

NHS patients and British businesses to benefit from historic changes to medicines access following pharmaceutical partnership with USA

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New partnership accelerates NHS patients' access to new medicines and will see UK benefit from greater life sciences industry investment

- NHS patients will get improved access to life-changing treatments as a result of medicines pricing changes — 2 new cancer medicines already recommended under the updated approach
- The UK is the first country in the world to secure commitment to 0% tariffs on pharmaceutical exports to the US
- In a boost to economic growth, the UK will benefit from greater life sciences industry investment and highly skilled manufacturing jobs will be safeguarded

Thousands of NHS patients will get improved access to life-changing treatments, after the government today agreed the full text of its landmark US-UK pharmaceutical partnership.

UK pharmaceutical exports to the US — worth at least £5 billion a year — will enter the United States completely tariff free, for at least 3 years. This makes UK the first country in the world to secure 0% tariffs on pharmaceutical exports to the US.

The partnership also accelerates NHS patients' access to new medicines. Under the partnership, pharmaceutical companies have stronger incentives to launch innovative treatments in the UK, meaning patients can benefit from new cancer therapies, rare disease treatments, and other breakthrough medicines sooner — without waiting years after they become available elsewhere.

The partnership is a win for British patients, British businesses and the British economy. First announced in December, the partnership protects a UK pharmaceutical industry that added £28.5 billion to the UK economy in 2025, employs over 50,000 people in highly skilled, well-paid jobs, and exported almost £21 billion in pharmaceutical products worldwide last year.

UK Science Minister Lord Vallance said:

Thanks to this partnership, patients right across the NHS will benefit from access to life changing new medicines that they previously would have been denied.

Not only this, but as the first country in the world to benefit from a zero percent tariff on pharmaceuticals to the US, Britain's life sciences sector will be further boosted.

By encouraging greater investment, this partnership will enable new medicines to be developed in the UK, helping more people to live healthier, longer lives, while creating high-skilled jobs across the UK.

On 31 March 2026, changes were made to the way that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) evaluates medicines, this means that some treatments that deliver significant health improvements but might previously have been turned down on cost grounds alone, will now be approved.

These changes respond directly to longstanding calls from patient groups, recognising that the cost-effectiveness threshold NICE uses has not been updated in over 2 decades. The updated threshold will therefore ensure that NICE is able to continue its world leading approach to assessing drugs and treatments, reflecting the huge changes in the economic, commercial and healthcare environment that we operate in.

The update to the NICE cost effectiveness threshold has already made a direct difference for NHS patients. Two medicines have already been recommended by NICE under the new threshold, giving patients immediate access to life-changing medicines — including a brain cancer drug for patients as young as 12 and a last-resort treatment for patients with a rare form of stomach cancer who had already exhausted other options. NHS patients in England will be able to access these through the health service, thanks to the new thresholds.

Dr Karen Noble, Director of Research, Policy and Innovation at Brain Tumour Research, said:

The announcement that NHS patients will gain improved access to life-changing treatments as a result of the medicines pricing change is a welcome step forward for the brain tumour community. We are already seeing the impact of this shift, with vorasidenib – the first new treatment for adult brain tumours in the UK for 2 decades – now available to eligible patients on the NHS. We are hopeful that this will unlock further innovative treatments and ensure more promising drugs clear the threshold for approval, opening up new opportunities and better outcomes for brain tumour patients.

Crucially, improved access alone is not enough, and we must ensure that these new medicines are coming across the pipeline. Increased investment in research remains critical to accelerating the discovery and development of treatments for brain tumours, and we will continue to campaign for this on behalf of our community.

Cathy Hampshire, Vice-Chair of GIST Cancer UK who has lived with GIST cancer for 5 years, said:

Regorafenib has a limited window of effectiveness. At every scan and every consultation, I brace myself for the moment I'm told the drug has stopped working, that the tumours are growing again, and that there is no further treatment options left.

Today's UK-US pharmaceutical partnership and NICE's decision to approve the treatment changes that picture entirely. I was literally dancing around the room when I heard. When you're on the third of the 3 available treatments and been told there are no more options, you feel like the system has given up on you. After a two-year battle, the UK Government through this partnership and NICE has recognised the importance of making Ripretinib available. For people like me across England and Wales, this opens up a new treatment pathway — and with it, renewed hope. I feel as though a huge weight has lifted from my shoulders. For the first time in a long while, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

The UK has now also secured preferential terms for medical technology exports, with no additional new tariffs on medtech for at least 3 years — unlocking further investment in British manufacturing and strengthening the UK's position as a world leader in health innovation.

