

INFORMATION
ANALYSIS
DIRECTORATE



Northern Ireland

Waiting Time Statistics:

Cancer Waiting Times

(January – March 2021)

Reader Information

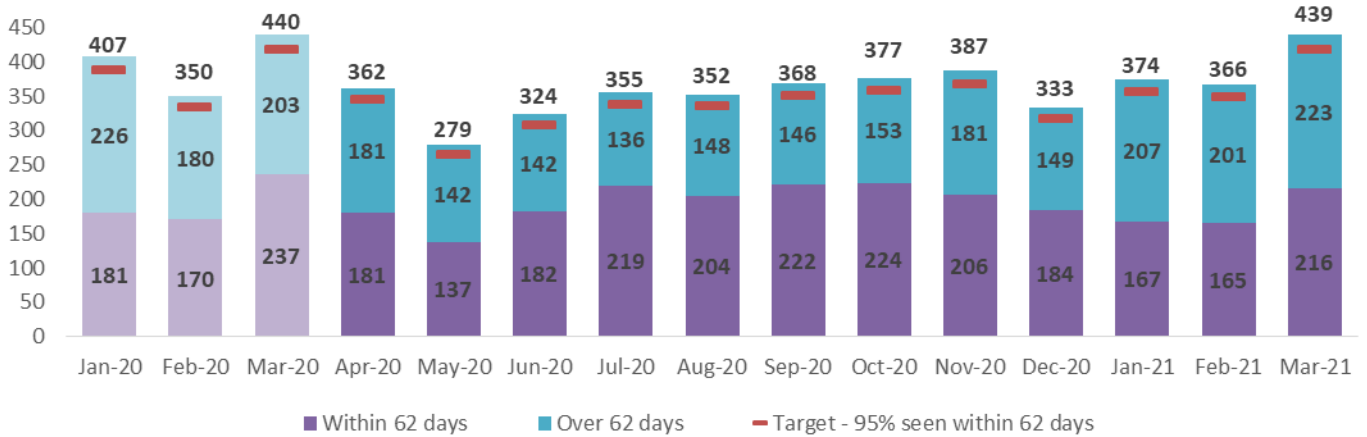
- Purpose:** This publication presents information on waiting times for cancer services at hospitals in Northern Ireland during January, February and March 2021 and reports on the performance of Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts in Northern Ireland, against the draft 2020/21 Ministerial Target for cancer care services, which states that:
- “During 2020/21, all urgent breast cancer referrals should be seen within 14 days; at least 98% of patients diagnosed with cancer should receive their first definitive treatment within 31 days of a decision to treat; and at least 95% of patients urgently referred with a suspected cancer should begin their first definitive treatment within 62 days.”*
- All data are presented by Health and Social Care Trust and, where applicable, by tumour site. In order to preserve the privacy of individual patients, we do not report on individual counts below five. This does not affect the statistical inferences that can be drawn from the data.
- Statistical Quality:** The ‘Cancer Waiting Times Publication – Supporting Documentation’ booklet details the technical guidance, definitions, as well as notes on how to use the data contained within this statistical release. This booklet is available to view or download from the following link:
- <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/cancer-waiting-times>
- Authors:** Jennifer Finlay, Mary Farrelly & Siobhán Morgan
- Publication Date:** Thursday 24th June 2021
- Reporting Period:** 1st January – 31st March 2021
- Issued by:** Hospital Information Branch,
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- Target audience:** Department of Health (DoH), Chief Executives of the Board and Trusts in Northern Ireland, health care professionals, academics, Health & Social Care stakeholders, media and general public.
- Contact Information:** statistics@health-ni.gov.uk
- Copyright:** This publication is Crown copyright and may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium. Any material used must be acknowledged, and the title of the publication specified.
- Note to Users:** Users should be aware that the Covid-19 Pandemic drastically altered the function of hospitals during the current reporting period and should exercise caution when using these data given that hospital records may not be fully updated at this time.

62 Day Ministerial Target

At least 95% of patients should begin their first treatment for cancer within 62 days following an urgent GP referral for suspect cancer.

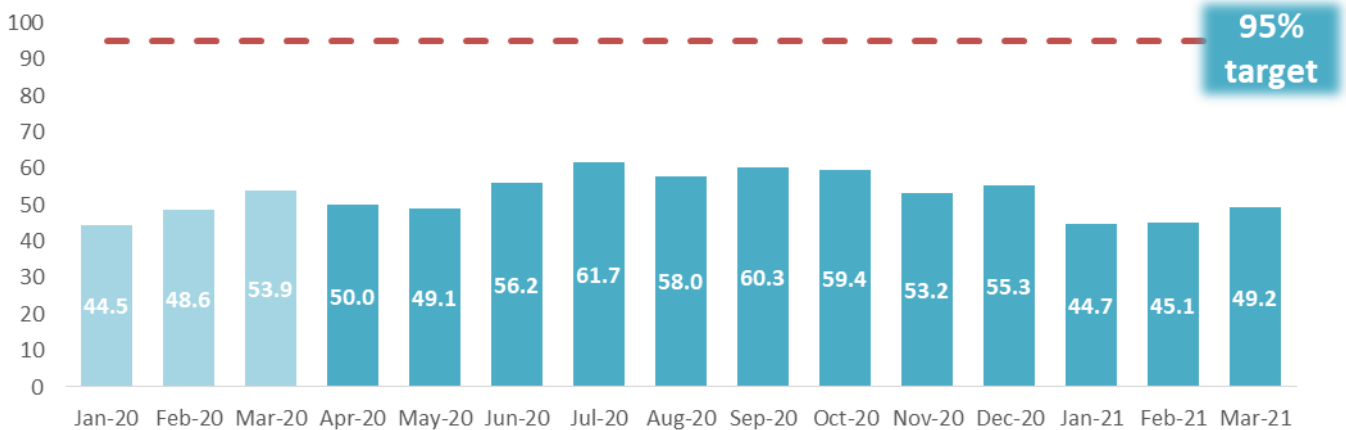
There has been an increase in the number of patients who started treatment following an urgent GP referral in March 2021 (439) when compared with February (366) and January (374). This was similar to the number who started treatment in March 2020 (440).

