



Trends in Cancer Waiting Times metrics, England, 2009/10 to 2014/15

National Cancer Intelligence Network Data Briefing

The National Cancer Intelligence Network's analysis of NHS England's Cancer Waiting Times (CWT) database generally considers three primary metrics. These are the:

- referral rate: the number of urgent GP referrals for suspected cancer (also known as two-week wait [TWW] referrals) per 100,000 people
- conversion rate: the percentage of TWW referrals resulting in a diagnosis of cancer
- detection rate: the percentage of CWT recorded cancers¹ which resulted from a TWW referral

Key messages

There was a large increase in the number of 'two-week wait' referrals between 2009/10 and 2014/15.

Fewer than one in ten of these referrals now lead to a diagnosis of cancer.

In 2014/15, almost half of CWT recorded cancers were diagnosed after a 'two-week wait' referral.

This briefing describes how the national referral rate, conversion rate and detection rate have changed for all cancers² between the 2009/10 and 2014/15 financial years.

National trends in CWT metrics

There has been a large increase of 60% in the directly age-sex standardised³ referral rate, increasing from 1,904 to 3,055 referrals per 100,000 people between 2009/10 and 2014/15. This increase relates to a 71% increase in the number of TWW referrals, with an additional 642,754 TWW referrals in 2014/15 compared to 2009/10 (Figure 1).

The conversion rate decreased from 10.8% in 2009/10 to 8.2% in 2014/15. Over the same period, there was a 30% increase in the number of cancer diagnoses resulting from a TWW referral (TWW cancers), from 97,759 in 2009/10 to 126,637 in 2014/15. The reduction in the conversion rate was entirely due to the larger increase in the number of TWW referrals.

¹ Some cancer diagnoses (around 20% to 30%) are not recorded in the CWT database, for example where a patient died before they could start treatment.

² The rates also differ considerably by cancer type.

³ Using the 2013 European Standard Population.

The detection rate increased from 42% in 2009/10 to 48% in 2014/15. This increase in the proportion of diagnoses made through the two-week wait pathway is encouraging, with patients expected to benefit from quicker access to cancer services. Other recent work has also shown an accompanying decrease in the proportion of diagnoses made following an emergency presentation⁴.

Figure 1: TWW referrals, cancer diagnoses resulting from a TWW referral (TWW cancers), conversion rate, CWT recorded cancers and detection rate by financial year, England, 2009/10 to 2014/15



Find out more:

Other useful resources within the NCIN partnership:

What cancer statistics are available and where can I find them?

www.ncin.org.uk/publications/reports

Public Health England's National Cancer Intelligence Network (NCIN) is a UK-wide initiative, working to drive improvements in cancer awareness, prevention, diagnosis and clinical outcomes by improving and using the information collected about cancer patients for analysis, publication and research.

www.gov.uk/phe

⁴ <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2015/11/10/big-data-in-action-the-story-behind-routes-to-diagnosis/>