

Health Performance Indicators in Wales

Research Briefing

August 2021



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Paper Overview:

This briefing sets out the targets and where statistics can be found for the main health performance indicators in Wales.



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1. Introduction

The performance indicators used to measure the delivery of health services in Wales, such as waiting times for treatment, are going to change.

The Welsh Government intends that the new **Single Integrated Outcomes Framework (SIOF)** for Health and Social Care will replace the current framework of indicators and performance measures.

The change is a commitment from **A Healthier Wales**, the Welsh Government's long term plan for Health and Social Care, and is intended to encourage greater integration between NHS Wales and social services. It is also aimed at focusing more on outcomes and the impact that those services are having upon people's health and well-being, rather than indicators that measure processes of service delivery.

In this transitional year (2021-22), the intention is to continue with the targets set out in the existing **NHS Wales Delivery Framework 2020-2021**. The **NHS Wales Annual Planning Framework 2021 - 2022** states that during 2021-22, the delivery framework will be redeveloped to create a set of outcomes measures, reflecting the current work on the SIOF.

2. Time spent in Accident and Emergency departments

The targets relating to time spent in Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments are:

- 95 per cent of patients to spend less than 4 hours in all major and minor emergency care facilities (i.e. A&E) from arrival until admission, transfer or discharge; and
- no patient to spend 12 hours or more in all hospital major and minor emergency care facilities from arrival until admission, transfer or discharge.

- The Welsh Government publishes **monthly activity and performance reports** that summarise NHS Wales data. They include the latest available monthly information plus a summary of long term trends. Information on time spent in A&E departments is included in the reports.
- This data is also available in the **NHS activity and performance summary dashboard**. This is an online tool providing additional activity information where users can interact with and explore the data.
- More detailed data on time spent waiting in NHS Wales A&E departments is published monthly on the **StatsWales** website. Figures are available showing performance against 4 and 12 hour waiting time targets, broken down by health board and hospital.
- Further background information (including the categorisation of emergency care facilities in Wales) is available in the Welsh Government's publication: **Time Spent in NHS Wales Accident and Emergency Departments Quality Report**.

Provisional new Accident and Emergency performance measures

- In November 2020, the Welsh Government **announced** a new set of 'experimental measures' for emergency departments. **The measures** were developed in conjunction with clinicians and the Royal College of Emergency Medicine. They are being published alongside the existing performance information and are still in the process of being evaluated. The three initial experimental measures are:

- **Time to triage:** Time of arrival to being triaged, this is where the patient's priority for treatment is determined using a triage score;
 - **Time to clinician:** Time of arrival to seeing a clinician for treatment. This could be a doctor, nurse or other health care professional: and
 - **Outcome of attendance:** This focuses on the outcome of the patient's visit, such as no follow-up, admission or treatment at another location.
- **Reports against the new measures** have been published by the **National Collaborative Commissioning Unit** since November 2020.

3. Referral to Treatment waiting times

Referral to Treatment Time (RTT) is the period of time from referral by a GP or other medical practitioner to hospital for treatment in NHS Wales. An RTT pathway covers the time waited from referral to hospital for treatment in NHS Wales and includes time spent waiting for any hospital appointments, tests, scans or other procedures that may be needed before treatment.

The targets relating to Referral to Treatment times are:

- 95 per cent of patients waiting less than 26 weeks from referral to treatment; and
 - no patients waiting more than 36 weeks for treatment.
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- The Welsh Government's **monthly activity and performance reports** on NHS Wales include information on RTT. This data is also available in the **NHS activity and performance summary dashboard**.
 - More detailed monthly data on RTT waiting times, broken down by health board and specialty are available on the **StatsWales website**.
 - **Further background information is also available in the Welsh Government's publication: NHS Wales Referral to Treatment Times: Quality Report.**

4. Diagnostic and therapy services waiting times

Waiting times for access to diagnostic and therapy services have the following targets (operational standards for maximum waiting times):

- the maximum wait for access to specified diagnostic tests is 8 weeks; and
- the maximum wait for access to specified therapy services is 14 weeks.

- The Welsh Government's **monthly activity and performance reports** on the Welsh NHS include information on diagnostic and therapy services waiting times. This data is also available in the **NHS activity and performance summary dashboard**.
- More detailed monthly data on the number of people waiting and waiting times, by health board and for individual diagnostic and therapy services, is available on the **StatsWales website**.
- **Further background information is also available in the Welsh Government's publication: NHS Wales Diagnostic and Therapy Services Waiting Times Quality Report.** This sets out which diagnostic and therapy services are included in the waiting times statistics.

5. Cancer waiting times

The target relating to cancer is:

Patients should start first definitive treatment within 62 days from the point of suspicion of cancer.

The **starting performance measure** until March 2022 will be 75 per cent of patients to start treatment within the 62 days, and the Welsh Government stated in 2020 that the performance measure will be revised upwards in subsequent years.