The medtech sector employs over 195,000 people across the UK, and these preferential terms provide businesses with the certainty they need to invest, grow, and create jobs here.

The UK and US have also agreed to work together towards mutual recognition of medical device approvals — cutting red tape and supporting future innovative health technologies to reach patients on both sides of the Atlantic.

In addition, the Voluntary Scheme for Branded Medicines Pricing, Access and Growth (VPAG) headline payment percentage — the rebate pharmaceutical companies pay on branded medicines sold to the NHS — will be capped at a maximum of 15% until the end of the current scheme, which expires on 31 December 2028, providing the stability and predictability that life sciences companies need to invest and grow in the UK.

Dr Zubir Ahmed, Health Innovation and Safety Minister, said:

For too long, NHS patients have watched as some treatments available in other countries remained out of reach here. We're changing that.

From April, thousands of people across the UK will be able to access treatments on the NHS that were previously out of reach. This is the first time in over twenty years that we have raised the bar for what the NICE can approve, and it means life-changing medicines can reach the patients who need them most.

This government made a commitment to make the NHS fit for the future — and we are delivering on it by building an NHS that works better for patients, along with building an economy that delivers skilled jobs and growth across the country.

To drive further progress, the government and the UK life sciences industry have launched a new Joint Taskforce to accelerate innovation in the UK's commercial environment for medicines. It will report back to ministers and industry leaders with initial findings, with pilot schemes expected to launch as early as September 2026.

The Taskforce will work with the pharmaceutical sector, NHS England, NICE, and patient and charity groups, to help the UK become the third most important life sciences economy by 2035—as outlined in the 10 Year Health Plan and Life Sciences Sector Plan.

The government has committed to doubling spending on innovative medicines as a proportion of GDP — from 0.3% to 0.6% over the next 10 years. This means NHS patients get wider and faster access to the treatments they need, including for cancer and other life-limiting conditions.

It also sends a clear signal to global investors that the UK is a serious, long-term partner for the life sciences industry — supporting economic growth and high-skilled jobs across the country.

Chris Boerner, Bristol Myers Squibb Board Chair and CEO, said:

Bristol Myers Squibb welcomes this arrangement as a step toward properly recognising

the value of innovative medicines so patients in the UK can access them sooner. We will work with the UK and US Governments to support this goal and recognise the Prime Minister's focus on building a better medicines ecosystem. We are proud of our UK sites and their role in delivering for patients and anticipate investing more than \$500 million in the UK over the next 5 years.

Richard Torbett, Chief Executive of the ABPI, said:

This landmark partnership is an important step forward for patients, the NHS and the UK's life sciences sector. It reinforces the UK's position as a global centre for innovation, helping to attract investment and accelerate access to cutting-edge medicines.

The government has listened to industry concerns and is taking positive action to improve access and create a more stable, competitive environment. While further detail and technical work is underway, this is strong progress, and we look forward to working closely with the government to ensure these commitments deliver for patients, the NHS and the UK economy.

As part of the UK's ambition to be the leading Life Sciences Economy in Europe by 2030 and to maximise the economic benefits of these changes, we will be working closely with industry to help land investment into the UK.

The partnership will support greater investment in UK life sciences. It has already started generating results, such as £500 million investment in UK R&D and manufacturing in Surrey from the global biopharmaceutical company UCB which was announced in January, turbocharging economic growth.

Business and Trade Secretary Peter Kyle said:

This government's trade strategy is delivering for our world-leading pharma sector, accelerating health innovation while protecting high-skilled jobs here in the UK.

Partnerships like this demonstrate the tangible benefits of our strong UK-US economic relationship, and we will continue to prioritise getting the best for British business through the Economic Prosperity Deal.

Today's finalised text builds on the General Terms of the UK-US Economic Prosperity Deal signed in May and takes forward commitments made when the principles of this partnership were first announced in December.

The partnership forms part of the government's Life Sciences Sector Plan, backed by over £2 billion of investment, and its Modern Industrial Strategy

Further quotes:

Shay Emerton was diagnosed with a grade 2 glioma, a type of brain tumour, at the age of 24. Shay has been able to access the drug Vorasidenib, which has had a significant impact on quality of life. However, this access had previously been under threat. The new partnership will now help ensure

that patients like Shay can benefit from these life-changing treatments. Shay said:

I consider myself extremely lucky to have accessed Vorasidenib on the managed access scheme. It really has changed my life significantly and this decision from NICE is a game changer in neurooncology. It was an honour to be the patient advocate on the NICE appraisal as I was able to represent the low grade glioma community who could benefit from this drug. It has now given not only me but hopefully many patients around the UK hope for the future and at last another option compared to the standard treatment of care. I hope this is just the start of the much needed improvement in care options for low grade glioma patients.

