

SELECT COMMITTEE WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Reform Think Tank's submission to the Public Accounts Committee's Antimicrobial resistance: addressing the risks inquiry

About Reform

Reform is established as the leading Westminster think tank for public service reform. We believe that the State has a fundamental role to play in enabling individuals, families and communities to thrive. But our vision is one in which the State delivers only the services that it is best placed to deliver, within sound public finances, and where both decision-making and delivery is devolved to the most appropriate level. We are committed to driving systemic change that will deliver better outcomes for all.

We are determinedly independent and strictly non-party in our approach. This is reflected in our cross-party Advisory Board and our events programme which seeks to convene likeminded reformers from across the political spectrum.

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How well is Government implementing plans to respond to the risks posed by AMR?

1. Progress against the 2019-2024 NAP has been notably faster in some areas than others. For example, there has been a significant reduction in the sale of antibiotics for use in food-producing animals.¹ The NHS has also been able to roll out two new antibiotics, developed through an innovation, 'subscription-style' reimbursement model – that pays companies a fixed fee based on the value of these drugs to the NHS, rather than on sales volume – which is now being replicated by other countries.² This is especially crucial to the UK, which is afflicted by higher rates of drug resistance than many comparable countries.³
2. By contrast, there has been much slower progress on the uptake of diagnostic technology, needed to make appropriate prescribing decisions and support improved AMR surveillance.⁴
3. There are also challenges in addressing the risks of AMR on a cross-government basis, as responsibility for tackling its main drivers sits across different departments, public bodies (such as the Veterinary Medicines Directorate), local and national organisations. Though the Government is committed to greater join-up in principle, through its 'One Health' initiative, adopted in 2013,⁵ the reality is more patchy. Independent evaluations have found that cross-government working is "not always present", and where it is, tends to be based on "established relationships".⁶
4. Progress in tackling AMR has generally been more encouraging in general practice (which accounts for the majority of total prescribing) than in other settings, particularly inpatient and outpatient secondary care.⁷
5. Due to variability in diagnostic testing, particularly 'point-of-care' testing, the use of subjective prescribing, in which doctors exercise a professional judgement (i.e. make an 'educated guess'), is still commonplace.⁸
6. *Reform's* 2022 report called on NHS England to centrally purchase diagnostic tools, to more rapidly increase the percentage of prescriptions supported by a diagnostic test, drawing on evidence collected from Wales' use of a central budget for diagnosing respiratory tract infections.
7. *Reform's* 2023 report, 'Smart Prescribing', also detailed how technology, particularly AI-based tools and wearables (i.e. biosensors and other real-time monitoring

¹ UK-VARSS, *UK Veterinary Antibiotic Resistance and Sales Surveillance Report 2020* (Veterinary Medicines Directorate, 2021).

² Mark Parkins and David Glover, 'How the "NHS Model" to Tackle Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Can Set a Global Standard', Blog, 18 December 2020.

³ Patrick King, *Powering the UK's Approach to AMR: The Future of AMR Policy*, 2022.

⁴ Jim O'Neill, 'Oral Evidence: Antimicrobial Resistance' (HC 231, 22 June 2022).

⁵ Veterinary Medicines Directorate, *UK One Health Report: Joint Report on Antibiotic Use and Antibiotic Resistance, 2013-2017*, 2019.

⁶ See, for example, Elizabeth Eastmure et al., *Evaluation of the Implementation of the UK Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Strategy, 2013-2018* (Policy Innovation and Evaluation Research Unit, 2019).

⁷ King, *Powering the UK's Approach to AMR: The Future of AMR Policy*.

⁸ Ibid.

devices), can be used to improve antimicrobial prescribing behaviours.⁹ It recommended investing in real-world evaluations of individualised approaches to prescribing based on technology.¹⁰

8. There has been limited progress in improving the public's understanding of AMR, and in particular, designing campaigns to affect long-term behaviour change. Public health messaging is insufficiently linked to people's real-world experience of infection and drug-resistant infection.¹¹
9. *Reform's* 2022 report called for the development of AMR awareness campaigns in the vein of those delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlight the experience of individuals living with drug-resistant infection and their families – led, as far as possible, by local Directors of Public Health, to increase trust in AMR messaging.¹²
10. *Reform* research and expert roundtables have found that blurred lines of ministerial accountability act as a barrier to making further progress on the risks posed by AMR.¹³ Though ministers continue to be accountable for health security and emergency preparedness, AMR remains a very small part of their overall brief, despite the enormous risks it poses to safe delivery of healthcare.¹⁴
11. Given the extraordinary threat posed by AMR, *Reform's* 2022 report also recommended the creation of a subcommittee of the National Security Council dedicated to assessing progress against the five-year Action Plans for AMR, and the twenty-year vision for AMR, as well as discussing future risks to health security.¹⁵

***Reform* has published the following papers on antimicrobial resistance:**

'Smart prescribing: harnessing technology in the fight against AMR'¹⁶

'Powering the UK's approach to AMR: the future of AMR policy'¹⁷

'Powering the UK's approach to antimicrobial resistance'¹⁸

⁹ Timothy Rawson, *Smart Prescribing: Harnessing Technology in the Fight against AMR* (Reform think tank, 2023).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ King, *Powering the UK's Approach to AMR: The Future of AMR Policy*.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Rawson, *Smart Prescribing: Harnessing Technology in the Fight against AMR*.

¹⁷ King, *Powering the UK's Approach to AMR: The Future of AMR Policy*.

¹⁸ Claudia Martinez, *Powering the UK's Approach to Antimicrobial Resistance* (Reform, 2020).