In November 2018, the Welsh Government **announced** that a new single cancer pathway would be introduced across Wales. This would replace the urgent suspected cancer and non-urgent suspected cancer pathways.

The previous targets relating to cancer waiting times, **up until February 2021**, were:

- at least 95 per cent of patients newly diagnosed with cancer, via the urgent suspected cancer (USC) route will start definitive treatment within 62 days of receipt of referral. This is for patients referred from primary care with suspected cancer, fulfilling specific criteria and accepted as suspected cancer by site specific specialists in secondary care; and
- at least 98 per cent of patients newly diagnosed with cancer, not via the USC route, will start definitive treatment within 31 days of the time the patient accepts their treatment plan. This is for patients diagnosed with suspected cancer through other routes, such as when presenting with another clinical condition, and referred onwards to specialist cancer services. **This would include** any patient who was not referred by their GP as a USC, but was assessed as USC by the specialist on analysis of the GP referral.

Wales began publicly reporting on the single cancer pathway from June 2019, and from **February 2021**, reporting has been only against the single pathway (now formally titled the suspected cancer pathway). The previous measures are no longer reported.

The suspected cancer pathway measures the patient's waiting time beginning from a suspicion of cancer rather than the point of diagnosis. The pathway is for all cancer patients, whether referred by the GP or identified through an emergency presentation, an incidental finding, screening or during an appointment in secondary care.

As the suspected cancer pathway starts the waiting time clock earlier, it aims to more accurately measure the patient experience. The Welsh Government **expects** to see lower percentage figures on the new pathway, but 'it is important to note that this does not mean people are waiting any longer'.

Cancer statistics

- The Welsh Government's **monthly activity and performance reports** include information on cancer waiting times. This data is also available in the **NHS activity and performance summary dashboard**. Additional contextual data and analysis on the suspected cancer pathway is reported through an **interactive dashboard**.
- Monthly data on the suspected cancer pathway is also available on the **StatsWales** website. This includes data by health board and tumour site.
- The **Welsh Cancer Intelligence & Surveillance Unit** is the National Cancer Registry for Wales and its primary role is to record, store and report on all incidence of cancer for the resident population of Wales wherever they are treated. Further information, along with additional data, is available on its **website**.
- Further background information is available in the Welsh Government publication: **NHS Wales Cancer Waiting Times Quality Report** and in **Welsh Health Circular WHC (2019) 028: Consolidated Rules for Managing Cancer Waiting Times**.

6. Ambulance response times

The **call categories** and targets for ambulance response times are:

Red: Immediately life-threatening (someone is in imminent danger of death, such as a cardiac arrest). There is an all-Wales target for 65 per cent of these calls to have a response within 8 minutes.

Amber: Serious, but not immediately life-threatening (patients who will often need treatment to be delivered on the scene, and may then need to be taken to hospital). These calls will include most medical and trauma cases, such as cardiac chest pains, stroke or fracture. There is no time-based target for amber calls.

Green: Non urgent (can often be managed by other health services and clinical telephone assessment). These will include fainting (recovered and alert), minor injuries or earache. There is no official time based target for these calls.

- The Welsh Government's **monthly activity and performance reports** include information on ambulance response times. This data is also available in the **NHS activity and performance summary dashboard**.
- Tables containing more detail on emergency ambulance services, including 'red' minute by minute performance, are available on **StatsWales**. A broader range of Ambulance Service Quality Indicators are also published by **StatsWales** and the NHS Wales **Emergency Ambulance Services Committee**.
- Further background information is available in the Welsh Government's publication: **Ambulance Services in Wales Quality Report**.

7. Delayed transfers of care

The term 'delayed transfers of care' is used when inpatients in hospital who are ready to move on to a more appropriate care setting are prevented from doing so for one or more reasons.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the Welsh Government **suspended delayed transfers of care reporting requirements**, along with other datasets. The Welsh Government introduced interim **COVID-19 Discharge Requirements**, which included a new discharge process with increased focus on rehabilitation and reablement. Under these requirements, brief weekly updates have been submitted to the Welsh Government, so that barriers to implementation could be understood and addressed. This data has not been used for performance management purposes.

This weekly data does not measure delayed transfers of care in the same way as the previous data collection, has not been assessed against the standards of the Code of Practice for Statistics, and has not been published. The Welsh Government has **stated that** options for future collection and publication of data and performance measures will be developed, but work in this area has been delayed due to other priorities relating to COVID-19 pandemic.

- The Welsh Government's **monthly activity and performance reports** include information on delayed transfers of care **up until February 2020**. Data up until March 2020 is available in the **NHS activity and performance summary dashboard**.
- More detailed monthly data on delayed transfers of care up until February 2020 is also available on the **StatsWales** website. This includes a breakdown of data by health board and local authority.
- Further background information on delayed transfers of care up until February 2020 is available in the Welsh Government publication: **Delayed transfers of care: quality report**.