Dave Ricks, Chair & CEO of Eli Lilly and Company, said:

This UK / US arrangement on pharmaceuticals is an encouraging move; the positive trend in the UK warrants our attention and Lilly will revisit our investment plans there as the environment improves.

A spokesperson from GSK, said:

We are pleased that the partnership between the UK and US on pharmaceuticals has been finalised. It provides certainty on zero-tariffs for medicines and offers real improvements to the UK operating environment and rewards for innovation.

This is an important foundation for the UK's global competitiveness in life sciences and for future investment in the country. As a longstanding and significant investor in the UK, GSK is particularly encouraged by the commitments contained in the partnership.

Work now needs to happen at pace on the detailed actions to deliver these improvements and GSK is committed to supporting this.

Dr Scott Purdon, Chair of the Charity Medicines Access Coalition (CMAC) and Head of Patient Advocacy at Myeloma UK, said:

Investment in the UK life sciences sector and improved access to medicines is welcome news. The approval of 2 new cancer treatments, enabled by changes to the NICE thresholds, offers real hope to people waiting for new options. For many patients and their families, these decisions can mean more time and a better quality of life.

We hope this marks the beginning of many more approvals. Continued investment in research and innovation is essential to delivering the breakthrough treatments patients urgently need. Today's announcement is a welcome step, but just one piece of a much bigger picture.

What matters now is seeing a genuine and long-term commitment from the pharmaceutical industry to invest in UK research and development. That means expanding clinical trial opportunities for people across the UK and reinforcing the UK's reputation as a global leader in science and timely access to medicines.

We look forward to working closely with DHSC so that people can meaningfully access these innovative treatments. Ultimately, every decision should bring us closer to what matters most: faster, fairer access to life-changing treatments for the people who need them.

Nicola Perrin, Chief Executive of the Association of Medical Research Charities, said:

For our member charities, the worst possible scenario is having a discovery stuck in the lab, or a treatment available in other countries but not through the NHS. We therefore welcome today's announcement and the progress that has been made since last December. This reinforces the Government's commitment to making the UK one of the best places in the world to develop new treatments. It will also help to ensure that patients can access new medicines as quickly as possible.

Dr Ian Walker, executive director of policy at Cancer Research UK, said:

Research into kinder, more effective and more targeted treatments relies on the UK maintaining its world-leading position in the life sciences sector. These changes to the way that NICE evaluates new medicines will lead to greater investment in the industry, critically enabling more life-saving discoveries for people with cancer and ensuring that patients receive the treatment they deserve.

Changes to the pricing of medicines should help to improve patients' access to proven, innovative drugs, and it's important that this is delivered as a broader package of investment across the NHS.

Abbvie Executive Vice President and Chief Commercial Officer, Jeff Stewart said:

We appreciate the US-UK pharmaceuticals arrangement as a first step in recognising the impact of innovative medicines on patient outcomes. We believe rapid implementation of the partnership is now needed to deliver meaningful results for patients and the sector.

Nico Reynders, General Manager, UCB UK & Ireland, said:

We welcome the government's commitment to bringing innovative treatments to UK patients and this arrangement supports industry/government collaboration to ensure UK citizens have access to the best treatments across all disease areas.

UCB remains a committed, strategic partner in the UK healthcare system through investment in research, development and manufacturing of innovative medicines which we aim to bring to UK patients simultaneously with patients worldwide.

Professor Andrew Morris CBE FRSE PMedSci, President of the Academy of Medical Sciences, said:

Getting effective treatments to patients faster is what matters most, and the approval of new medicines as a direct result of these changes shows that this arrangement can make a real difference to people and families.

The commitment to increase spending on innovative medicines, backed by interim targets, is a welcome step towards a system that properly values the contribution of medical science. Planned changes to how NICE measures the impact of treatments on patients' quality of life will also bring its methods into line with latest evidence - something researchers and clinicians have long called for.

>A strong life sciences sector benefits patients first and foremost by supporting faster and fairer access to new treatments, more clinical trials, and continued medical research. It can also bring wider benefits to the economy through investment and skilled jobs. But for patients to feel the full benefit, this must go hand in hand with broader investment in the NHS and the health and care services they rely on every day.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nhs-patients-and-british-businesses-to-benefit-from-historic-changes-to-medicines-access-following-pharmaceutical-partnership-with-usa>