

# NHS Waiting times– termly monitoring report

Y Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol | 6 Hydref 2022  
Health and Social Care Committee | 6 October 2022

Reference: RS22/3562-1

## Introduction

The Welsh Government published its [programme for transforming and modernising planned care and reducing waiting lists in Wales](#) in April 2022.

The Health Minister, Eluned Morgan MS [has said](#) “it will take a full Senedd term and a lot of hard work to recover from the impact of the pandemic”, stating that “this is now my priority and it is the health service’s priority”.

The Minister has set out her commitment to reducing waiting lists through **five key ambitions**. This paper looks at Welsh Government progress towards these ambitions and takes a more detailed look at the specialities that are waiting more than one year or two years.

Waiting times data are **published monthly** on the [StatsWales](#) website with a two month lag. Therefore the July 2022 data is the latest available at the time of writing.

**N.B.** Since 2009, Welsh Government has published monthly data on NHS Referral to Treatment Times (RTT), which measures the total waiting time from GP referral to treatment and this is now the main source of information on NHS waiting times. However, some specialties are not covered by RTT reporting. The waiting times data for these is published separately on [StatsWales](#), including for mental health hospital services, palliative care and



inpatient/day care dentistry. Cardiology is also measured separately using a different methodology.

Senedd Research articles on the NHS waiting times backlog are also available:

- [Reducing the NHS waiting list backlog](#)
- [Access delayed: the waiting times backlog in NHS Wales](#)

## 1. Headlines

NHS Wales is seeing a significant number of patients. The [number of patient pathways closed in July 2022](#) was just over 87,000, which is an average of 4,162 patient pathways per working day. Despite this, the waiting lists continue to grow.

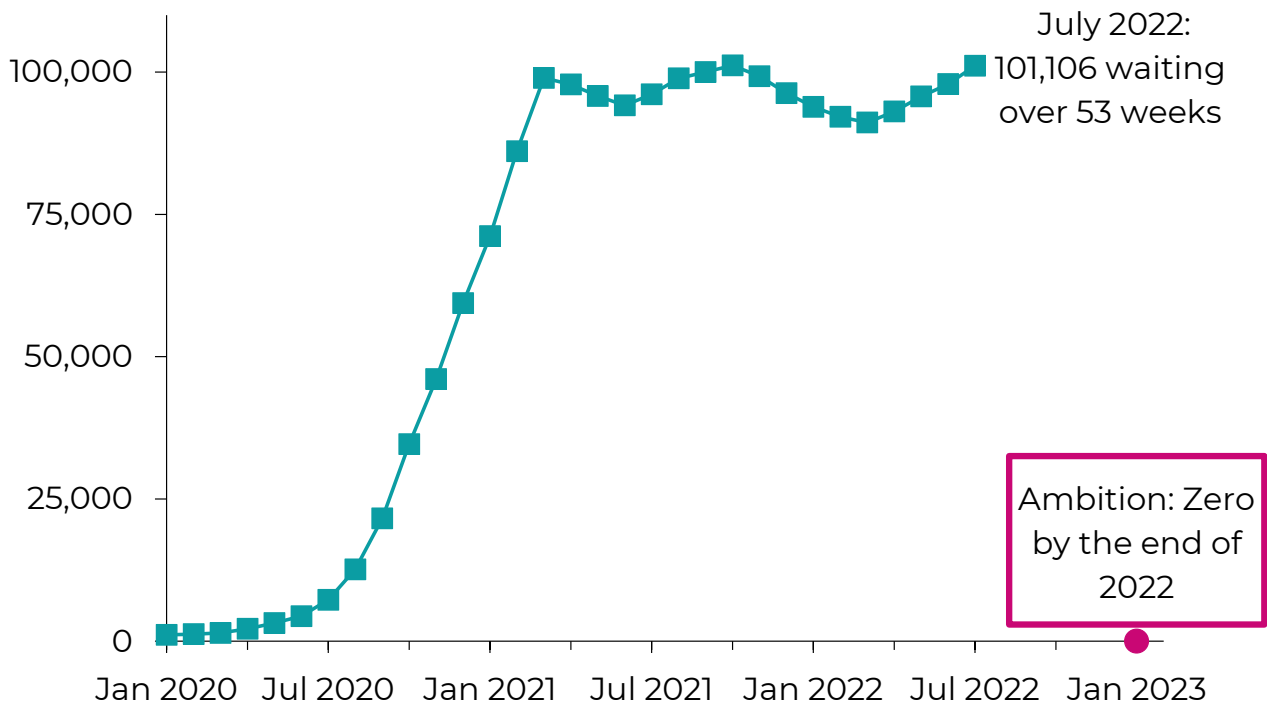
The total number of patient pathways waiting in Wales has grown since the start of the pandemic (February 2020), when it stood at 463,402 to 701,411 in March 2022. At the end of July 2022, that figure is 743,229.