Figure 1. Number of patients treated within 62 days of an urgent GP referral for suspect cancer January 2020 - March 2021



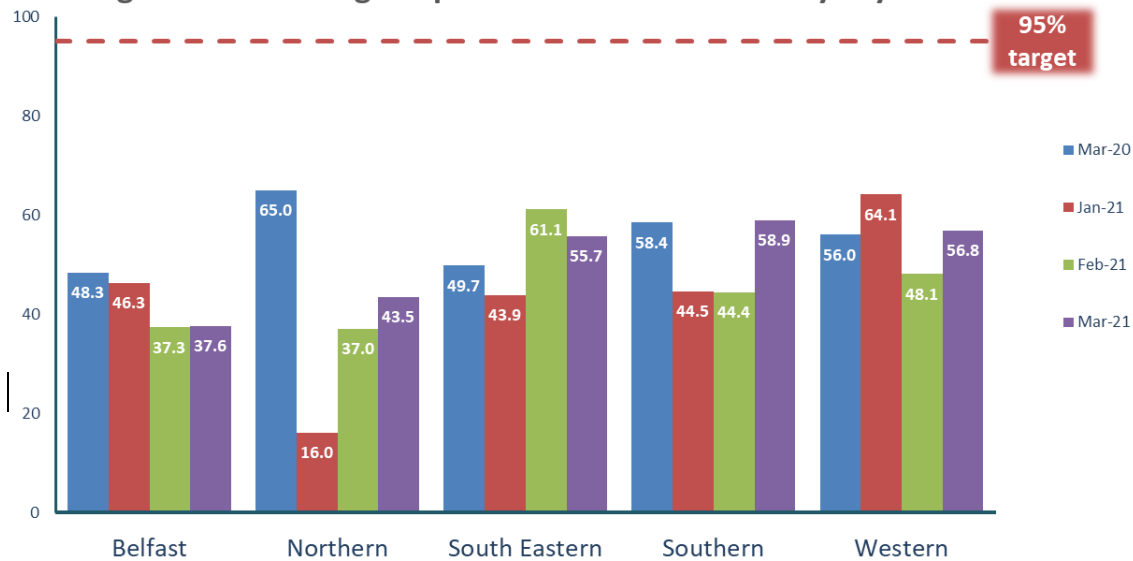
The percentage who began treatment within 62 days increased from 44.7% in January to 45.1% in February before increasing to 49.2% in March. However this was well below the 95% Ministerial target which has not been met in the last 3 years (Table 3).

Figure 2. Percentage of patients treated within 62 days of an urgent GP referral for suspect cancer January 2020 - March 2021



Trust Performance

Figure 3. Percentage of patients seen within 62 days by HSC Trust

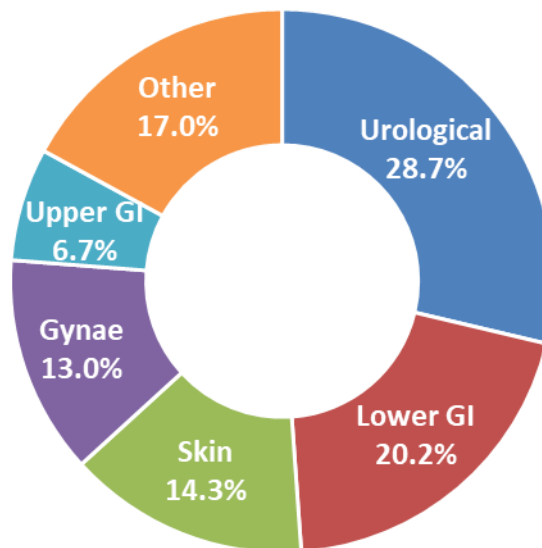


All HSC Trusts failed to meet the 62 day component of the Ministerial target during January, February or March 2021 (Table 1).

Waits over 62 Days by Tumour Site

Of the 223 patients waiting longer than 62 days for treatment in March 2021, over a quarter (64, 28.7%) were diagnosed with urological cancer (Table 2).

