

INFORMATION
ANALYSIS
DIRECTORATE



Northern Ireland

Waiting Time Statistics:

Cancer Waiting Times

(October - December 2021)

Reader Information

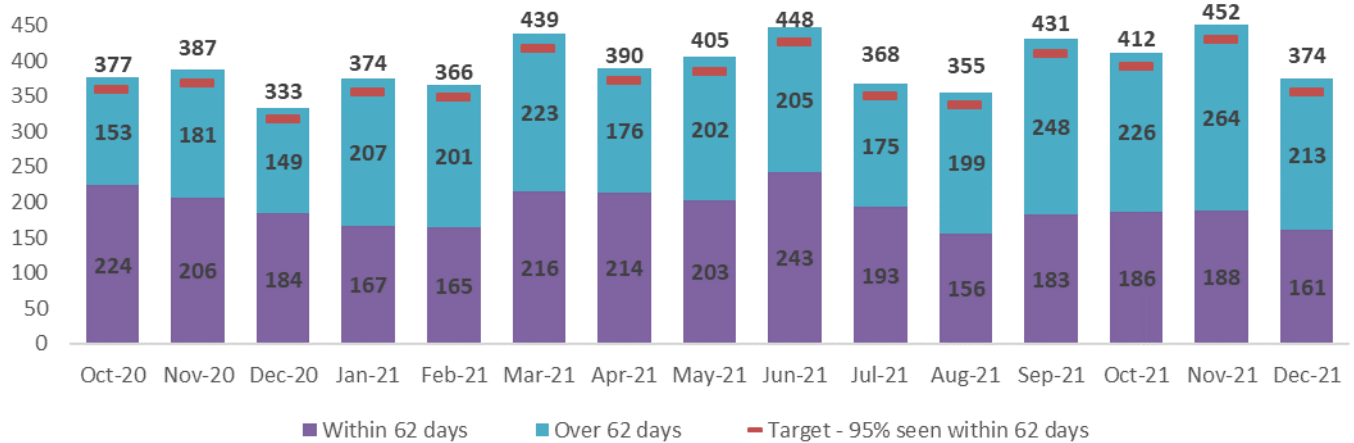
- Purpose:** This publication presents information on waiting times for cancer services at hospitals in Northern Ireland during October, November and December 2021 and reports on the performance of Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts in Northern Ireland, against the draft 2021/22 Ministerial Target for cancer care services, which states that:
- “During 2021/22, 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>
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- Contact Information:** statistics@health-ni.gov.uk
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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.

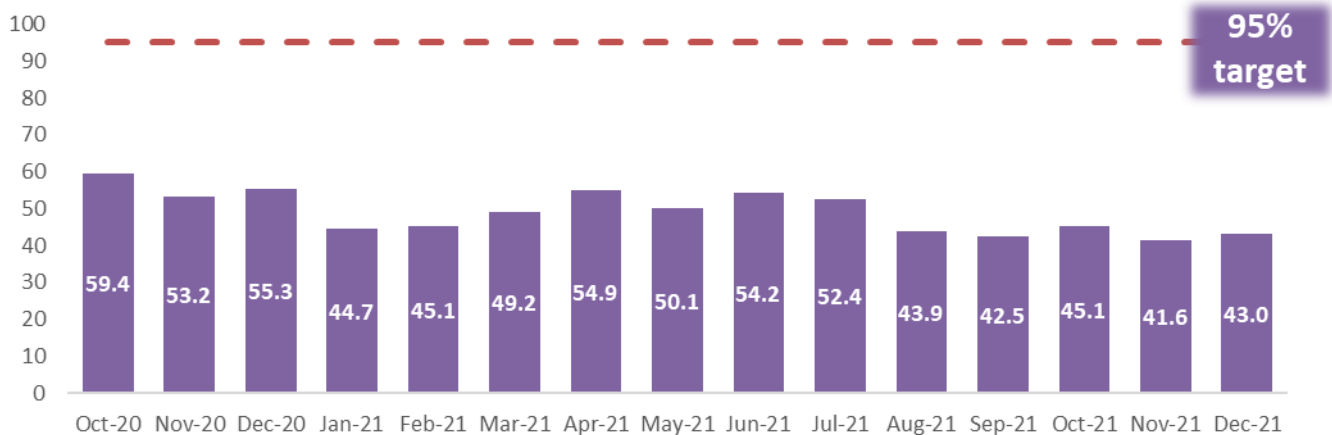
There was a decrease in the number of patients who started treatment following an urgent GP referral in December 2021 (374) when compared with November (452) and October (412). However, this was higher than the number who started treatment in December 2020 (333).