In July, there were 181,390 patient pathways having waited 53 weeks or more for treatment. 60,557 patient pathways were waiting more than 105 weeks, although this number has been falling in recent months.

The graphics and analysis below show progress against the Welsh Government's five ambitions.

**Ambition 1: No one waiting longer than a year for their first outpatient appointment by the end of 2022**

Figure 1: Number of patient pathways waiting over 53 weeks for their first outpatient appointment



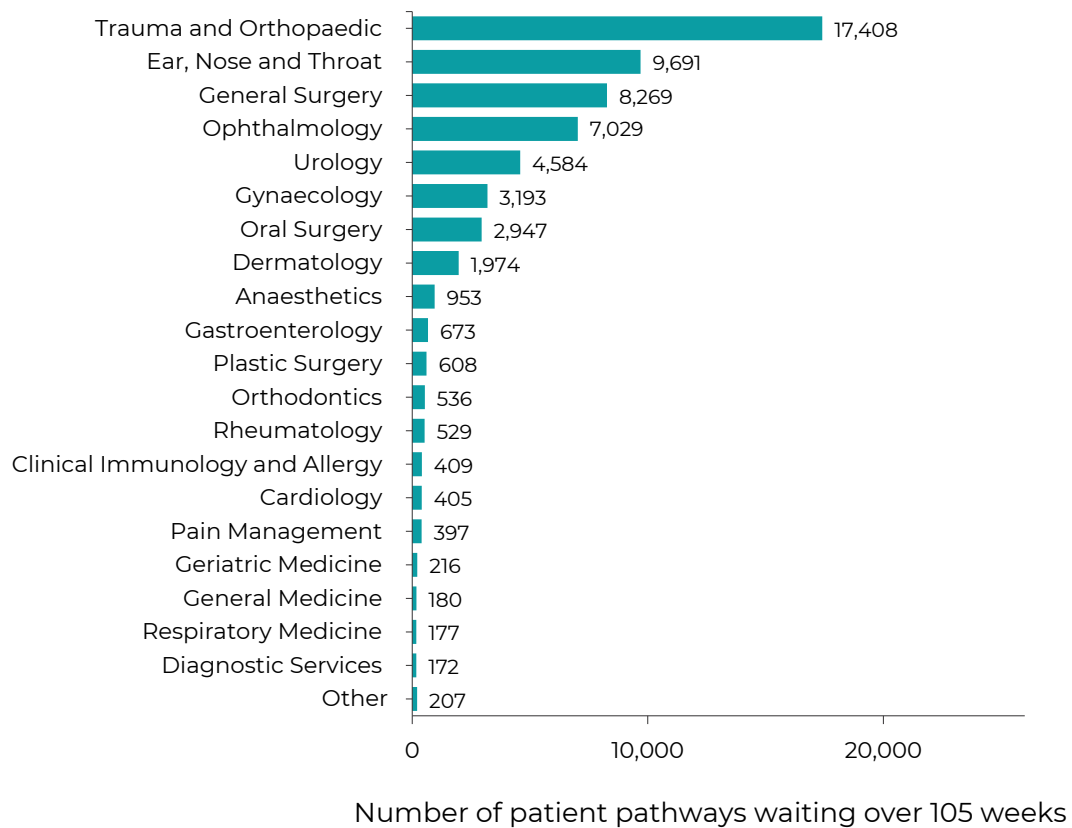
Source: StatsWales, [Patient pathways waiting to start treatment by month, grouped weeks and stage of pathway](#)

- In July 2022, 101,106 patient pathways were waiting over 53 weeks (more than a year) for their first outpatient appointment.
- This is an increase from 97,882 in June 2022 and 95,720 in May 2022.