Figure 4. % of patients waiting over 62 days by tumour site

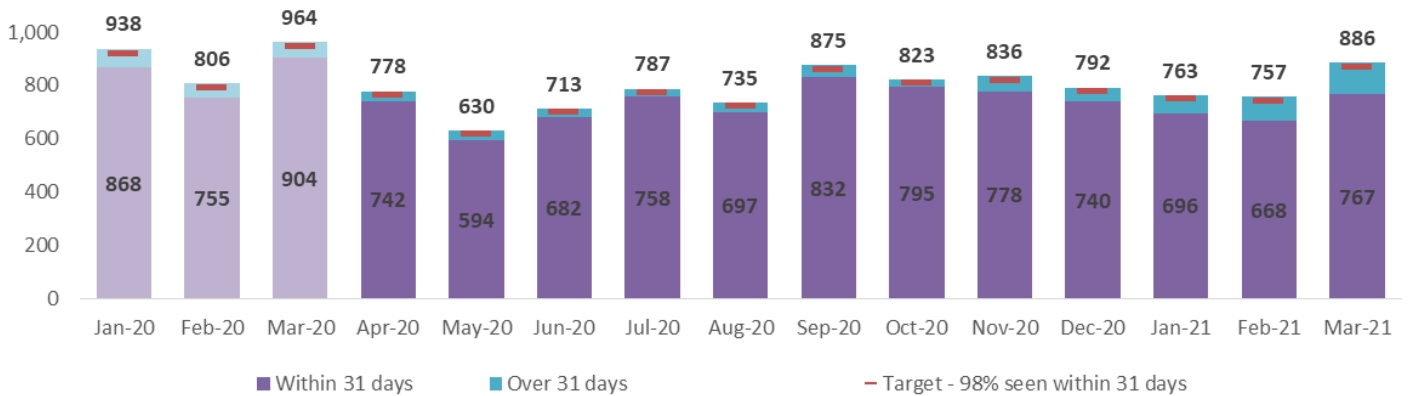


31 Day Ministerial Target

At least 98% of patients diagnosed with cancer should receive their first definitive treatment within 31 days of a decision to treat.

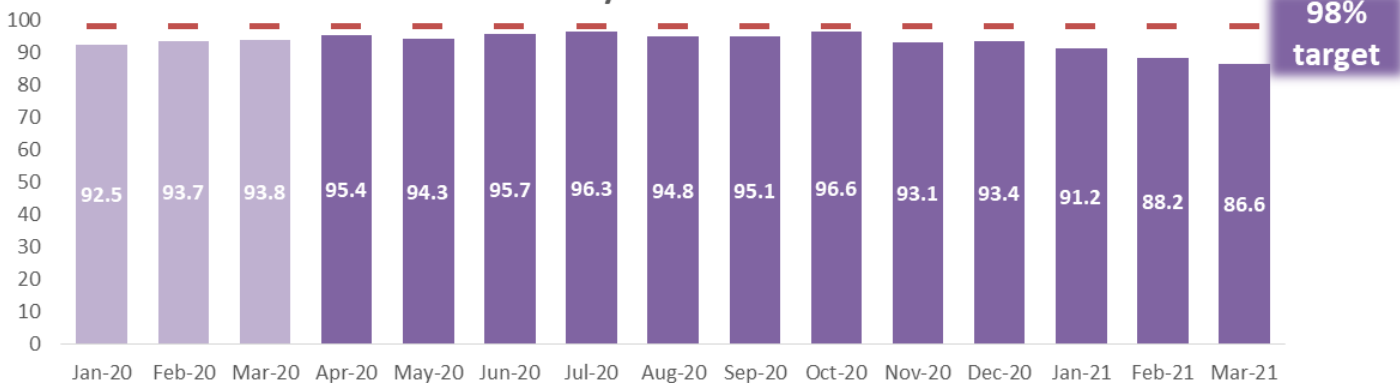
In March 2021, 767 out of 886 patients started treatment within 31 days following a decision to treat, compared with 668 out of 757 in February, 696 out of 763 in January and 904 out of 964 in March 2020 (Table 6).

Figure 5. Number of patients treated within 31 days of a decision to treat January 2020 - March 2021



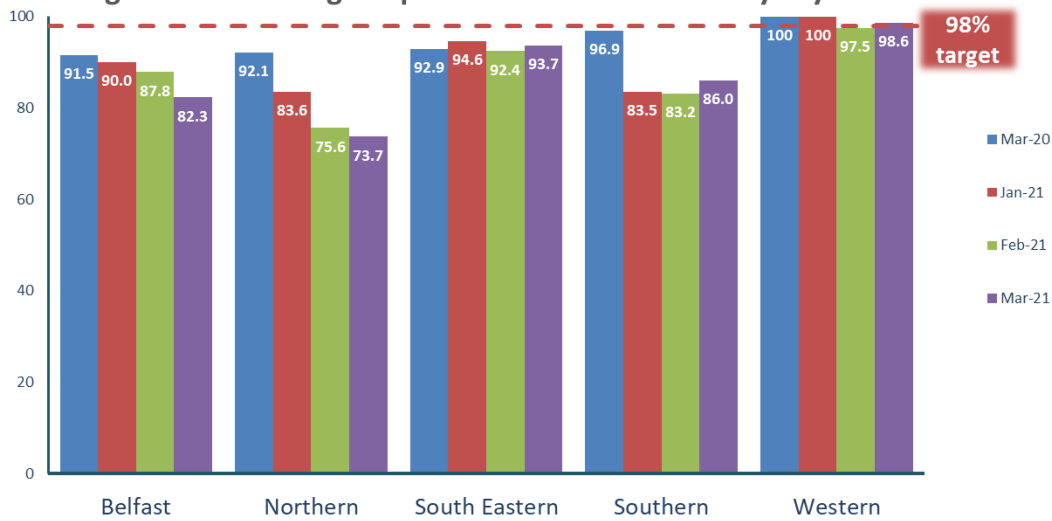
In March 2021, 86.6% of patients were treated within 31 days compared with 88.2% in February, 91.2% in January and 93.8% during March 2020. Although this is close to the 98% target, this should be viewed in the context of the lower numbers starting treatment when compared with the same quarter last year. The Ministerial target has not been met in the last 3 years (Table 6).

