politics, publicly holding the Scottish Government to account over their handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and delivery of NHS services in Scotland. If elected, you can expect Gulhane to be angling for a similarly prominent role – and with experience as a GP, orthopaedic registrar, football Club Doctor, and Co-Chair BMA trainees GP subcommittee, it is likely to be in health.

Although there are currently few Conservative MPs in Scotland, the Tories held East Renfrewshire as recently as 2017. With the SNP’s recent reputational challenges and a relatively small majority to overturn, Gulhane will fancy his chances of election.



Martin McCluskey
Labour

Along with many other Labour strongholds in Scotland, Inverclyde fell to the SNP in 2015. This will be Martin McCluskey’s third attempt to win Inverclyde, although this time he will be attempting it under new boundaries.

McCluskey is a key figure in Scottish Labour, serving as Political Director in the aftermath of the party’s collapse in Scotland in 2016. As a Board Member for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, he has been vocal in criticising the SNP for *“raiding our local health budget”*. He has a personal local health story, with his mum having worked as a nurse and midwife at Inverclyde Royal Hospital. Outside of the public sphere, McCluskey is a director of a consultancy firm which works with organisations with social purpose.

Constituency:
Inverclyde and
Renfrewshire West
(new boundaries)

Incumbent:
Ronnie Cowan,
SNP

Majority:
7,500



Kirsty McNeill Labour

Constituency:
Midlothian

Incumbent:
Owen Thompson,
SNP

Majority:
5,700

A former special advisor in the Brown administration at Number 10, Kirsty McNeill, needs to overturn a moderate SNP majority to win back Midlothian for Labour, a seat which has swung between the two parties since the SNP's 2015 takeover across Scotland.

For the last 8 years, McNeill has been Save the Children's Executive Director of Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns, where she has worked on campaigns on health and nutrition. Expect her to be a key voice on children's health inequalities in the UK. We could also anticipate her to be an advocate for global health issues, drawing on her experience from the Stop AIDS Campaign, in which she helped to successfully negotiate a commitment to universal access to AIDS treatment from the 2005 G8. She is also Interim Chair of Trustees for the IPPR.



Pamela Nash Labour

Pamela Nash is another hopeful looking to reclaim Labour ground in Scotland.

A former MP, Nash has been an active voice on health in Westminster before. Whilst representing Airdrie and Shotts from 2010 to 2015, Nash Chaired the All-Party Parliamentary Group for HIV and AIDS, and was also active on multiple sclerosis. After losing her seat to the SNP in 2015, Nash kept up her work on HIV during a stint as Head of Policy and Campaigning for HIV Scotland. If elected, she can be expected to return to this territory.

Constituency:
Motherwell,
Wishaw and
Carluke (new
boundaries)

Incumbent:
Marion Fellows,
SNP

Majority:
11,900

Contact us

We think you will agree, it's shaping up to be an exciting year for those of us lucky enough to be working in health policy! If you have any questions for the Incisive Health team, or would like advice or support, please do get in touch via info@incisivehealth.com.