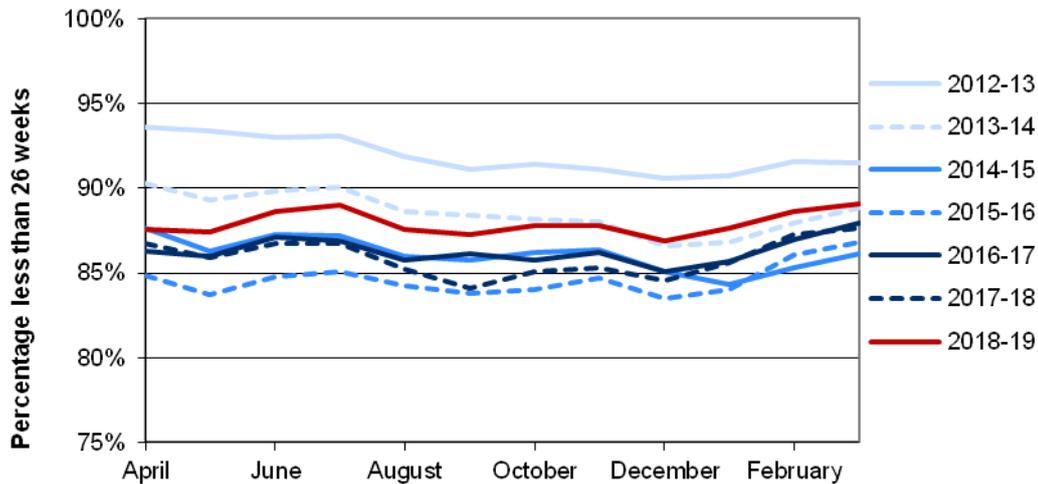




NHS Wales Referral to Treatment Times: 2018–19

29 August 2019
SB 36/2019

Chart 1: Percentage of pathways waiting less than 26 weeks, by financial year.



*Please note this chart does not start at zero
Note: Includes known estimates - see Key Quality Information.

Source: Referral to treatment times (RTT), NHS Wales Informatics Services (NWIS)

Key points

- There were 1,014,880 pathways closed in 2018-19, 4.2 per cent more than in 2017-18.
- The total open pathways waiting for treatment each month in 2018-19 was around 430 to 450 thousand.
- The percentage waiting less than 26 weeks ranged from 86.9 to 89.1 per cent.
- Performance against the 95 per cent target (26 weeks) in 2018-19 was higher than in 2017-18. March 2019 had the highest percentage of patients waiting less than 26 weeks since July 2013
- The number waiting over 36 weeks ranged from 8,985 to 15,622.
- There were less pathways waiting more than 36 weeks in every month of 2018-19 compared to 2017-18.
- The median wait varied across the year. In 2018-19, the longest was 10.0 weeks in September 2018; the lowest was 8.6 weeks in March 2019.

About this bulletin

This Statistical Bulletin presents summary information on the reported numbers of patients waiting for NHS referral to treatment in Wales.

New this year: an [interactive dashboard](#) where you can explore the trends and data in more detail.

The operational standards relating to referral to treatment times are that 95 per cent of patients should be seen within 26 weeks, and no patients should wait in excess of 36 weeks. This information is published monthly along with other key indicators as part of the [NHS Activity and Performance Summary](#).

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Introduction

The referral to treatment statistics show monthly data on the number of people waiting and number of weeks waited at the end of each month for specific referrals to treatment. NHS local health boards (LHBs) report on the data which is collected by the NHS Wales Informatics Service (NWIS). Waiting lists include all those patients, irrespective of their area of residence, who are waiting for NHS-funded referral to treatment within Wales.

A referral to treatment pathway covers the time waited from referral to hospital treatment in the NHS in Wales and includes time spent waiting for any hospital appointments, tests, scans or other procedures that may be needed before being treated.

The waiting time is calculated from the date the referral to treatment was received until the point in the month where the data is requested for that month's statistics, when patient pathways are closed they are removed from this list and make up the data requested for the pathways closed each month.

Closed pathways are un-validated as there are multiple reasons for a pathway being closed, including a definitive treatment not taking place. Please see the [Key quality information](#) section for more information.

Referral to Treatment targets were used to measure outcome delivery of [The NHS Delivery Framework 2018-19](#). The targets are:

- 95 per cent of patients should be seen within 26 weeks.
- No patients should wait longer than 36 weeks for treatment.

There are more specified [waiting times statistics focusing on diagnostic tests and therapy treatments](#).

