

# NHS Referral to Treatment Waiting Times

March 2016

## Introduction

This briefing provides information on the performance of Local Health Boards (LHBs) against the Welsh Government targets for NHS treatment waiting times. Most NHS waiting times in Wales are measured against the time from referral to treatment (RTT), although there are a number of exceptions.<sup>1</sup> The RTT is the period of time from referral, by a GP or other medical practitioner, to hospital for treatment.<sup>2</sup>

**The Welsh Government statistical release and Stats Wales have amended references from 'patients' to 'patient pathways', to reflect the fact that an individual patient can be on more than one treatment pathway. The term 'patients' in this briefing note should be taken to also refer to 'patient pathways'.**

The current Welsh Government targets for NHS RTT waiting times are to ensure that:

- At least 95 per cent of patients waiting to start treatment must have waited less than 26 weeks from referral to treatment
- 100 per cent of patients not treated within 26 weeks must be treated in 36 weeks.

<sup>1</sup> The targets apply to the majority of referrals to NHS hospitals for treatment; however there are a number of exceptions. In addition, some conditions such as cancer have their own specific target, and are therefore not included in the general targets. Further information on referral to treatment targets is available at: Welsh Government, [Waiting Times for NHS Services: Frequently Asked Questions](#), 9 June 2011 [accessed 10 March 2016]

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Government, [Referral to treatment times](#), 10 March 2016 [accessed 10 March 2016]

The Welsh Government measures progress against these targets each month, and the figures used **are those for patients waiting to start treatment at the end of the month**. Separate figures for patients treated during each month are published, but as these are not covered by the targets they have not been included in this release. The LHB figures included in this release are for patients treated by each LHB rather than the LHB they live in. The Welsh Government has issued revised figures for October 2015.

## NHS Referral to Treatment Waiting Times in January 2016

Table 1 and figures 1 and 2 show performance against the 26 and 36 week referral to treatment waiting time targets for each LHB, and for the whole of Wales, using the latest figures from January 2016.<sup>3</sup> It can be seen from table 1 and figures 1 and 2 that:

- In January 2016, neither the 26 week nor 36 week targets were met on an All Wales basis.
- **Powys Teaching Health Board** achieved both the 26 week and the 36 week referral to treatment waiting time target in January 2016.
- **Hywel Dda Health Board** was the worst performing LHB for both the 26 week target and the 36 week target.

<sup>3</sup> [Patient pathways waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#), (accessed 10 March 2016)



**Table 1: Performance against waiting time targets at end of January 2016 (a), (c)**

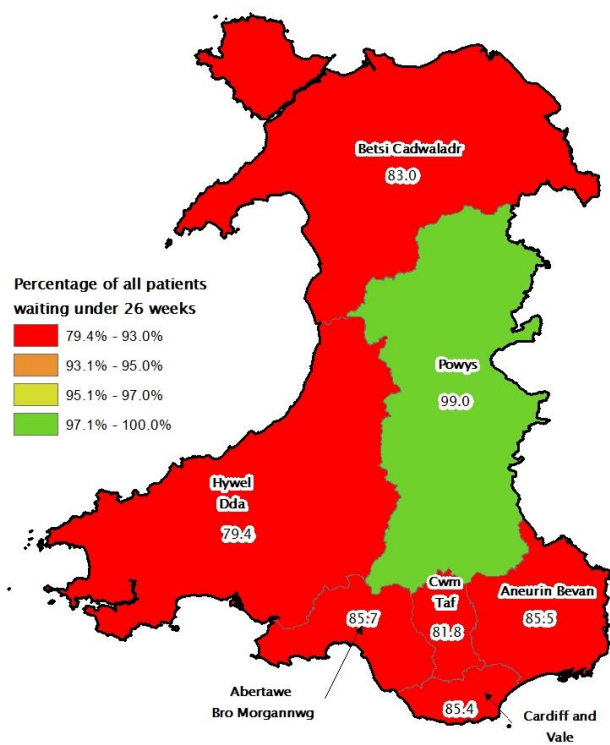
Local Health Board	Under 26 weeks		Under 36 weeks (b)		Over 36 weeks	Total patients waiting for treatment
	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	
Abertawe Bro Morgannwg	64,414	85.7	70,383	93.6	4,782	75,165
Aneurin Bevan	71,474	85.5	79,684	95.3	3,907	83,591
Betsi Cadwaladr	74,513	83.0	83,604	93.1	6,218	89,822
Cardiff and Vale	68,806	85.4	77,685	96.5	2,846	80,531
Cwm Taf	33,430	81.8	37,856	92.6	3,019	40,875
Hywel Dda	45,293	79.4	51,433	90.2	5,584	57,017
Powys	5,251	99.0	5,303	100.0	.	5,303
<b>Wales</b>	<b>363,181</b>	<b>84.0</b>	<b>405,948</b>	<b>93.9</b>	<b>26,356</b>	<b>432,304</b>

Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales, [Patient pathways waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#)

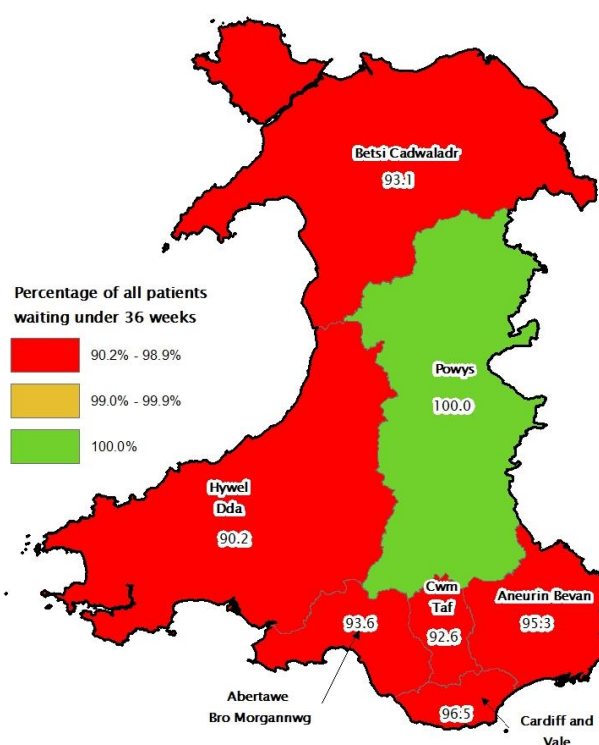
Notes:

- (a) This includes patients who are waiting for cardiac treatment. Cardiac RTT is defined differently from the rest of RTT; please refer to the [Referral to Treatment Time quality report](#) for further details.
- (b) The figures for patients waiting under 36 weeks for treatment include those waiting under 26 weeks and between 26 and 36 weeks for treatment.
- (c) The values in the purple shaded boxes met the referral to treatment waiting time target in January 2016.

**Figure 1: Percentage of patients waiting less than 26 weeks for treatment at end of January 2016**



**Figure 2: Percentage of patients waiting less than 36 weeks for treatment at end of January 2016**



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Contains Ordnance Survey data.

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Source: Statswales

Contains Ordnance Survey data.



## Performance against RTT waiting time targets since January 2015

Table 2 and figure 3 focus on the performance against the referral to treatment waiting time targets, on an All Wales basis since January 2015.<sup>4</sup>

It can be seen from table 2 and figure 3 that:

- **Neither target has been met in any month** at an All Wales level between January 2015 and January 2016.
- The percentage of patients waiting less than 26 weeks for treatment in January 2016 was 0.5 percentage points higher than in December, the joint fourth lowest since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.
- The percentage of patients waiting less than 36 weeks for treatment in January 2016 was 0.1 percentage points lower than in December, the third lowest since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.
- The number of patients waiting over 36 weeks for treatment was nearly 3,000 more than in January 2015. It was the third highest since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.
- The number of patients waiting for treatment at the end of January 2016 was over 17,000 more than in January 2015.<sup>5</sup> It is the lowest figure since April 2015.

**Table 2: Performance against waiting time targets, on All Wales basis, January 2015 to January 2016 (a), (b)**

Date	Under 26 weeks		Under 36 weeks (b)		Over 36 weeks	Total patients waiting for treatment
	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	
January 2015	349,703	84.3	391,142	94.3	23,532	414,674
February 2015	354,687	85.3	392,499	94.4	23,238	415,737
March 2015	360,496	86.2	399,444	95.5	18,938	418,382
April 2015	364,092	84.9	406,166	94.7	22,753	428,919
May 2015	364,338	83.8	409,501	94.1	25,519	435,020
June 2015	372,810	84.8	414,256	94.2	25,373	439,629
July 2015	377,531	85.1	416,531	93.8	27,313	443,844
August 2015	374,689	84.3	416,013	93.6	28,654	444,667
September 2015	370,824	83.8	417,677	94.3	25,013	442,690
October 2015	372,622	84.0	417,385	94.1	26,005	443,390
November 2015	371,963	84.7	413,085	94.1	25,872	438,957
December 2015	366,696	83.5	412,748	94.0	26,342	439,090
January 2016	363,181	84.0	405,948	93.9	26,356	432,304

Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales, [Patient pathways waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#)

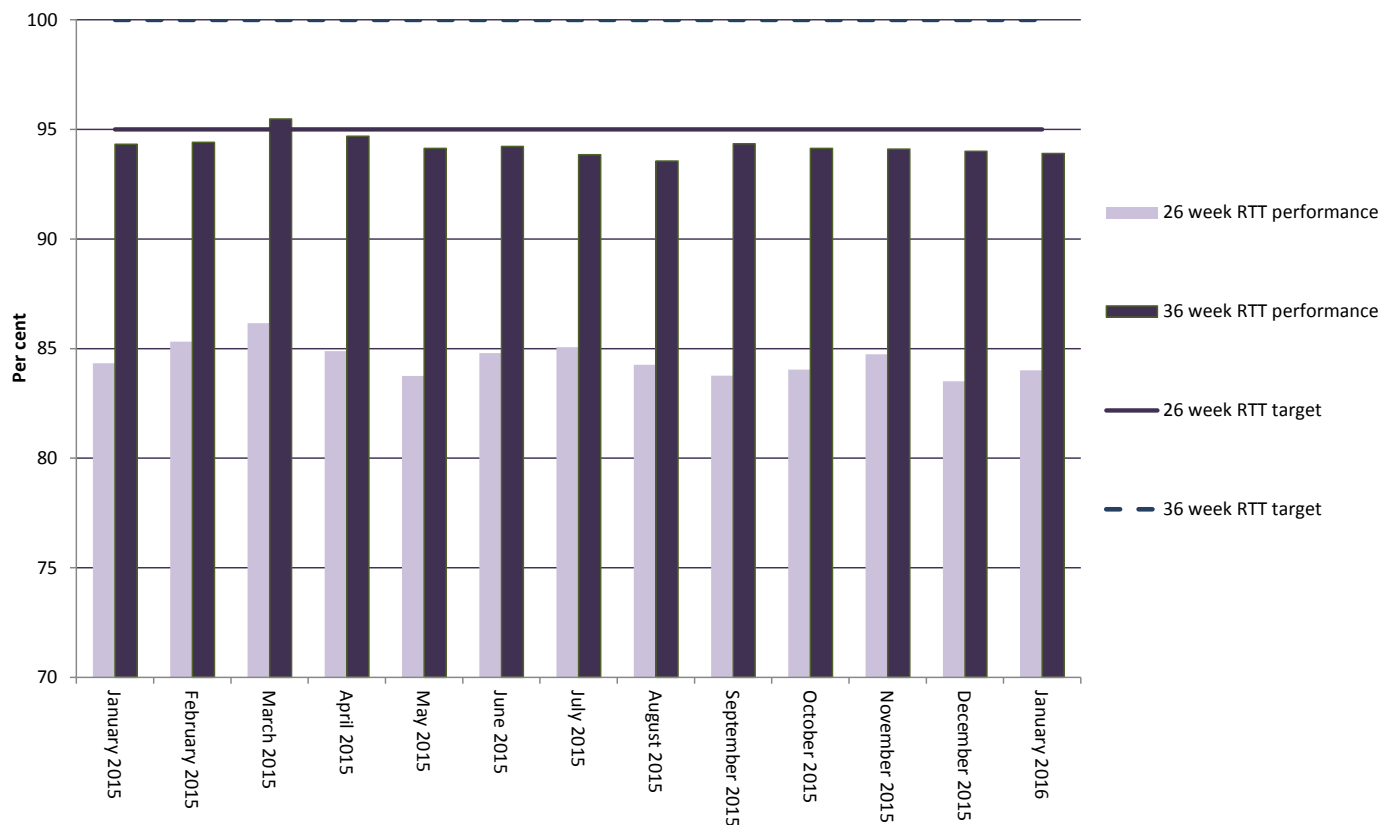
Notes:

- This includes patients who are waiting for cardiac treatment. Cardiac RTT is defined differently from the rest of RTT; please refer to the [Referral to treatment time quality report](#) for further details.
- The figures for patients waiting under 36 weeks for treatment include those waiting under 26 weeks and between 26 and 36 weeks for treatment.

<sup>4</sup> Welsh Government, Stats Wales, [Patient pathways waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#), (accessed 10 March 2016)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

**Figure 3: Percentage of patients waiting less than 26 and 36 weeks at end of month from January 2015 to January 2016**



Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales, [Patient pathways waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#)

Notes – See notes from Table 2

## Trauma and orthopaedic speciality

While **waiting time targets are allied to performance across all specialties**, it is useful to see the contribution of individual specialties towards performance.