This month, for the first time since 2020, the Welsh Government released data for all outpatient referrals (see [‘NHS referrals for first outpatient appointments: April 2012 to July 2022’](#)). The data shows the huge drop in referrals during the first wave of the pandemic. We’re now seeing some ‘bounce back’ in terms of the number of referrals returning to pre-pandemic levels.

**Ambition 2: Eliminate the number of people waiting longer than two years in most specialties by March 2023**

Figure 2: Number of patient pathways waiting over 105 weeks by treatment function

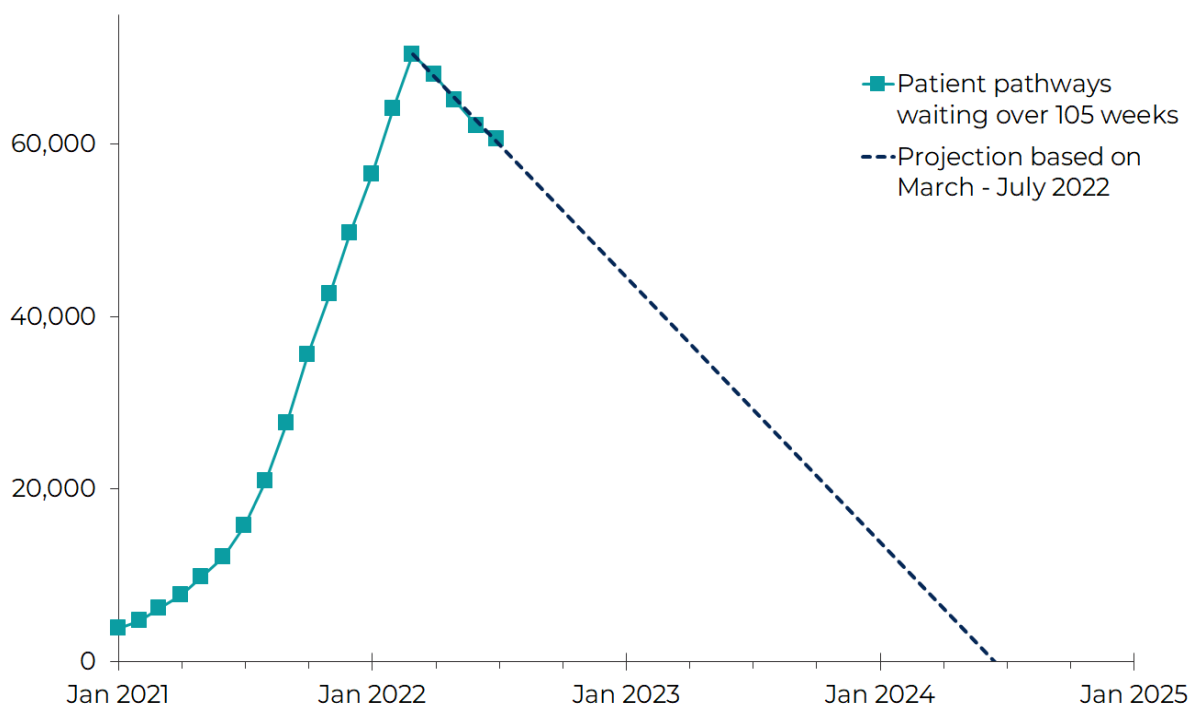


Source: StatsWales, [Patient pathways waiting to start treatment by month, grouped weeks and treatment function, January 2021 onwards](#)

- In July 2022, 60,557 patient pathways were waiting over 105 weeks (more than two years) across all specialities.
- The July data shows that 17,408 patient pathways were waiting over 105 weeks (more than two years) for trauma and orthopaedic treatments, 9,691 for ear, nose and throat treatments and 8,269 for general surgery.