The analysis focuses on activity and performance in the 2018-19 financial year, but looks back over a longer time series to show long-term trends. Whilst data for referral to treatment times are available back to 2009 on [StatsWales](#), this bulletin and the associated [interactive dashboard](#) focus on September 2011 onwards (or 2012-13 when comparing years), as this was when Cardiology waiting times were combined into referral to treatment (See the [DSCN](#) here).

New this year

An [interactive dashboard](#) has been published alongside this bulletin. This bulletin provides a summary of the last year of data, along with longer-term trends. The dashboard provides an interactive analysis with more detail. It includes breakdowns by local health board, treatment function and stage of pathway. It shows the median wait times and provides detail on pathways not covered by referral to treatment recording.

Summary

Activity

Activity is shown by the number of pathways that are closed over time. In 2018-19, Cwm Taf were unable to report on the number of closed pathways so they have been excluded from the following analysis.

Latest data

There were 1,014,880 pathways closed in 2018-19. The most pathways were closed in Aneurin Bevan (227,981) and the least in Powys (14,454). January had the highest number of closed pathways per working day in 2018-19 with 4,226. August had the lowest with 3,476.

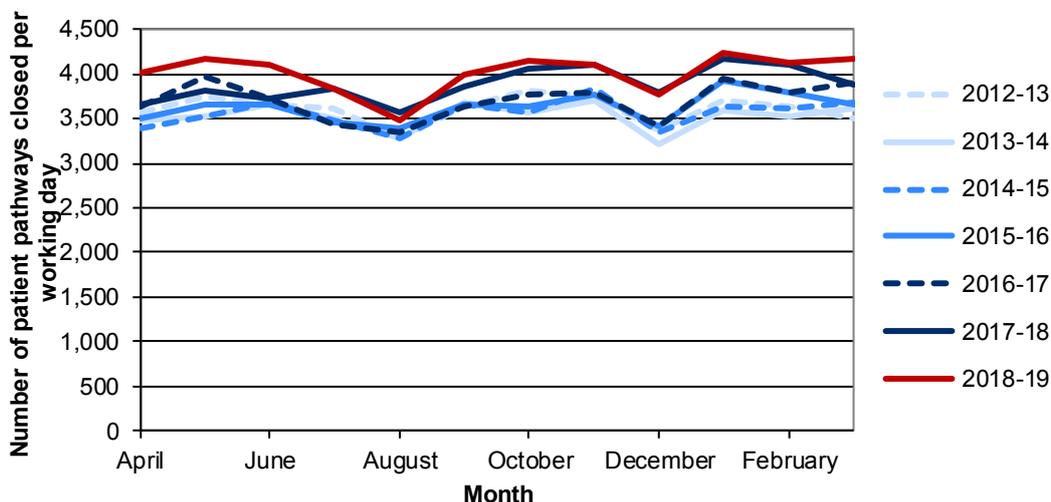
Change from last year

There was a 4.2 per cent increase (40,601 pathways) overall from 2017-18. Aneurin Bevan had the highest increase (7.9 per cent), Hywel Dda and Powys closed slightly fewer than last year (a 0.2 and 0.7 percentage decrease respectively).

Long term trend

There was a 12.5 per cent increase (113,123 pathways) over the last 6 years from 2012-13. The number of pathways closed per working day was the highest on record in eight out of the twelve months in 2018-19 (see chart 2). The number of patient pathways closed per working day varies throughout the year, with the numbers tending to be lower in August and December.

Chart 2: Closed patient pathways per working day, by financial year 2012-13 onwards



Note: Includes known estimates - see Key Quality Information.

Source: Referral to treatment times (RTT), NHS Wales Informatics Services (NWIS)

See the activity page in the [interactive dashboard](#) or [StatsWales](#) for more data and analysis

Performance

Latest data

The percentage waiting less than 26 weeks was highest at the end of the financial year (89.1 per cent in March) and lowest in December (86.9 per cent). The number waiting over 36 weeks was highest in August (15,622) and lowest in March (8,985). The 26 week and 36 week targets were not met for Wales overall in any month this year.

