

28 July 2026

Dear Colleague,

The IHRA definition of antisemitism and NHS organisations

I write as the chair of the Jewish Medical Association UK ('JMA'), an umbrella organisation which supports Jewish medical professionals in the UK and promotes links between Israeli and British medicine.

I write in relation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism and accompanying examples ('the IHRA definition').

In October 2025, following the deadly Heaton Park synagogue terrorist attack, the then-Secretary of State for Health announced that all NHS England and Department of Health and Social Care arm's length bodies would be asked to adopt the IHRA definition, and that NHS trusts and integrated care boards would be encouraged to do so. The following day, the Chief Executive and Chief Workforce Officer of NHS England confirmed that NHS England was formally and actively adopting the IHRA definition and also strongly encouraged NHS organisations to do so.

The JMA supports the adoption and use of the IHRA definition by all NHS organisations. This is because (a) there has in recent years been a deeply concerning rise in antisemitic incidents across the NHS which is inexcusably leading to Jewish people feeling excluded from health services (as highlighted in the recent review by Lord Mann), (b) the IHRA definition is supported by all of the major Jewish communal organisations, and (c) it is a useful tool which can help NHS organisations understand modern antisemitism, including when discourse around Israel and Palestine reflects and propagates classic antisemitic tropes.

In order to assist NHS organisations in adopting the IHRA definition, I attach a joint legal opinion which the JMA commissioned from two leading equalities and human rights barristers, Rebecca Tuck K.C. and Adam Wagner K.C. The opinion can also be found on our website [hyperlink]. In short summary, the opinion concludes:

1. There is no legal impediment to NHS organisations adopting the IHRA definition. On the contrary, the IHRA definition is a tool which can help NHS organisations fulfil their legal duties, for example under the Equality Act 2010.

2. The IHRA definition is a useful tool which, if adopted, will help NHS organisations to address the serious and worsening problem of antisemitism in the healthcare system
3. The text of the IHRA definition makes clear that its 11 examples “may serve as illustrations” and “could” be antisemitism but only when “taking into account the overall context”. These are adequate safeguards for freedom of speech which would prevent an NHS organisation from breaching legal duties simply because it adopted the IHRA definition
4. The examples in the IHRA definition relating to Israel are important because they recognise that modern antisemitism often manifests as extreme anti-Israel and antizionist rhetoric.
5. There is no legal requirement to edit the IHRA definition or to accompany it with additional guidance. To do so would also risk over-complicating and rendering it less useful.
6. In order for it to be effective, NHS organisations should be clear that the IHRA definition will be considered in relation to complaints, disciplinary and grievance processes.

Finally, the JMA notes that a legal opinion has recently been circulated by or on behalf of the “Health Workers 4 Palestine” organisation. This recent article sets out some relevant context and background: <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/nhs-doctors-call-in-lawyers-to-oppose-ihra-definition-of-antisemitism-s5p1vg1y>.

If you would like to discuss the contents of this letter further, please contact us.

Yours faithfully,



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Chair, Jewish Medical Association UK