

Will the NHS Long Term Plan help us diagnose cancer earlier?

How will the Long Term Plan improve early diagnosis?

Cancer Research UK welcomes the ambition in the NHS Long Term Plan to diagnose 75% of cancers at stage one or stage two by 2028. The key changes announced to support this ambition include introducing Faecal Immunochemical Tests to bowel screening and lowering the screening age to 50, rolling out Rapid Diagnostic and Assessment Centres, targeted lung health checks, and investing in new equipment including MRI and CT scanners.

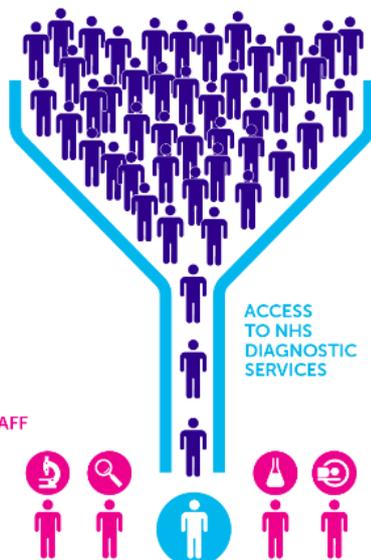
However, hospitals are already dealing with worryingly high vacancy rates. More than 1 in 10 NHS diagnostic posts are currently unfilled and thousands more staff will be needed in the future to meet demand – by 2035 there will be on new cancer case every minute. With more people being diagnosed, demand for staff who deliver treatment is also going to increase. A National Audit Office report released in January stated that if money is not committed to staff training, the NHS Long Term Plan may not be able to deliver on its ambitions. We believe the cancer workforce may have to double if we are to adequately meet the increasing need for cancer diagnosis and treatment.

If the critical shortages in the cancer workforce are not addressed, we will not have enough specialist staff to deliver these new measures or cope with our growing and ageing population.

How can we make sure we have enough staff to cope with rising demand?

THERE AREN'T ENOUGH NHS STAFF TO DIAGNOSE CANCER EARLY

REFERRED PATIENTS
More tests are needed as more patients are referred.



NHS DIAGNOSTIC STAFF

To achieve a truly world-leading service and reach CRUK's goal of 3 in 4 people surviving cancer by 2034, we need to fill current vacancies and invest for the long term to produce the next generation of NHS professionals.

A national workforce group, led by Baroness Harding, Chair of NHS Improvement, has been tasked with producing a long-term workforce implementation plan. This group will make interim recommendations in the Spring.

However, the level of funding available for workforce planning and training is still unknown. It is important that the workforce plan is fully funded in the Spending Review and that this funding is based on need.

There are also concerns that the work Health Education England has been doing to develop a long-term cancer workforce plan could be lost. Health Education England's plan should be published as soon as possible as part of the new group's interim recommendations, to ensure that the specific focus on the cancer workforce is retained.

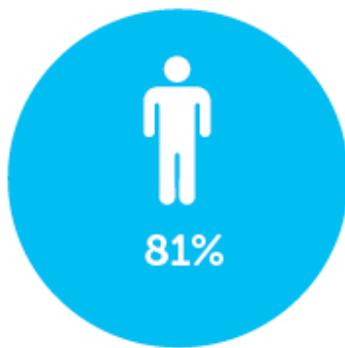
Why is early diagnosis so important?

The UK has a growing and ageing population and by 2035 there will be over half a million new cancer cases every year - one new case every minute. In our lifetime, half of us are now expected to be diagnosed with cancer.

Our best chance of increasing survival is to diagnose and treat cancer as early as possible. For instance, bowel cancer survival drops from more than 9 in 10 to around than 1 in 10 depending on when it is diagnosed.

SURVIVAL AND STAGE OF DIAGNOSIS TEN-YEAR SURVIVAL FOR EIGHT TYPES OF CANCER COMBINED

DIAGNOSED EARLY
(STAGE I + STAGE II)



SURVIVAL IS
MORE THAN
THREE TIMES
HIGHER WHEN
CANCER IS
DIAGNOSED
EARLY

DIAGNOSED LATE
(STAGE III + STAGE IV)



Despite the hard work of our NHS staff, the UK tends to diagnose cancer at a later stage than comparable countries. Nearly half of all patients are diagnosed at a late stage in England, when chances of successful treatment aren't as good. This is one of the main reasons why we are lagging behind cancer outcomes in other countries.

If we are to meet rising demand and diagnose cancers earlier, we will need more workforce than ever to conduct tests and interpret their results. For example, even without introducing significant changes like targeted lung health checks, 70% more radiologists may be needed in 10 years compared to current levels. If lung health checks are implemented, significantly more would be needed on top of this.

How can I help?

- Ask us for draft Parliamentary Questions on the NHS cancer workforce.
- Tweet your support using #ShouldertoShoulder and @CRUK_Policy.
- Speak up in Parliamentary debates and at Health Questions about the need to ensure the cancer workforce can keep pace with rising demand.
- Meet with the CRUK Public Affairs team or your local Cancer Campaigns Ambassador to find out more.
- Get in touch with us at publicaffairs@cancer.org.uk and we'll be happy to provide you with local stats, briefings, reports and any other help you need to support our cancer workforce in the months and years ahead