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



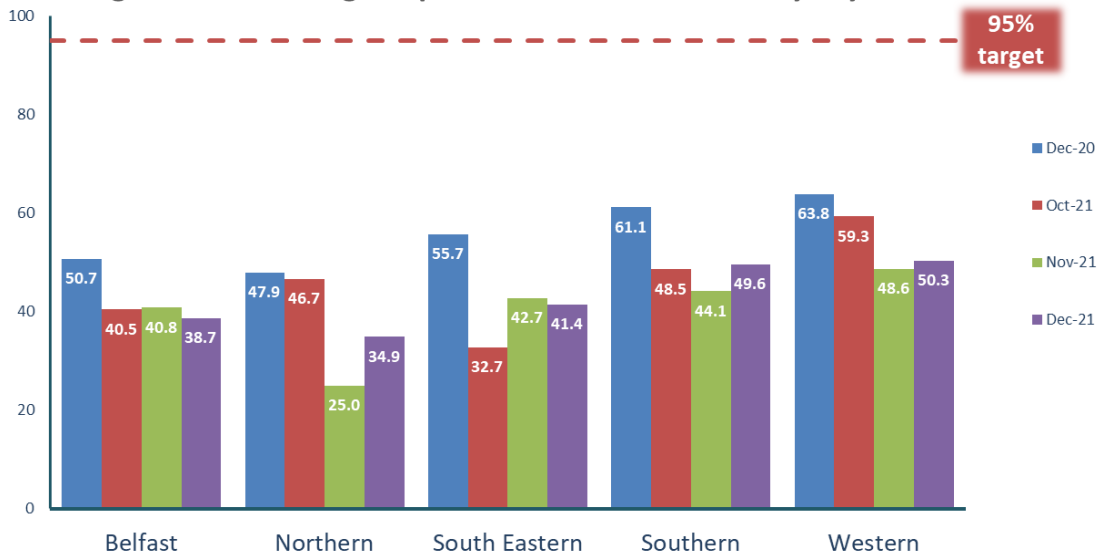
The percentage who began treatment within 62 days decreased from 45.1% in October to 41.6% in November and increased to 43.0% in December. This was well below the 95% Ministerial target which has not been met in the last 3 years (Table 3).

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



Trust Performance

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

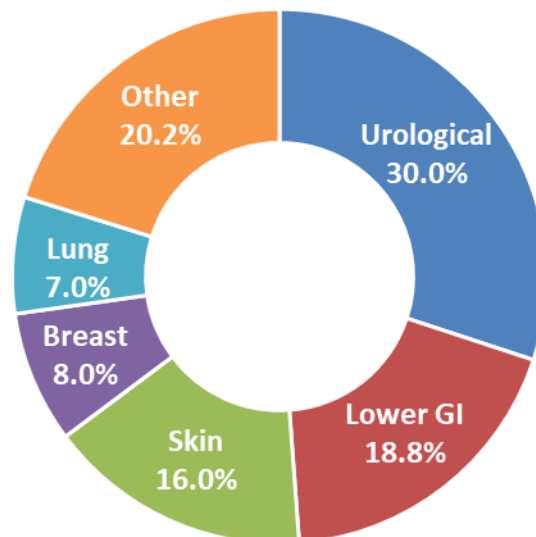


All HSC Trusts failed to meet the 62 day component of the Ministerial target during October, November and December 2021 (Table 1).

Waits over 62 Days by Tumour Site

Of the 213 patients waiting longer than 62 days for treatment in December 2021, almost a third (64, 30.0%) were diagnosed with urological cancer (Table 2).

