

NHS chiefs warn of winter crisis ahead without £350m bail-out

By Victoria Ward

THE NHS will suffer its worst winter in recent history if it does not receive a £350million emergency bail-out, hospital chiefs have warned.

The cash is desperately needed to fund extra staff and beds, with waiting times and bed shortages remaining “stubbornly bad,” according to NHS Providers, which represents NHS chief executives.

The Government has given councils an extra £1billion for social care services to help relieve the pressure on hospitals but experts warn that it is not enough to prevent a repeat of the chaos seen across parts of the health service last winter.

Chris Hopson, chief executive of NHS Providers, said: “Last winter the health service came under pressure as never before. This winter could be worse.”

He acknowledged that planning had been much better this year but said that despite those efforts, and the extra money for care services, hospitals were still struggling to improve performance.

“We are in virtually the same position as this time last year,” he told the BBC.

“Unless we get extra money, patients will be put at greater risk as local trusts won’t have the beds and staff they need to meet the extra demand we will face.”

Mr Hopson suggested that delays in discharging patients and workforce shortages were hampering their efforts, noting that the NHS budget had increased by only 1.3 per cent this year compared to a 5 per cent rise in demand. In July, the Royal College of

Emergency Medicine, warned that the NHS urgently needed to build the equivalent of eight new hospitals to prevent dangerous overcrowding and long waiting times, calling for at least 5,000 more beds to prevent another winter health crisis.

Just last week the Nuffield Trust said the “eye-watering” scale of overspending in NHS hospitals was masked by official accounts. The think tank claimed that health chiefs spent almost £3billion more than they reported in 2016-17.

Its analysis also predicted that NHS managers will be hit with £2.2billion in

5,000

The number of extra beds needed to prevent another winter crisis, according to the Royal College of Emergency Medicine

unfunded inflation in 2017-18, half a billion higher than was planned, and that without more cash, hospitals and other facilities will still be £2billion in the red in 2021.

Mr Hopson said NHS bosses had made savings of £20billion in the last Parliament.

But he added: “There’s a bit of a myth running around that somehow if the NHS could be that bit more efficient or a lot more productive we wouldn’t need to put this extra money in.”

NHS leaders are expected to meet Prime Minister Theresa May next week to discuss plans for this winter.