- The number of patient pathways waiting over 105 weeks has decreased since March 2022. However, a projection using data from March to July shows that, at the current rate of progress, the ambition will not be fulfilled until the middle of 2024. This assumes that the rate of progress since March is sustained. Fulfilling the ambition sooner requires faster progress. It's unlikely that this ambition will be achieved for all specialities.

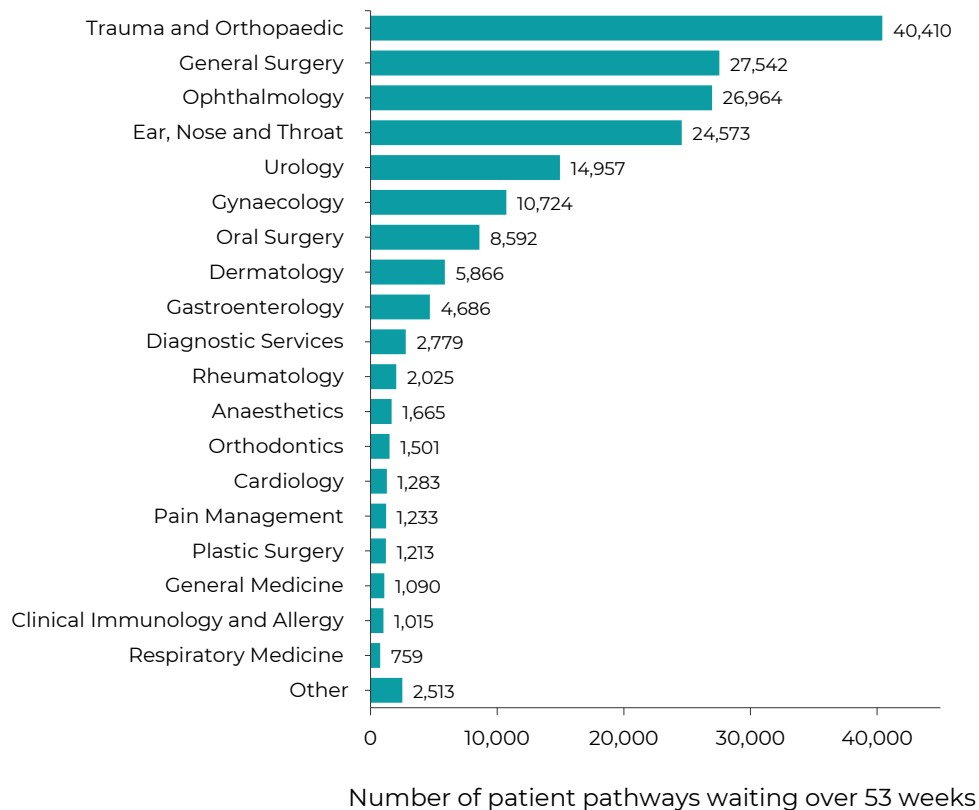
Figure 3: Number of patient pathways waiting over 105 weeks and projection based on March to July 2022 data



Source: StatsWales, [Patient pathways waiting to start treatment by month, grouped weeks and treatment function, January 2021 onwards](#)