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

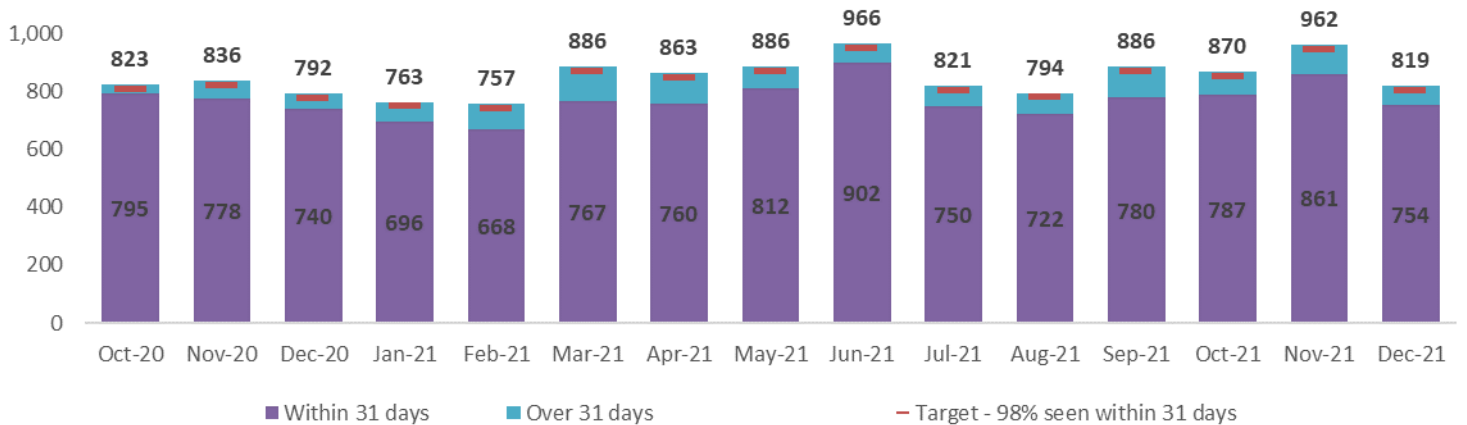


31 Day Ministerial Target

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

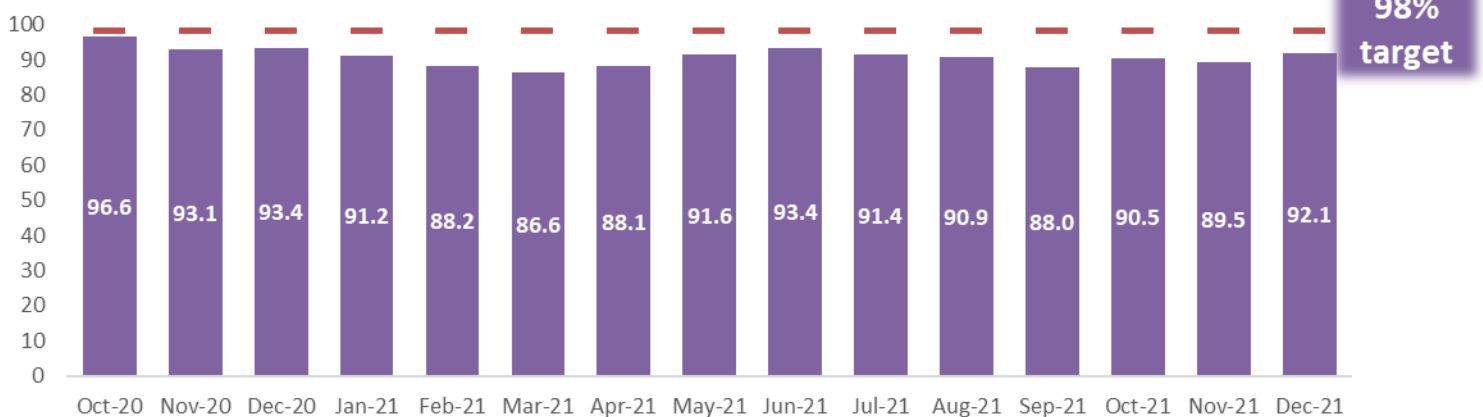
In December 2021, 754 out of 819 patients started treatment within 31 days following a decision to treat, compared with 861 out of 962 in November, 787 out of 870 in October and 740 out of 792 in December 2020 (Table 6).

