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## **PRISON HEALTH TRANSFERRED TO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

The Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Health have today agreed that funding responsibility for prison health services in England is to be transferred from the Home Office to the Department of Health. This responsibility will take effect from April 2003.

This is the first step in a process over the next 5 years which will see prison health become part of the NHS. Primary Care Trusts will then become responsible for the commissioning and provision of health services to prisoners in their areas. The Prison Service funding currently used to provide health care for prisoners will be transferred to the Department of Health. In addition, the Department of Health will, over the next three years, allocate further resources to improve these services, rising to around an extra £46 million a year by 2005-06.

Much progress has already been made through partnership between prisons and the NHS. The funding transfer marks a natural next step in this partnership, and will support further improvements in services.

Prison Minister, Hilary Benn, said:

“Improving health services for prisoners is important for their rehabilitation and resettlement to reduce their chances of reoffending. We know that health problems such as mental illness can contribute to reoffending, so high quality, professional care, which continues on release, is vital.

“It has long been acknowledged that mental health and drug misuse are far more common among prisoners than in the general population. We need to do more to meet their needs by improving prison healthcare to meet NHS standards and providing more effective ways to manage throughcare both on reception into custody and on release.”

Jacqui Smith, Health Minister, added:

“Continued partnership between the Prison Service and the NHS will be essential to secure effective health services for prisoners and this decision reflects the need for better integration of NHS services whether patients are in prison or in the wider community.”

The Government is giving fuller consideration with Welsh Assembly Ministers about how equivalent arrangements may be made in respect of the four prisons in Wales.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Current key statistics on prison health:
  - Mental illness, drug dependency and communicable diseases are the dominant health problems among prisoners
  - 90% of all prisoners have a diagnosable mental health problem (including personality disorder), substance misuse problem or both
  - More than 80% of prisoners smoke
  - The rate of suicide in prisons is higher than in the community
  - 8% of a sample of prisoners tested positive for Hepatitis B and 7% for Hepatitis C, and 0.3% of male prisoners and 1.2% of females were HIV positive
  - 24% of prisoners report having injected drugs – of these, 20% were infected with Hepatitis B and 30% with Hepatitis C
  - 20% of women in prison ask to see a doctor or nurse each day
2. The disposition of the new funds for prison health has not been finalised, but it is expected that they will support significant service improvements such as enhanced mental health services for prisoners, better primary care and work to tackle infectious diseases.
3. The Prison Health Policy Unit and Task Force were established 2 years ago. The partnership is working to modernise prison health care and to establish partnership working between the Prison Service and NHS. The units are jointly accountable to Ministers in the Home Office and DoH. The new partnership embodied at all levels the joint commitment to improving the health of prisoners by the Prison Service and Department of Health
4. Development work on prison health over the last two years has included:
  - New investment to rebuild or refurbish some of the worst prison health care centres;
  - The introduction of new NHS mental health in-reach teams as part of the NHS Plan, expected to cover around half of all prisons by March 2004;
  - Work to reduce the health risks posed by infectious diseases, including a programme to offer prisoners vaccinations against Hepatitis B;
  - Improved provision of drug detoxification programmes; and
  - Development support for the prison health workforce, including the introduction of a new NVQ in Custodial Care.
5. Prison Health publications can be downloaded from the DoH website:  
[www.doh.gov.uk/prisonhealth](http://www.doh.gov.uk/prisonhealth)