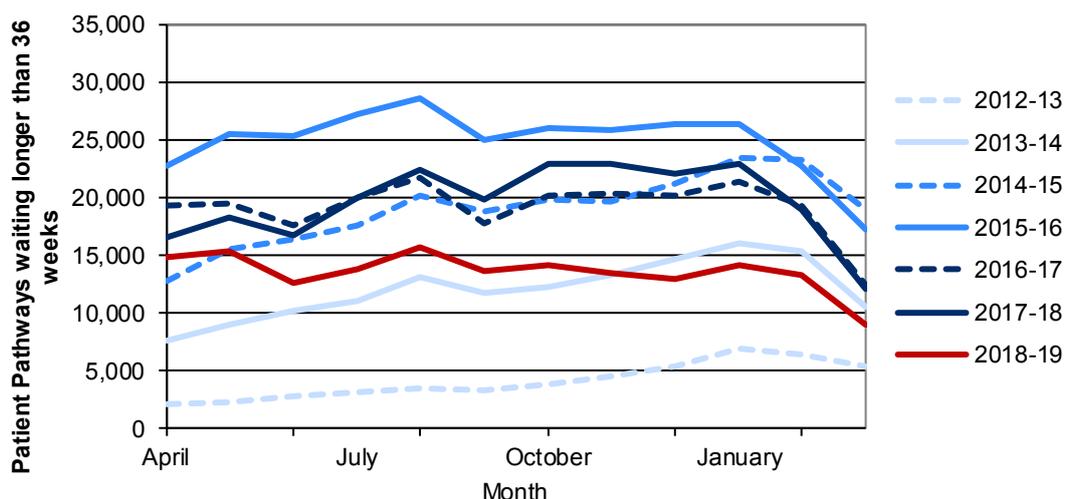
Change from last year

Overall, performance was closer to target this year compared to last year. When comparing the same month this year with last year, the percentage of patients waiting under 26 weeks was higher in every month, and the number waiting over 36 weeks was lower for every month.

Long term trend

March 2019 had the highest percentage of patients waiting less than 26 weeks since July 2013. In general, comparing the same month over time, there were fewer waits over 36 weeks in 2018-19 than the last four years (see chart 3)

Chart 3: Number of pathways waiting more than 36 weeks, by financial year.



Note: Includes known estimates - see Key Quality Information.

Source: Referral to treatment times (RTT), NHS Wales Informatics Services (NWIS)

See the performance page in the [interactive dashboard](#) or [StatsWales](#) for more data and analysis

Context

Latest data

The median wait varied across the year. In 2018-19, the longest wait was 10.0 weeks in September; the lowest was 8.6 weeks in March.

Over half of pathways are new outpatient appointments. Other pathways are undergoing tests, interventions or waiting for a follow-up appointment. The majority of pathways that have been waiting over 36 weeks are waiting for admitted diagnostic or therapeutic intervention

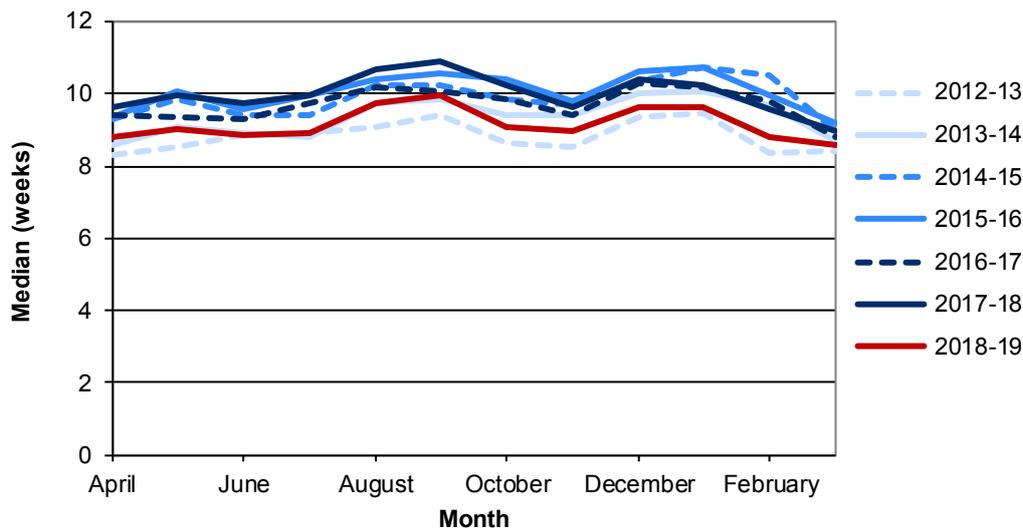
Change from last year

The median wait was shorter than the same time last year for every month in 2018-19.

Long term trend

The median waits in 2018-19 were generally shorter than the previous four years. In most months, the median was the shortest for that month since 2012-13.

Chart 4: Median waiting time (weeks) from referral to treatment, by financial year.