**Figure 5. Number of patients treated within 31 days of a decision to treat
October 2020 - December 2021**



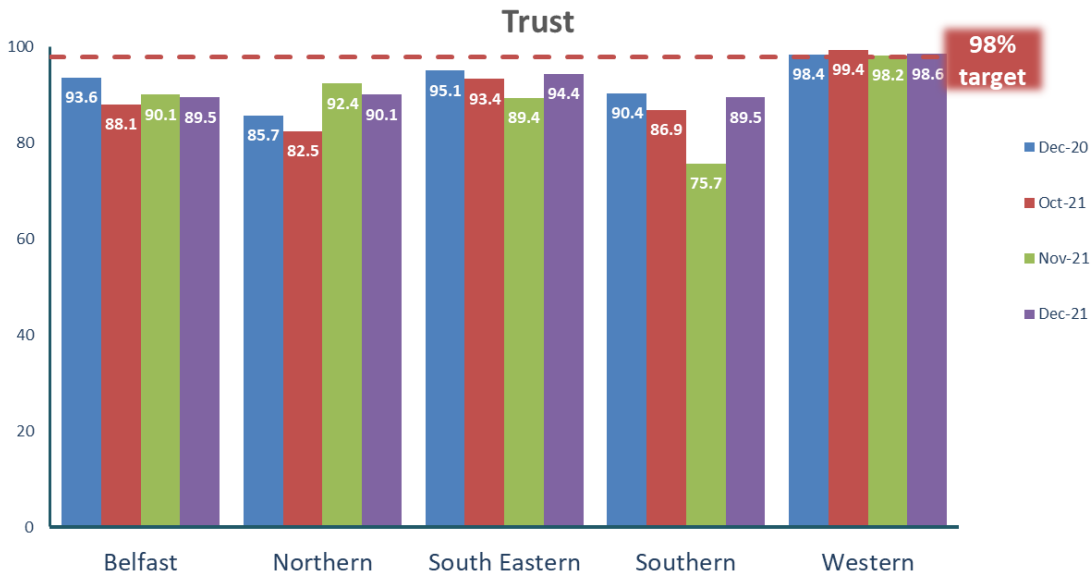
In December 2021, 92.1% of patients were treated within 31 days compared with 89.5% in November, 90.5% in October and 93.4% during December 2020. The Ministerial target has not been met in the last 3 years (Table 6).

**Figure 6. Percentage of patients treated within 31 days of a decision to treat
October 2020 - December 2021**



Trust Performance

Figure 7. Percentage of patients seen within 31 days by HSC

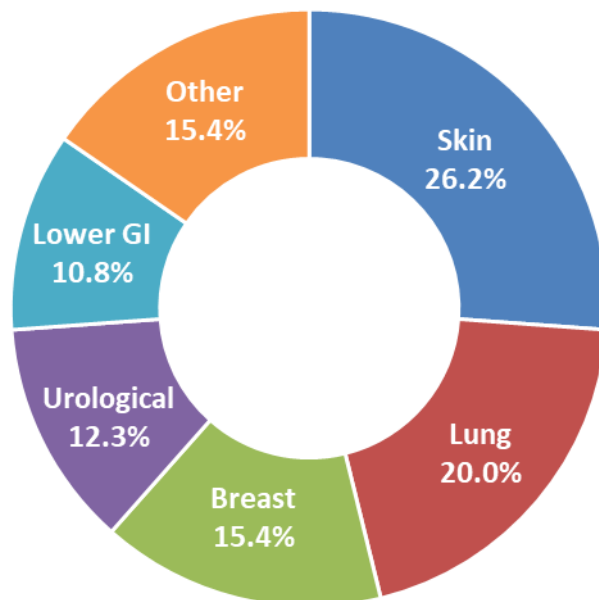


The Western HSC Trust achieved the 98% Ministerial target in all three months of the quarter. This target was not met by any other Trust in any month of the quarter (Table 4).

Waits over 31 Days by Tumour Site

Of the 65 patients waiting longer than 31 days in December 2021, over a quarter (17, 26.2%) were diagnosed with skin cancer (Table 5).