Figure 6. Percentage of patients treated within 31 days of a decision to treat January 2020 - March 2021



Trust Performance

Figure 3. Percentage of patients seen within 31 days by HSC Trust

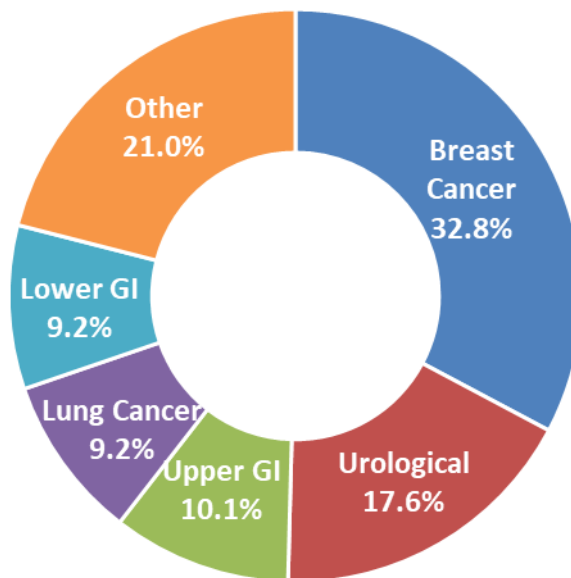


The Western HSC Trust achieved the 98% Ministerial target in January and March. This target was not met by any other Trust in any of three months of the quarter (Table 4).

Waits over 31 Days by Tumour Site

Of the 119 patients waiting longer than 31 days in March, two thirds (39, 32.8%) were diagnosed with breast cancer (Table 5).

Figure 8. % of patients waiting over 31 days by tumour site

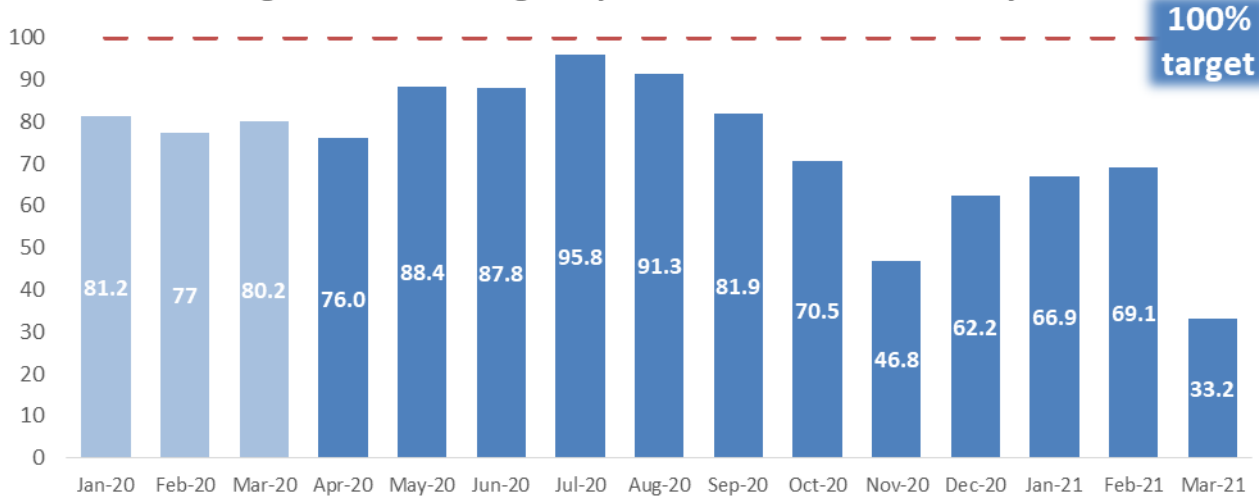


14 Day Ministerial Target

All urgent breast cancer referrals should be seen within 14 days.

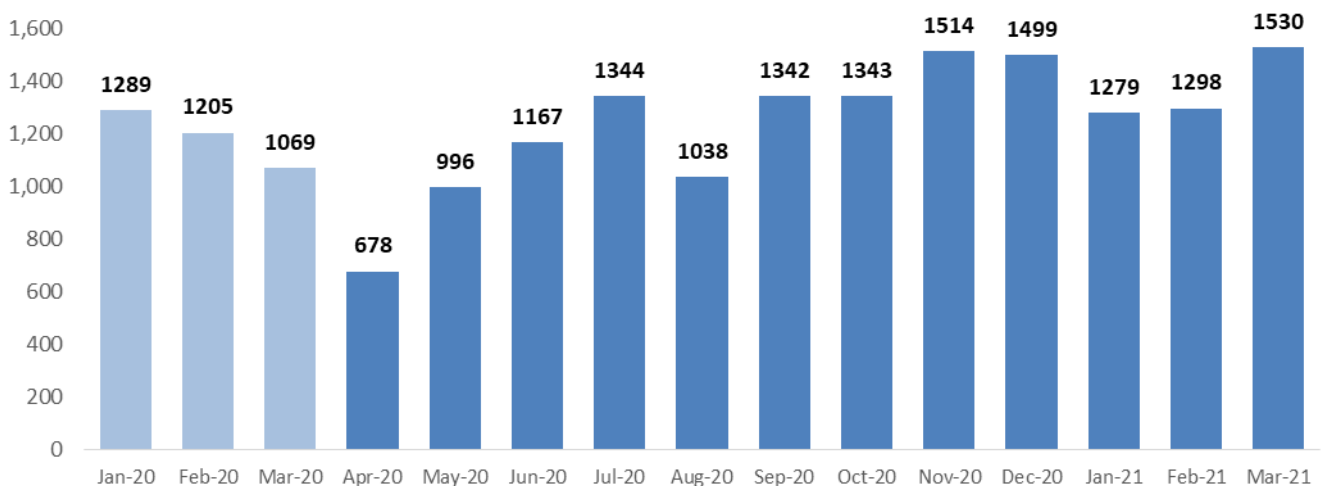
In March 2021, 1,530 patients were seen by a breast cancer specialist following an urgent referral for suspect breast cancer; this was an increase on the 1,298 seen in February and the 1,279 seen in January. It was 43% more than the 1,069 seen in March 2020.

Figure 9. Percentage of patients seen within 14 days



The Ministerial target was not met in January, February or March 2021 with 66.9%, 69.1% and 33.2% of patients being seen by a breast cancer specialist within 14 days of an urgent referral for suspect cancer respectively. The target has not been met at a regional level in the last 15 months.