In a written statement in March 2011, the then Minister for Health and Social Services highlighted the difficulty in achieving waiting time targets due to pressures within orthopaedic services resulting from increased GP referrals.<sup>6</sup>

Following additional funding allocations for orthopaedic treatment in 2011-12 and 2012-13, the

<sup>6</sup> Welsh Government, Edwina Hart (Minister for Health and Social Services), [Waiting Times and Orthopaedic Services update](#), Cabinet Written Statement, 10 March 2011 [accessed 10 March 2016]

Welsh Government stated that £16.6 million will be allocated in recurrent annual funding from 2013-14 with the purpose of sustaining improvements in orthopaedic waiting times.<sup>7</sup>

In his report published in June 2015, [A Review of Orthopaedic Services](#), the Auditor General for Wales concluded that while orthopaedic services have become more efficient in the past decade, NHS Wales is not well placed to meet future demand. This is because there has been a focus on securing immediate reductions in waiting times, however less attention has been paid to developing more sustainable, long-term solutions to meet demand.

<sup>7</sup> Welsh Government, [Draft Budget 2013-14: A Budget for Growth and Jobs](#), page 38, October 2012 [accessed 10 March 2016]



Table 3 shows the latest figures for the trauma and orthopaedic specialty, at the end of January 2016.

**Table 3: Waiting times for trauma and orthopaedic specialty at end of January 2016, (a), (b)**

Local Health Board	Under 26 weeks		Under 36 weeks (b)		Total patients waiting for treatment
	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	
Abertawe Bro Morgannwg	7,499	69.0	9,077	83.5	10,875
Aneurin Bevan	11,187	74.1	13,246	87.8	15,093
Betsi Cadwaladr	8,770	60.9	11,274	78.3	14,403
Cardiff and Vale	8,273	77.5	9,955	93.3	10,673
Cwm Taf	3,774	79.1	4,371	91.6	4,771
Hywel Dda	5,181	69.3	6,233	83.4	7,475
Powys	321	99.7	322	100.0	322
<b>Wales</b>	<b>45,005</b>	<b>70.7</b>	<b>54,478</b>	<b>85.6</b>	<b>63,612</b>

Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales [Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#)

Notes:

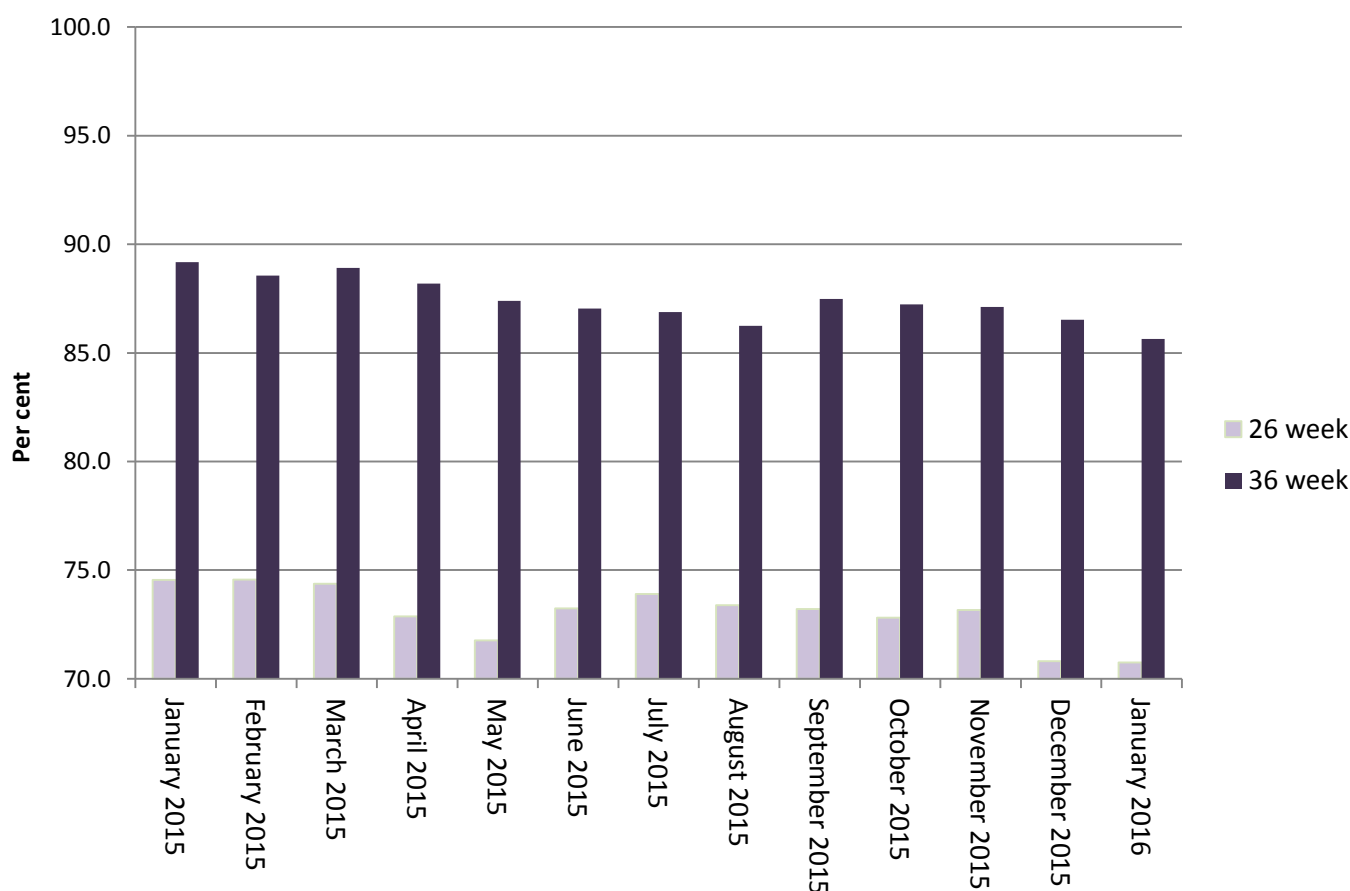
- (a) The figures for patients waiting under 36 weeks for treatment include those waiting under 26 weeks and between 26 and 36 weeks for treatment.
- (b) Values in the purple shaded boxes indicate a level of performance in January 2016 equal to or above that needed to achieve the waiting time targets.