Note: Includes known estimates - see Key Quality Information.

Source: Referral to treatment times (RTT), NHS Wales Informatics Services (NWIS)

See the context page in the [interactive dashboard](#) or [StatsWales](#) for more data and analysis

Waiting times not included in RTT reporting

Summary

The percentage waiting over 14 weeks for an inpatient or day-case admission ranged from a low of 64.3 per cent in May 2018, to a high of 70.5 per cent in September 2018.

The percentage of those waiting longer than 10 weeks for a first outpatient appointment was lowest in May 2018 (13.7 per cent) and highest in September 2018 (22.0 per cent).

For child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), performance ranged from 49.5 per cent in August 2018 to 79.7 per cent in March 2019. November had the highest number of patients starting treatment in the target time (579) of all months for which there is comparable data (from March 2017).

See the non-RTT page in the [interactive dashboard](#) or [StatsWales](#) for more data and analysis

Key quality information

We publish a detailed [quality report](#) on NHS Wales Referral to treatment time statistics. This includes information on definitions and coverage, as well as other aspects of quality such as timeliness, relevance and comparability, and details of users and uses of our statistics.

Relevance

Definitions

Definitions of terms used are in the [NHS Wales Data Dictionary](#).

Although this release refers to patients, it is possible that a person could be on a number of different lists waiting for different conditions – i.e. there would be one patient but more than one pathway. Due to it being an aggregate data collection we're not able to measure the number of unique patients.

Changes to the statistical release

From April 2017 we have been publishing our monthly NHS activity and performance statistics on one day, with annual rather than quarterly analytical releases. This is the first in the new series of annual releases relating to referral to treatment times. Please see the [Chief Statistician's update](#) for more information. We welcome feedback on the new look release as well as any further analysis that would be of interest.

Coverage

Data on Welsh residents treated or waiting for treatment outside of Wales is not included in this release.

The time series in this release start at September 2011. This is because from this date onwards local health boards submitted a combined RTT return rather than separate main RTT and Cardiac RTT returns as they had done previously.

Median

The median time is the middle time when all waiting times are ordered from shortest wait to longest, so a half of all patient pathways wait this time or less. It is commonly used in preference to the mean as it is less susceptible to extreme values than the mean.

It should be noted that median times are calculated from aggregate data, rather than patient level data, and therefore are only estimates. Also because we do not have patient level data we have not presented the mean in these statistics.

Stage of pathway

The stage of pathway is used to identify the point at which a patient is currently waiting in respect of their overall diagnosis and treatment, along the entire patient pathway.

Below are the stages of pathway.

stage 1 -waiting for a new outpatient appointment. A new outpatient appointment may come from any referral source. A patient will be at Stage 1 only once.

stage 2 -waiting for a diagnostic of a diagnostic or Allied Health Professional (AHP) test, intervention or result.

stage 3 - waiting for a follow-up outpatient appointment or waiting for a decision following:

- 1) An outpatient appointment.
- 2) A diagnostic or AHP intervention result.
- 3) Or where the patient is waiting and the stage is uncertain/unknown.

also stage 3 -waiting for an admitted diagnostic or therapeutic intervention (i.e. treatment) only.

stage 4 -closed pathway. This includes:

Patient pathways treated

Patient pathways who no longer wanted to be seen

Deceased patient pathways

It is not possible for a patient to move backwards on this pathway, but it is possible for patient pathways to enter the pathway at different points (e.g. if a patient has a private outpatient appointment, but decides to revert to the NHS for treatment then they could enter at the treatment stage of the pathway). If this occurs, the patient would still be subject to the 26 week RTT target.

Care should be taken when looking at closed pathway information, as this data is not validated by health boards.

Accuracy

Estimates

Occasionally Local Health Boards do not submit complete information in time for the release. When this occurs an estimate is included within the data presented.

December 2011 to February 2012 – open pathways (waiting) and December 2011 to March 2012 – closed pathways (those treated)

December 2011 to February 2012 figures for Aneurin Bevan for those waiting to start treatment and those treated, as well as March 2012 figures for those treated, are estimated using their data for November 2011. Also, the data since April 2012 for those treated is not fully validated. This is following the implementation of a new Patient Administration System at the end of 2011. Due to technical difficulties, Aneurin Bevan were unable to run the report to provide figures for those patient pathways treated for June and July 2012 and to avoid not submitting any figures, the figures for those treated that were previously submitted for May 2012 have been used as estimates.