**Ambition 3: Eliminate the number of people waiting longer than one year in most specialties by Spring 2025**

Figure 4: Number of patient pathways waiting over 53 weeks by treatment function

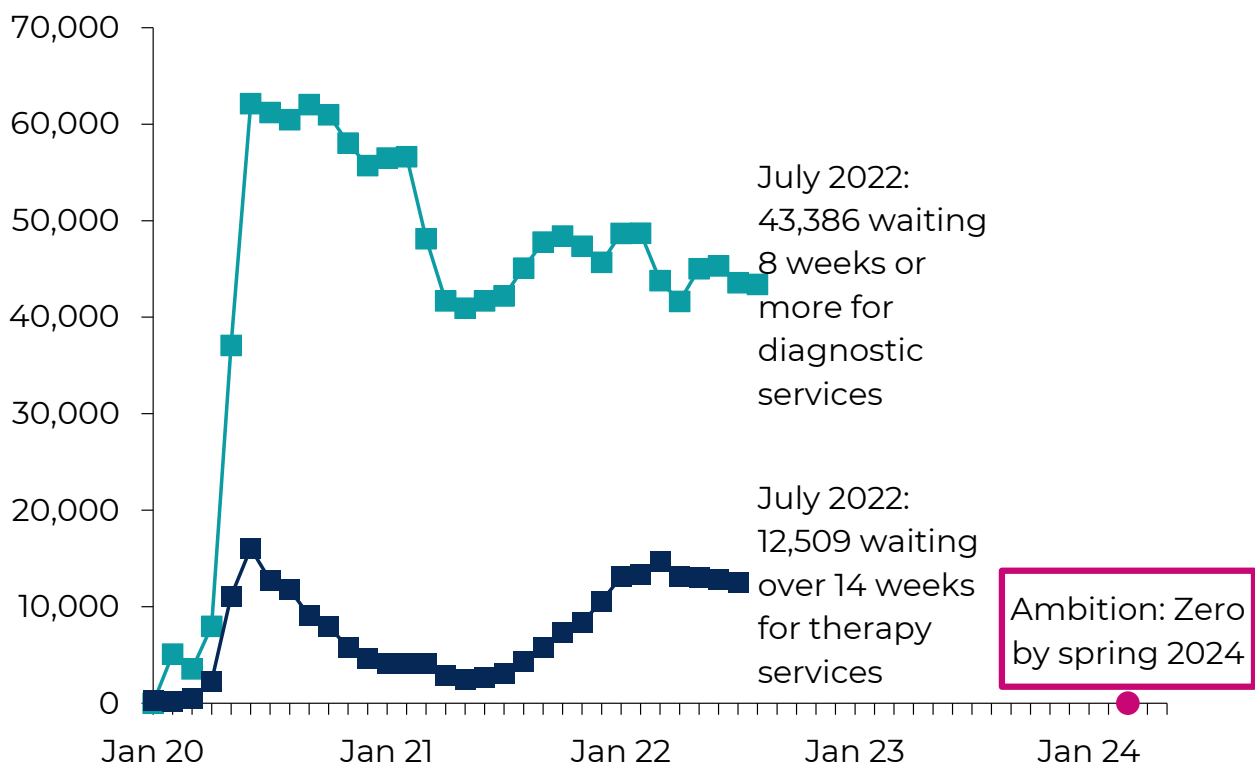


Source: StatsWales, [Patient pathways waiting to start treatment by month, grouped weeks and treatment function, January 2021 onwards](#)

- In July 2022, 181,390 patient pathways were waiting over 53 weeks (more than a year) across all specialities. This is up 2% from 177,964 in June 2022.
- The number of patient pathways waiting over 53 weeks is increasing, with a 8% increase in numbers for July 2022 compared to March 2022.
- In July 2022, 40,410 patient pathways were waiting over 53 weeks (more than a year) for trauma and orthopaedic treatment, 27,542 for general surgery and 26,964 for ophthalmology treatments.

**Ambition 4: Increase the speed of diagnostic testing and reporting to eight weeks and 14 weeks for therapy interventions by Spring 2024**

Figure 5: Number of patient pathways waiting 8 weeks or more for diagnostic services and over 14 weeks for therapy services