In January 2016, it can be seen that:

- **In Powys Teaching Health Board** almost all patients had been waiting less than 26 weeks. In all other LHBs, less than 80 per cent of patients had been waiting less than 26 weeks for treatment.
- **In Powys Teaching Health Board**, all patients had been waiting under 36 weeks for treatment. In all other LHBs, less than 94 per cent of patients had been waiting less than 36 weeks for treatment.
- The LHB with the lowest percentage of patients waiting under 26 weeks and under 36 weeks was **Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board**.

Figure 4 compares the percentage of patients waiting less than 26 and 36 weeks for treatment in the trauma and orthopaedic specialty in the months from January 2015 to January 2016.

**Figure 4: Percentage of patients waiting less than 26 and 36 weeks in the trauma and orthopaedic specialty, from January 2015 to January 2016**



Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales, [Patient pathways waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#)

- For each month since January 2015, the percentage of patients waiting under 26 weeks has been **well below the level needed to achieve the waiting time target across all specialties**. The percentage of patients waiting less than 26 weeks in the trauma and orthopaedic specialty in January 2016 decreased by 0.1 percentage points compared to December. This was the lowest of any point over the past year, and since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.<sup>8</sup>
- For each month since January 2015, the percentage of patients waiting under 36 weeks has also been **below the level needed to achieve the waiting time target across all specialties**. The percentage of patients waiting less than 36 weeks in the trauma and orthopaedic specialty in January 2016 was the lowest of any point over the past year, and since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011. It decreased by 0.9 percentage points compared to December.

<sup>8</sup> Welsh Government, Stats Wales, [Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#) [accessed 10 March 2016]



## Further information

The links below provide further information about the data sources used in this briefing, and further information about NHS Referral to Treatment Waiting Times:

- Stats Wales, **Patient pathways waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks**
- Stats Wales, **Percentage of patient pathways waiting to start treatment within target time by month and grouped weeks**
- Statistics on patients that have been treated during each month are available at:
- Stats Wales, **Percentage of treated patients by latest month, local health board and grouped weeks**
- Auditor General for Wales, **NHS Waiting Times for Elective Care in Wales**, January 2015
- Auditor General for Wales, **A Review of Orthopaedic Services**, June 2015

For further information and statistics on NHS Referral to Treatment Waiting Times, please contact **Nigel Barwise** ([Nigel.Barwise@Assembly.Wales](mailto:Nigel.Barwise@Assembly.Wales)), **Research Service**.

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