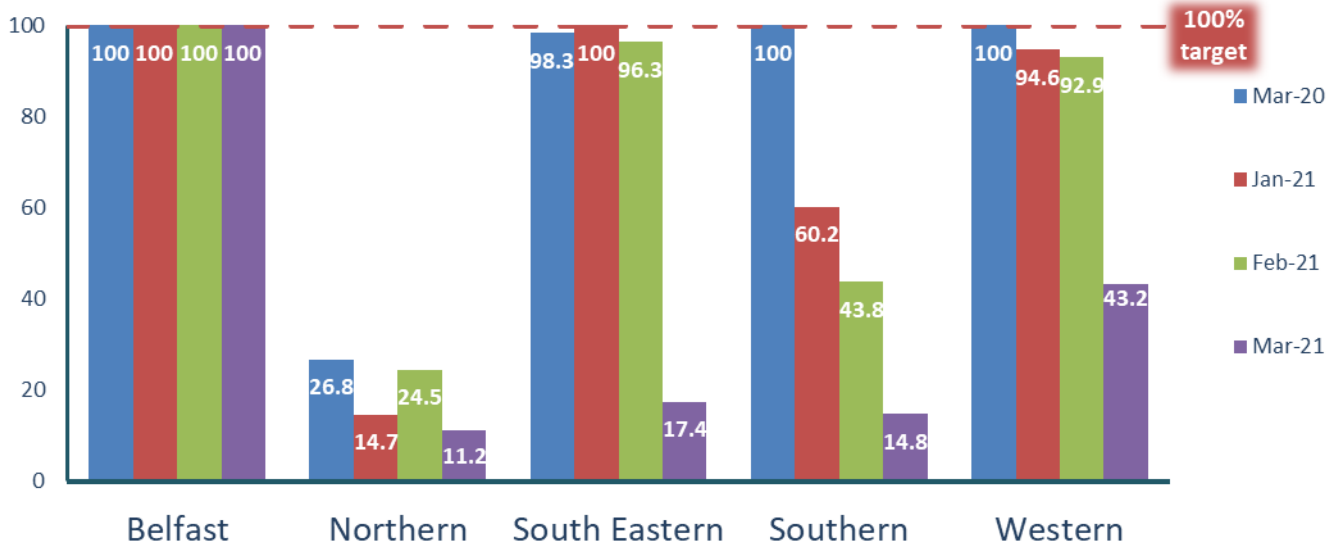
Figure 10. Number of patients seen by a breast cancer specialist



Trust Performance

At an HSC Trust level, Belfast was the only Trust to achieve the target in all three months of the quarter, with all patients seen within 14 days in January, February and March. South Eastern met the target in January only.

Figure 11. Percentage of patients seen within 14 days by HSC Trust



Breast cancer referrals

Information in this section relates to the number of referrals received by HSC Trusts for suspect breast cancer. This information is sourced from the Patient Administration System via the HSC Data Warehouse.

Readers should note that these data are not National Statistics but have been validated and quality assured by HSC Trusts prior to publication. Currently the Department is in the process of refining validation processes for these data, which should therefore be treated with caution. However, they have been published to help provide users with some contextual information in relation to the Ministerial Target relating to breast cancer waiting times.

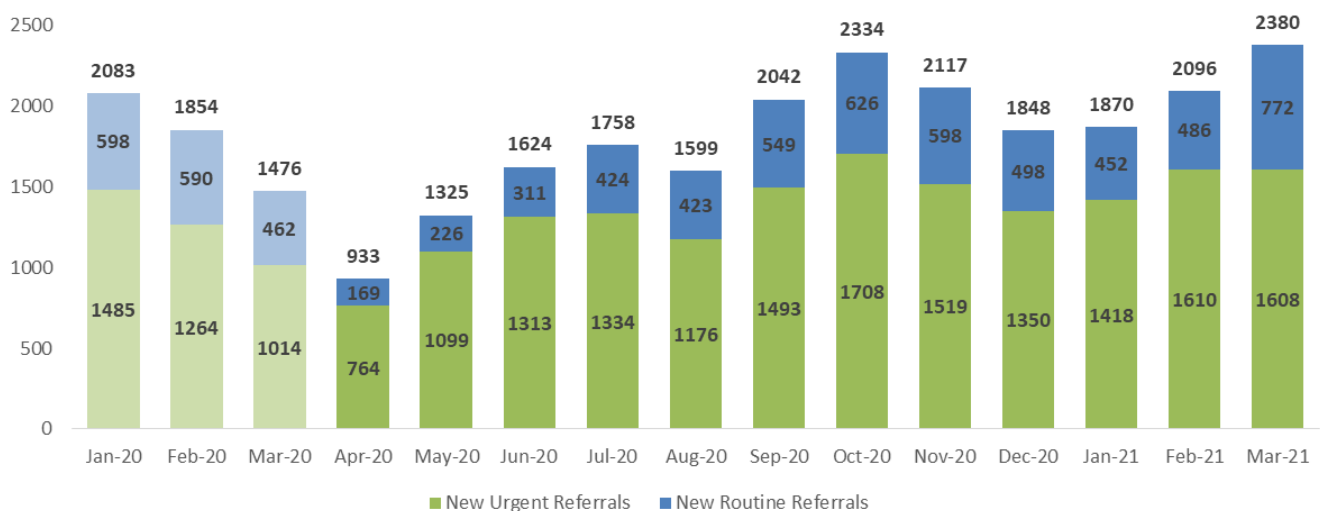
New Suspect Breast Cancer Referrals

March 2021 recorded the highest number of new referrals for suspect breast cancer during the last 15 months (2,380). This was an increase from 1,870 new referrals in January and 2,096 in February. There were a significantly higher numbers of new referrals in March 2021 when compared with March 2020 (1,476).