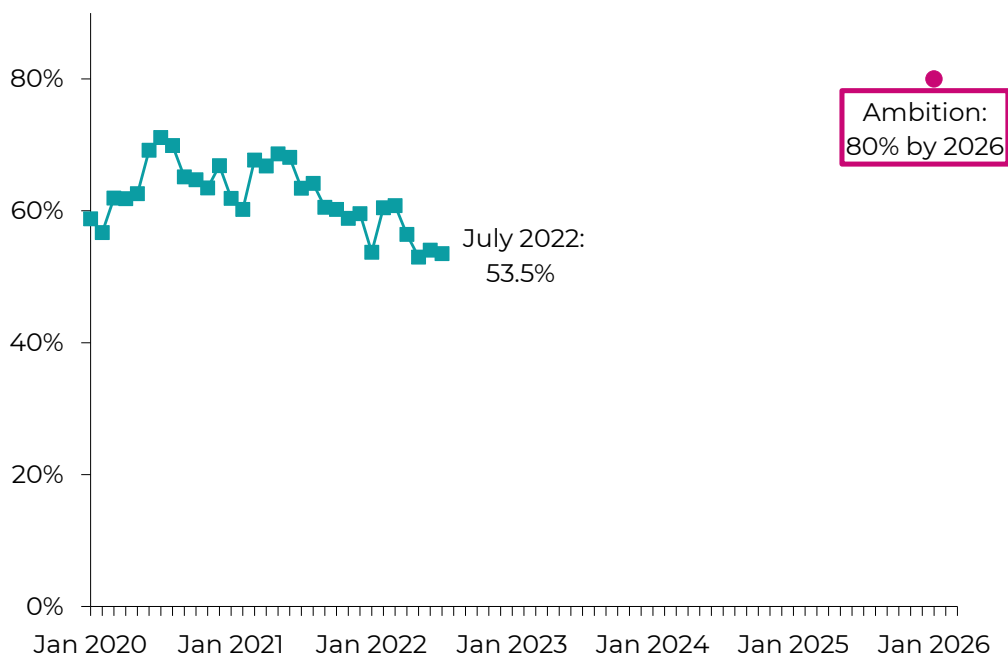
Source: StatsWales, [Diagnostic and therapy services waiting times by month](#)

- In July 2022, 43,386 patient pathways were waiting 8 weeks or more for diagnostic services, such as endoscopy, imaging, radiology and cardiology.
- The July data shows that endoscopy and neurophysiology have the highest percentage of patient pathways waiting over 8 weeks. Endoscopy has 25,777 patient pathways waiting which equates to 23.4% of all diagnostic pathways waiting. Radiology has 62,590 patient pathways waiting (combining the 2 radiology categories), which equates to 56.7% of all diagnostic pathways waiting.

- The **longest waits** in July 2022 were for diagnostic endoscopy (median 15.6 weeks) and neurophysiology (median 10.6 weeks).
- A further 12,509 patient pathways were waiting over 14 weeks for therapy services, such as audiology, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, podiatry and speech and language etc
- A programme board has been established and is overseeing the development of a national diagnostic strategy due to be published Autumn 2022, which includes plans for three regional diagnostic hubs.

**Ambition 5: Cancer diagnosis and treatment to be undertaken withing 62 days for 80% of people by 2026**

Figure 6: Percentage of people who received a cancer diagnosis and started their first definitive treatment within 62 days from the first point cancer was suspected



Source: StatsWales, Suspected cancer pathway (closed pathways): The number of pathways where the patient started their first definitive treatment and those informed they do not have cancer by local health board, tumour site, age group, sex, measure and month



- 53.5% (853 out of 1,594) of patients who started their first definitive treatment in July 2022 did so within 62 days of first being suspected of cancer. This is a lower percentage than June 2022 (54.0%) and July 2021 (63.4%).
- There are statistics available by tumour site. The July 2022 data show that the longest waits are urological, gynaecological and head and neck.
- The Welsh Government published its [Cancer Quality statement](#) in May 2022. A Cancer Services Delivery Plan is due to be published Autumn 2022.

For more information contact:

Sarah Hatherley



[Sarah.Hatherley@Senedd.Wales](mailto:Sarah.Hatherley@Senedd.Wales)

Helen Jones



[Helen.Jones@Senedd.Wales](mailto:Helen.Jones@Senedd.Wales)