June and July 2012 – closed pathways (those treated)

Due to technical difficulties, Aneurin Bevan were unable to run the report to provide figures for those patient pathways treated for June and July 2012 and to avoid not submitted any figures, the figures for those treated that were submitted for May 2012 have been used as estimates.

October 2015 – open pathways (waiting)

Figures for the specialities Allied Health Professionals and Diagnostic Services for the Cwm Taf University LHB could not be accurately provided. Therefore, figures for September 2015 have been used as estimates.

November 2016 – closed pathways (those treated)

November 2016 figures for paediatric surgery at Betsi Cadwaladr could not be accurately provided. Therefore, figures for October 2016 have been used as estimates.

April 2017 – open pathways (waiting).

Figures for the specialities Allied Health Professionals and Diagnostic Services for Cwm Taf University LHB could not be accurately provided. Therefore, figures for March 2017 have been used as estimates.

Revisions

Any revisions to the data will be noted in the information accompanying the StatsWales cubes each month, and any large revisions will be noted on the summary headline page.

Public sector strike

The public sector strikes on 30 November 2011 and 10 May 2012 will have had an effect on performance in the November 2011 and May 2012 figures, respectively, as many outpatient appointments and routine operations were cancelled for that date.

Doctors' strikes – 21 June 2012

Referral to Treatment times may have been affected by the doctors' strikes on 21 June 2012 and this might have had a slight impact on performance.

Timeliness and punctuality

All outputs adhere to the Code of Practice by pre-announcing the date of publication through the [Upcoming calendar](#) web pages. Furthermore, should the need arise to postpone an output this would follow the Welsh Government's [Revisions, errors and postponements](#) arrangements.

We publish releases as soon as practicable after the relevant time period. Data for the end of month position is published within six weeks of the reference date. This allows for the significant validation by LHBs, NWIS and the Health Statistics and Analysis Unit.

This release was postponed. It was originally pre-announced to be published on the 25th July but was published on the 29th August 2019.

Accessibility and clarity

The statistics are published in an accessible, orderly, pre-announced manner on the Welsh Government website at 9:30am on the day of publication. An RSS feed alerts registered users to this publication. Simultaneously the quarterly releases are also published on the National Statistics Publication Hub. All releases are available to download for free.

More detailed data is available at the same time on the StatsWales website and this can be manipulated online or downloaded into spreadsheets for use offline.

Comparability and coherence

England, Scotland and Wales publish referral to treatment waiting times – which measures the complete patient pathway from initial referral e.g. by a GP, to agreed treatment or discharge - in addition to certain stages of treatment waiting times. Northern Ireland publish waiting times statistics for the inpatient, outpatient and diagnostics stages of treatment – which measures waiting times for the different stages of the patient pathway, typically specific waits for outpatient, diagnostic or inpatient treatment, or for specific services such as audiology.

In relation to referral to treatment waiting times, whilst there are similar concepts in England, Wales and Scotland in terms of measuring waiting times from the receipt of referral by the hospital to the start of treatment, and, the types of patient pathways included, there are distinct differences in the individual rules around measuring waiting times. This is particularly important regarding ‘when the clock stops or pauses’, exemptions, and the specialities covered.

Data on NHS Wales referral to treatment times is available on [StatsWales](#).

Data on NHS England referral to treatment times is available on the [NHS England website](#).

Data on NHS Scotland referral to treatment times is available on the [Information Services Division Scotland website](#).

NHS Northern Ireland hospital waiting times statistics can be found on the [Department of Health website](#).

National Statistics status

The [United Kingdom Statistics Authority](#) has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority’s regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is Welsh Government’s responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

The continued designation of these statistics as National Statistics was confirmed in 2011 following a [compliance check by the Office for Statistics Regulation](#). These statistics last underwent a [full assessment against the Code of Practice in 2011](#).

Since the latest review by the Office for Statistics Regulation, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

- E.g. added more value by providing more detailed breakdowns and interactive analysis in the [referral to treatment dashboard](#).

Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act puts in place seven well-being goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (b) publish indicators (“national indicators”) that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the Well-being goals, and (c) lay a copy of the national indicators before the National Assembly. The 46 national indicators were laid in March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the well-being goals and associated technical information is available in the [Well-being of Wales report](#).

Further information on the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local well-being assessments and local well-being plans.

Further details

The document is available at: <https://gov.wales/referral-treatment-times-april-2018-march-2019>

Next update

July 2020 (provisional).

We want your feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics which can be provided by email to stats.healthinfo@gov.wales.

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