

For immediate release

Thursday, 13 February, 2025

74,000 cancer patients not treated on time in 2024

- **Analysis reveals the proportion of patients in England starting cancer treatment within 62 days of an urgent suspected cancer referral has plummeted over the last decade, from 83.9% in 2014 to 62.2% in 2024.***
- **More than 50 cancer charities come together to call on the UK Government to provide funding and reform in the upcoming National Cancer Plan for England so cancer patients are diagnosed and start their treatment quicker.**

Over 50 cancer charities are calling on the UK Government to tackle cancer waiting times in England, after new analysis by Cancer Research UK revealed that in 2024, 74,000 cancer patients didn't start their treatment on time.

That's enough people to fill the O2 arena almost four times over.

The NHS in England aims to begin treatment for 85% of cancer patients within 62 days of an urgent referral.

But in 2024, just over 6 in 10 patients (62.2%) started treatment within 62 days following an urgent suspected cancer referral.**

There was a slight improvement in 2024 compared to the previous year, where only 60.1% of patients were treated on time.

More than 1 in 10 cancer patients (11.3%) faced having to wait more than 104 days*** following an urgent suspected cancer referral to begin their treatment - nearly twice as long as the 62-day target.

The UK government has pledged to meet the 85% target by the end of this parliament, and last month, made a welcome commitment to improve performance by April 2026.****

But One Cancer Voice, a coalition of the UK's leading cancer charities, warned that the slow rate of improvement - just over 2 percentage points over the last year - is not enough to achieve this.

The coalition welcomed the UK Government's intention to publish a National Cancer Plan for England – but called on ministers to prioritise cancer waiting times through investment in additional staff and equipment.

Cancer Research UK's chief executive and One Cancer Voice representative, Michelle Mitchell, said:

"Seventy-four thousand cancer patients waited longer than they should to start their treatment last year. Behind every one of these numbers is a family member, friend or loved one facing unbelievable stress and anxiety, where every day can feel like forever.

"Hardworking NHS staff are doing their best, and last year we saw a slight improvement in cancer waiting times from the year before. However, there is still a long way to go, and the UK Government must act.

"The National Cancer Plan can be a turning point for cancer patients across England, but the UK Government must invest in staff and equipment, alongside reforms, if it's to hit all cancer waiting time targets by the end of this parliament. It's the least that cancer patients deserve."

It's not always possible to determine how a delay to cancer treatment will impact on a patient's outcome, as some cancers progress more quickly than others. However, one study***** has estimated that a 4-week delay to cancer surgery led to a 6-8% increased risk of dying, and delays can also reduce the treatment options that are available. There are also the psychological effects – waits cause major stress and anxiety for cancer patients and their loved ones.

The analysis also revealed that:

- Some cancer types see much longer waits on average for treatment – just over half of patients (56.0%) with lower gastrointestinal cancers, like bowel and anal, were treated on time in 2024, and less than 6 in 10 (59.1%) lung cancer patients were.*****
- NHS England diagnosed or ruled out cancer in 75.9% of patients within 28 days of an urgent referral in 2024, hitting its Faster Diagnosis Standard (FDS) target of 75% for the first time since it was introduced. However, the standard was introduced at a lower level than was recommended by cancer charities.

With an ageing and growing population, the challenge facing cancer services is only set to increase. There will be around 2.2 million new cancer cases diagnosed in the UK between 2024 and 2029 - this is over 20% more cases than in the previous five years.*****

One Cancer Voice is calling on the UK Government to equip the NHS to deal with this, to avoid more and more people waiting too long to start their cancer treatment.

Rebecca Gossage's story, whose dad experienced waits

Rebecca Gossage, 41, was first made aware that her dad, Keith Bromyard, was experiencing symptoms in October 2021 after he complained of stomach pain and started to rapidly lose weight. After waiting over a month for tests, he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer on the 30th of December 2021.

Rebecca, from Bromsgrove, said: "I checked my phone and saw his text message. I just remember bursting into tears."

Keith's cancer was found too late for him to be eligible for the only curative treatment for pancreatic cancer, surgery. However, he was told he was the ideal candidate for chemotherapy. While waiting to start treatment after several cancelled appointments, Keith's wife called an ambulance for him due to the pain he was in.

Rebecca said: "He was outside the hospital in the ambulance for 7 hours on the stretcher due to a backlog at A&E. Even though it was oncology he needed to go to, he still needed to be triaged through A&E. This is absolutely unacceptable: one, it was massively uncomfortable for him because he had started to develop pressure sores on his back; and two, a whole team of paramedics and an ambulance were outside of the hospital for 7 hours when they were likely needed elsewhere."

Keith died three days after he was admitted, having never seen his oncologist. He was 65.

Rebecca said: "I appreciate the NHS is under a lot pressure now and you can't just send people for scans for the sake of it. It must be higher on the government's agenda because the signs that dad had presented with, had they been picked up earlier with a scan, it might have been a bit more manageable for everybody. It might not have been so much of a shock or he may have received chemo."