New Urgent Suspect Breast Cancer Referrals

Urgent breast cancer referrals increased from 1,418 in January to 1,610 in February and stayed constant at 1,608 in March. The rate of urgent referrals decreased from 76% in January and 77% in February to 68% of new referrals being urgent in March. The rate of urgent referrals for 2020/21 was 74.8%.

Figure 12. Number of new referrals received for suspect breast cancer



Additional Tables

Table 1: Percentage of patients who commenced first treatment within 62 days following an urgent GP referral for suspect cancer, in Northern Ireland (January - March 2021)¹

	% treated within 62 days		
	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
HSC Trust			
Belfast	46.3%	37.3%	37.6%
Northern	16.0%	37.0%	43.5%
South Eastern	43.9%	61.1%	55.7%
Southern	44.5%	44.4%	58.9%
Western	64.1%	48.1%	56.8%
Northern Ireland	44.7%	45.1%	49.2%

Source: Cancer Patient Pathway System (CaPPS)

¹Refer to Explanatory Notes – Points 1-5.

Table 2: Percentage of patients who commenced first treatment within 62 days following an urgent GP referral for suspect cancer, by tumour site (January - March 2021)²

	% treated within 62 days		
	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
Cancer Type			
Brain Central Tumour	-	100.0%	100.0%
Breast Cancer	77.3%	69.4%	79.7%
Gynae Cancers	30.8%	35.7%	38.5%
Haematological Cancers	55.6%	80.0%	75.0%
Head/Neck Cancer	53.3%	41.7%	34.8%
Lower Gastrointestinal	32.6%	15.9%	16.7%
Lung Cancer	41.2%	31.3%	56.5%
Urological Cancer	21.6%	22.8%	26.4%
Sarcomas	-	100.0%	-
Skin Cancers	52.3%	59.3%	70.9%
Upper Gastrointestinal	21.1%	34.8%	25.6%
Other	57.1%	33.3%	60.0%
Northern Ireland	44.7%	45.1%	49.2%

Source: Cancer Patient Pathway System (CaPPS)

²Refer to Explanatory Notes – Points 1-6.

Table 3: Number of patients who commenced first treatment following an urgent GP referral for suspect cancer, in Northern Ireland (April 2018 – March 2021)³

Month	Total Treated	Treated within 62 days from receipt of referral	% treated within 62 days
Apr-18	343	234	68.2%
May-18	414	279	67.4%
Jun-18	367	260	70.8%
Jul-18	370	231	62.4%
Aug-18	403	268	66.5%
Sep-18	377	234	62.1%
Oct-18	435	256	58.9%
Nov-18	390	224	57.4%
Dec-18	318	192	60.4%
Jan-19	435	253	58.2%
Feb-19	337	203	60.2%
Mar-19	314	194	61.8%
Apr-19	355	205	57.7%
May-19	360	176	48.9%
Jun-19	325	180	55.4%
Jul-19	391	205	52.4%
Aug-19	345	196	56.8%
Sep-19	390	188	48.2%
Oct-19	423	210	49.6%
Nov-19	395	205	51.9%
Dec-19	351	175	49.9%
Jan-20	407	181	44.5%
Feb-20	350	170	48.6%
Mar-20	440	237	53.9%
Apr-20	362	181	50.0%
May-20	279	137	49.1%
Jun-20	324	182	56.2%
Jul-20	355	219	61.7%
Aug-20	352	204	58.0%
Sep-20	368	222	60.3%
Oct-20	377	224	59.4%
Nov-20	387	206	53.2%
Dec-20	333	184	55.3%
Jan-21	374	167	44.7%
Feb-21	366	165	45.1%
Mar-21	439	216	49.2%

Source: Cancer Patient Pathway System (CaPPS)

³Refer to Explanatory Notes – Points 1-5 & 7

Table 4: Percentage of patients who commenced first treatment within 31 days, for all cancers in HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland (January – March 2021)⁴

HSC Trust	% treated within 31 days		
	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
Belfast	90.0%	87.8%	82.3%
Northern	83.6%	75.6%	73.7%
South Eastern	94.6%	92.4%	93.7%
Southern	83.5%	83.2%	86.0%
Western	100.0%	97.5%	98.6%
Northern Ireland	91.2%	88.2%	86.6%

Source: Cancer Patient Pathway System (CaPPS)

⁴Refer to Explanatory Notes – Points 1-2 & 8-9.

Table 5: Percentage of patients who commenced first treatment within 31 days, for all cancers, in Northern Ireland by tumour site (January – March 2021)⁵

Cancer Type	% treated within 31 days		
	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
Brain Central Tumour	100.0%	93.8%	100.0%
Breast Cancer	82.9%	77.0%	72.3%
Gynae Cancers	81.5%	80.8%	80.0%
Haematological Cancers	98.3%	100.0%	100.0%
Head/Neck Cancer	90.3%	88.5%	90.5%
Lower Gastrointestinal	91.4%	89.2%	90.4%
Lung Cancer	94.1%	92.0%	88.0%
Urological Cancer	92.8%	90.7%	84.9%
Sarcomas	100.0%	50.0%	50.0%
Skin Cancers	90.5%	90.2%	93.2%
Upper Gastrointestinal	94.8%	89.4%	83.8%
Other	100.0%	91.7%	85.7%
Northern Ireland	91.2%	88.2%	86.6%

Source: Cancer Patient Pathway System (CaPPS)

⁵Refer to Explanatory Notes – Points 1-2 & 8-10.

Table 6: Number of patients who commenced first treatment, for all cancers, in Northern Ireland (April 2018 – March 2021)⁴

Month	Total Treated	Treated within 31 days from receipt of referral	% treated within 31 days
Apr-18	791	751	94.9%
May-18	909	848	93.3%
Jun-18	845	806	95.4%
Jul-18	877	824	94.0%
Aug-18	867	807	93.1%
Sep-18	890	816	91.7%
Oct-18	1040	992	95.4%
Nov-18	914	850	93.0%
Dec-18	772	721	93.4%
Jan-19	977	901	92.2%
Feb-19	820	783	95.5%
Mar-19	791	742	93.8%
Apr-19	840	780	92.9%
May-19	848	789	93.0%
Jun-19	809	755	93.3%
Jul-19	943	858	91.0%
Aug-19	843	791	93.8%
Sep-19	909	831	91.4%
Oct-19	1011	928	91.8%
Nov-19	933	849	91.0%
Dec-19	810	759	93.7%
Jan-20	938	868	92.5%
Feb-20	806	755	93.7%
Mar-20	964	904	93.8%
Apr-20	778	742	95.4%
May-20	630	594	94.3%
Jun-20	713	682	95.7%
Jul-20	787	758	96.3%
Aug-20	735	697	94.8%
Sep-20	875	832	95.1%
Oct-20	823	795	96.6%
Nov-20	836	778	93.1%
Dec-20	792	740	93.4%
Jan-21	763	696	91.2%
Feb-21	757	668	88.2%
Mar-21	886	767	86.6%

Source: Cancer Patient Pathway System (CaPPS)

⁴Refer to Explanatory Notes – Points 1-2 & 8-9

Table 7: Percentage of patients seen within 14 days by a breast cancer specialist following an urgent referral for suspect cancer in HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland (January – March 2021)⁶

HSC Trust	% seen within 14 days		
	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
Belfast	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Northern	14.7%	24.5%	11.2%
South Eastern	100.0%	96.3%	17.4%
Southern	60.2%	43.8%	14.8%
Western	94.6%	92.9%	43.2%
Northern Ireland	66.9%	69.1%	33.2%

Source: Patient Administration System via HSC Data Warehouse

⁶Refer to Explanatory Notes – points 1-2 & 11-13

Table 8: Number of patients seen by a breast cancer specialist following an urgent referral for suspect cancer in Northern Ireland (April 2018 – March 2021)⁶

Month	Total seen	Seen within 14 days or less	% seen within 14 days
April 2018	1,251	1,250	99.9%
May 2018	1,448	1,394	96.3%
June 2018	1,307	1,230	94.1%
July 2018	1,199	1,104	92.1%
August 2018	1,352	1,075	79.5%
September 2018	1,100	819	74.5%
October 2018	1,456	1,278	87.8%
November 2018	1,512	1,492	98.7%
December 2018	1,121	1,119	99.8%
January 2019	1,367	1,336	97.7%
February 2019	1,282	1,257	98.0%
March 2019	1,387	1,187	85.6%
April 2019	1,234	1,027	83.2%
May 2019	1,486	1,120	75.4%
June 2019	1,303	1,042	80.0%
July 2019	1,287	1,036	80.5%
August 2019	1,203	928	77.1%
September 2019	1,224	1,173	95.8%
October 2019	1,567	1,565	99.9%
November 2019	1,353	1,353	100.0%
December 2019	1,020	903	88.5%
January 2020	1,289	1,047	81.2%
February 2020	1,205	933	77.4%
March 2020	1,069	857	80.2%
April 2020	678	515	76.0%
May 2020	996	880	88.4%
June 2020	1,167	1,025	87.8%
July 2020	1,344	1,287	95.8%
August 2020	1,038	948	91.3%
September 2020	1,342	1,099	81.9%
October 2020	1,343	947	70.5%
November 2020	1,514	709	46.8%
December 2020	1,499	933	62.2%
January 2021	1,279	856	66.9%
February 2021	1,298	897	69.1%
March 2021	1,530	508	33.2%

Source: Patient Administration System via HSC Data Warehouse

⁶Refer to Explanatory Notes – points 1-2 & 11-13

Table 9: Number of patients referred for suspect breast cancer in Northern Ireland (April 2018 – March 2021)⁷

Month	Total New Referrals Received	New Urgent Referrals
April 2018	1,987	1,432
May 2018	1,940	1,396
June 2018	1,934	1,404
July 2018	1,743	1,318
August 2018	1,833	1,328
September 2018	1,740	1,226
October 2018	2,321	1,576
November 2018	2,103	1,367
December 2018	1,609	1,098
January 2019	2,309	1,617
February 2019	2,096	1,448
March 2019	2,152	1,424
April 2019	1,952	1,310
May 2019	2,197	1,545
June 2019	1,861	1,289
July 2019	1,900	1,365
August 2019	1,796	1,198
September 2019	2,087	1,468
October 2019	2,270	1,572
November 2019	1,934	1,363
December 2019	1,518	1,055
January 2020	2,083	1,485
February 2020	1,854	1,264
March 2020	1,476	1,014
April 2020	933	764
May 2020	1,325	1,099
June 2020	1,624	1,313
July 2020	1,758	1,334
August 2020	1,599	1,176
September 2020	2,042	1,493
October 2020	2,334	1,708
November 2020	2,117	1,519
December 2020	1,848	1,350
January 2021	1,870	1,418
February 2021	2,096	1,610
March 2021	2,380	1,608