ENDS

One Cancer Voice spokespeople and case studies are available for interview. For media enquiries, contact George Dean in the Cancer Research UK press office on George.Dean@cancer.org.uk / 020 3469 6654, or out of hours, on 020 3469 8301.

Notes to Editor

*Proportion of patients starting treatment within 62 days of an urgent suspected cancer referral, 2014-2024

Year	Percentage of patients starting treatment within 62 days of an urgent suspected cancer referral
2014	83.9
2015	82.4
2016	82.2
2017	81.8
2018	80.3
2019	77.7
2020	75.3
2021	70.9

2022	62.4
2023	60.1
2024	62.2

**This analysis looks only at those starting treatment following an urgent suspected cancer referral. From October 2023 the 62-standard applies to urgent suspected cancer referrals, breast symptomatic referrals, urgent cancer screening programme referrals or consultant upgrades. Previously this only applied to urgent suspected cancer referrals, so to allow accurate year on year comparisons this analysis looks at only those referrals.

***[The rise of the long waiters | Cancer Research UK](#)

****On 30 January NHS England published their [2025/26 priorities and operational planning guidance](#), in which they outlined ambitions to hit an 80% target for the Faster Diagnosis Standard by 2025/26, compared to 77% in 2024/25, and a 75% interim target for the 62-day standard, compared to 70% in 2024/25

*****[Mortality due to cancer treatment delay: systematic review and meta-analysis](#)

*****62-day performance by cancer type for 2024

Site	Percentage of patients starting treatment within 62 days of an urgent referral
Lower gastrointestinal (eg bowel and anal cancers)	56.0%
Lung	59.1%
Urological (eg prostate and kidney cancers)	60.8%
Other (Includes all other cancers outside the five groupings listed here)	67.3%
Breast	72.2%
Skin	84.6%

*****[Projected UK cancer cases and deaths in the current parliamentary term, Cancer Research UK](#)

Cancer waits data applies to adults (age 18+). For more information on the cancer waits experience by children and young people affected by cancer during diagnosis, see [here](#) and [here](#).

One Cancer Voice

One Cancer Voice is a coalition of cancer charities working together to improve outcomes for people affected by cancer. The One Cancer Voice members supporting this work include:

1. Action Bladder Cancer UK
2. Action Kidney Cancer
3. AMMF – The Cholangiocarcinoma Charity
4. Anthony Nolan
5. Blood Cancer Alliance
6. Blood Cancer UK
7. Bowel Cancer UK
8. Brain Tumour Research
9. Brainstrust
10. Breast Cancer Now
11. Breast Cancer UK
12. British Liver Trust
13. Cancer 52
14. Cancer Black Care
15. Cancer Care Map
16. Cancer Research UK
17. Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group (CCLG)
18. CLL Support Association
19. CoppaFeel!
20. Fight Bladder Cancer
21. Grace Kelly Childhood Cancer Trust
22. Hope for Tomorrow
23. Less Survivable Cancers Taskforce
24. Leukaemia UK
25. Lymphoma Action
26. Macmillan Cancer Support
27. Maggie's
28. Make 2nds Count
29. Melanoma Focus
30. Melanoma UK
31. Myeloma UK
32. Neuroendocrine Cancer UK
33. North West Cancer Research
34. Oracle Head & Neck Cancer UK
35. OUTpatients
36. Ovarian Cancer Action
37. Pancreatic Cancer Action
38. Pancreatic Cancer UK
39. Prostate Cancer UK

40. Radiotherapy UK
41. Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation
42. Royal College of Radiologists
43. Sarcoma UK
44. Shine Cancer Support
45. Solving Kids Cancer
46. Target Ovarian Cancer
47. Teenage Cancer Trust
48. The Brain Tumour Charity
49. The Eve Appeal
50. The Urology Foundation
51. Walk the Walk Worldwide
52. World Cancer Research Fund
53. Yorkshire Cancer Research
54. Young Lives vs Cancer
55. Young Tongues

About Cancer Research UK:

1. Cancer Research UK is the world's leading cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through research, influence and information.
2. Cancer Research UK's pioneering work into the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer has helped save millions of lives.
3. Cancer Research UK has been at the heart of the progress that has already seen survival in the UK double in the last 50 years.
4. Today, 2 in 4 people survive their cancer for at least 10 years. Cancer Research UK wants to accelerate progress and see 3 in 4 people surviving their cancer by 2034.
5. Cancer Research UK supports research into the prevention and treatment of cancer through the work of over 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses.
6. Together with its partners and supporters, Cancer Research UK is working towards a world where people can live longer, better lives, free from the fear of cancer.

For further information about Cancer Research UK's work or to find out how to support the charity, please call 0300 123 1022 or visit www.cancerresearchuk.org. Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)