Source: Patient Administration System via HSC Data Warehouse

⁷Refer to Explanatory Notes – points 1 & 14

Appendix 1: Explanatory Notes

1. The sources for the data contained in this release are the Outpatient Universe, Cancer Patient Pathway System (CaPPS) and Patient Administration System (PAS).
2. The draft 2020/21 Ministerial Target for cancer waiting times, as detailed in the Health and Social Care (Commissioning Plan) Direction (Northern Ireland) 2020, states that during 2020/21, (i) at least 95% of patients should begin their first treatment for cancer within 62 days following an urgent GP referral for suspect cancer; (ii) at least 98% of patients diagnosed with cancer should receive their first definitive treatment within 31 days of a decision to treat; and (iii) all urgent breast cancer referrals should be seen within 14 days.
3. Data contained in Tables 1, 2, and 3 relate to patients who received a first definitive treatment for cancer (having been given an 'International Classification of Diseases 10' (ICD 10) diagnosis) during each of the three months covered in the publication, following an urgent referral for suspect cancer from a General Practitioner or a routine GP referral that has subsequently been reclassified as urgent by a cancer specialist. Data for all cancers are included with the exception of basal cell carcinoma. Figures also include all patients living outside Northern Ireland and all privately funded patients treated in Health and Social Care hospitals in Northern Ireland. Referrals from sources other than a GP, routine referrals and patients who have not been given an ICD 10 diagnosis are excluded.
4. The completed waiting time in Tables 1, 2, and 3 is measured from the date an initial urgent GP referral for suspect cancer is received by the Provider Health and Social Care Trust and ends on the date the patient receives their first definitive treatment for cancer. Adjustments are made to the completed waiting time in the event of a patient cancelling or self-deferring treatment or as a result of suspension for either medical or social reasons.
5. The measurement of a patient's waiting time in Tables 1, 2, and 3 include cases in which a patient was initially referred to a particular Health and Social Trust for consultant assessment but was then subsequently transferred to another Health and Social Care Trust for treatment. In such cases, the responsibility for that patient is shared, with 0.5 allocated to the Trust where the patient was first assessed and 0.5 to the Trust of first treatment. For example, if a patient is initially referred for assessment in the South Eastern HSC Trust and is then transferred to the Belfast HSC Trust where they receive treatment 70 days after their initial GP referral, both the South Eastern and Belfast HSC Trusts will report 0.5 of a patient treated who waited over 62 days.
6. Table 2 reflects the number of patients that were treated in 62 days or less for each tumour site. Tumour sites are an aggregation of applicable ICD 10 codes.
7. Between April 2008 and May 2009, the target relating to waiting time for treatment following an urgent GP referral for suspect cancer required that 'at least 75% of patients urgently referred with a suspect cancer should begin their first definitive treatment within 62 days of urgent GP referral'. From June 2009 onwards this target increased to 95% of patients.

8. Data contained in Tables 4, 5, and 6 relate to all patients who received a first definitive treatment for cancer (having been given an ICD 10 diagnosis) during each of the three months covered in the publication, irrespective of their source or type of referral. Data include treatment for all cancers, with the exception of basal cell carcinoma. Figures also include all patients living outside Northern Ireland and all privately funded patients treated in Health and Social Care hospitals in Northern Ireland. Patients that have not been given an ICD 10 diagnosis are excluded.

9. The completed waiting time in Tables 4, 5, and 6 is measured from the date a decision is taken to treat a patient for cancer and ends on the date the patient receives their first definitive treatment for cancer. The decision to treat is the date on which the patient and the clinician agree the planned treatment. Adjustments are made to the completed waiting time in the event of a patient cancelling or self-deferring treatment or as a result of suspension for either medical or social reasons.

10. Table 5 reflects the number of patients that were treated in 31 days or less for each tumour site. Tumour sites are an aggregation of applicable ICD 10 codes.

11. Data contained in Tables 7 and 8 relate to all urgent referrals (excluding those that have been reclassified as routine by the breast specialist) for suspect breast cancer, and routine referrals that have subsequently been reclassified as urgent by a breast specialist that were first seen during each of the three months covered in the publication. Figures also include patients living outside Northern Ireland and all privately funded patients seen in Health and Social Care hospitals in Northern Ireland.

12. The completed waiting time in Tables 7 and 8 is measured from the date an initial breast cancer referral is first received by the Provider HSC Trust, and ends on the date that the patient attends their first outpatient appointment with a breast cancer specialist. Adjustments are made to the completed waiting time in the event of a patient cancelling, self-deferring or failing to attend a first outpatient appointment.

13. Figures provided in Tables 7 and 8 reflect all urgent referrals for breast cancer both from GP's and other practitioners.

14. Figures provided in the Breast Cancer Referrals section reflect all new referrals received for suspect breast cancer irrespective of their source of referral.

15. Information on the grouping of ICD 10 codes by tumour site is available at the following link: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/cancer-waiting-times>

16. HIB surveyed data providers during 2011/12 to ascertain the cost of producing, validating and submitting the information required for this publication. This relates to the time taken to generate, validate and submit data, over and above what is already required by their organisation for internal performance management purposes. The cost to data providers of compliance with HIB's requirements for this publication, based on HSC salary costs, was £2,378.

17. Monthly data relating to cancer waiting times have also been presented in spreadsheet format (Microsoft Excel), split by HSC Trust, and where applicable tumour site, in order to aid secondary analysis. These data are available at the following link: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/cancer-waiting-times>

18. Information on waiting times for the months of April, May and June 2021 will be published on Thursday 30th September 2021.

19. Data contained within this publication are National Statistics except for breast cancer referrals which are currently statistics in development.

Further information on cancer waiting times in Northern Ireland, is available from:

Hospital Information Branch
Information & Analysis Directorate
Department of Health
Stormont Estate
Belfast, BT4 3SQ

✉ Email: statistics@health-ni.gov.uk

This Statistical bulletin and others published by Hospital Information Branch are available to download from the DoH Internet site at:

Internet address: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/doh-statistics-and-research>