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

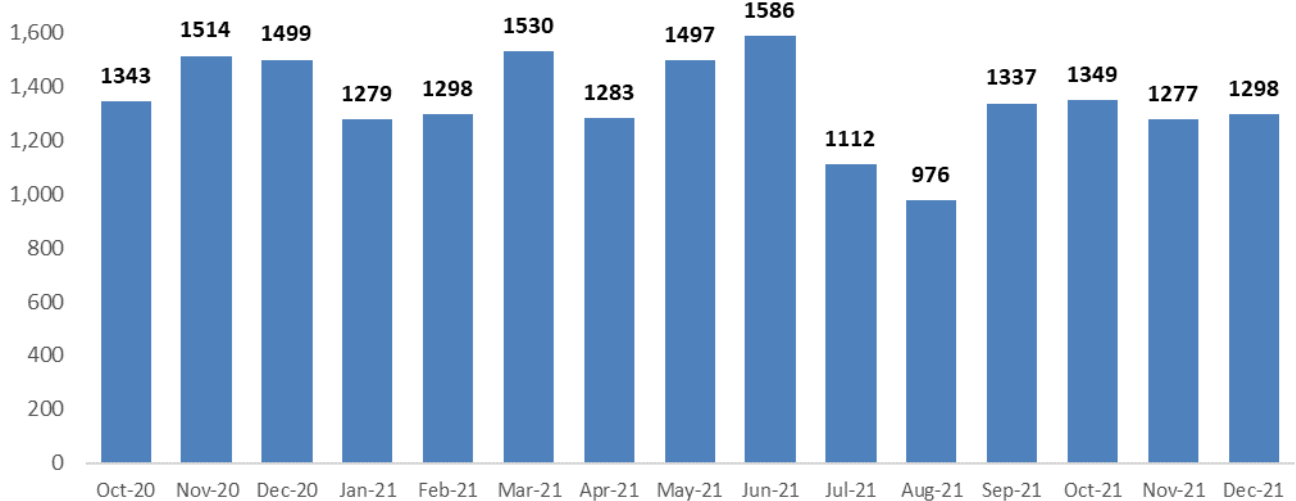


14 Day Ministerial Target

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

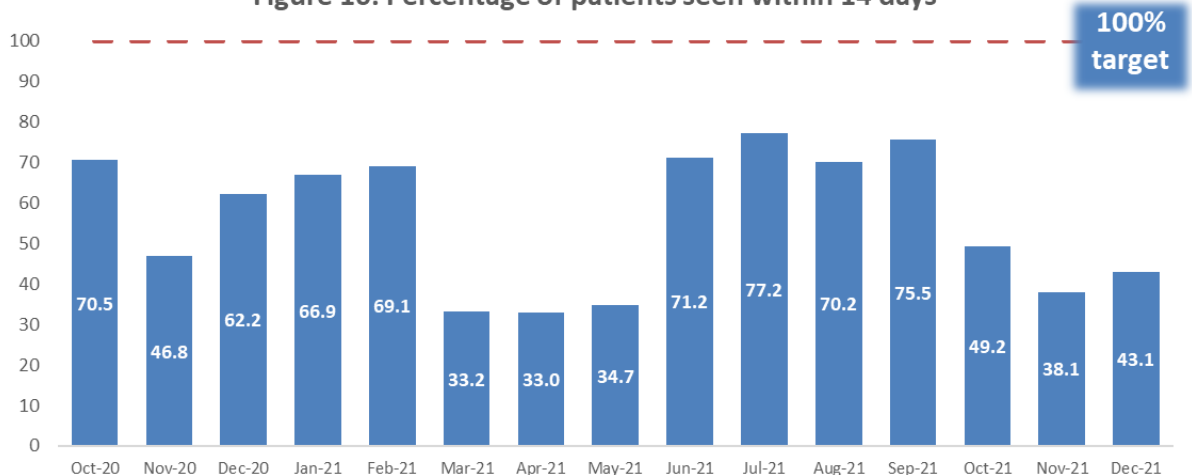
In December 2021, 1,298 patients were seen by a breast cancer specialist following an urgent referral for suspect breast cancer; this was similar to the 1,277 seen in November and slightly less than the 1,349 seen in October. It was also less than the 1,499 seen in December 2020.

Figure 9. Number of patients seen by a breast cancer specialist



The Ministerial target was not met in October, November or December 2021 with 49.2%, 38.1% and 43.1% of patients being seen by a breast cancer specialist within 14 days of an urgent referral for suspect breast cancer respectively. The target has not been met at a regional level in the last 2 years.

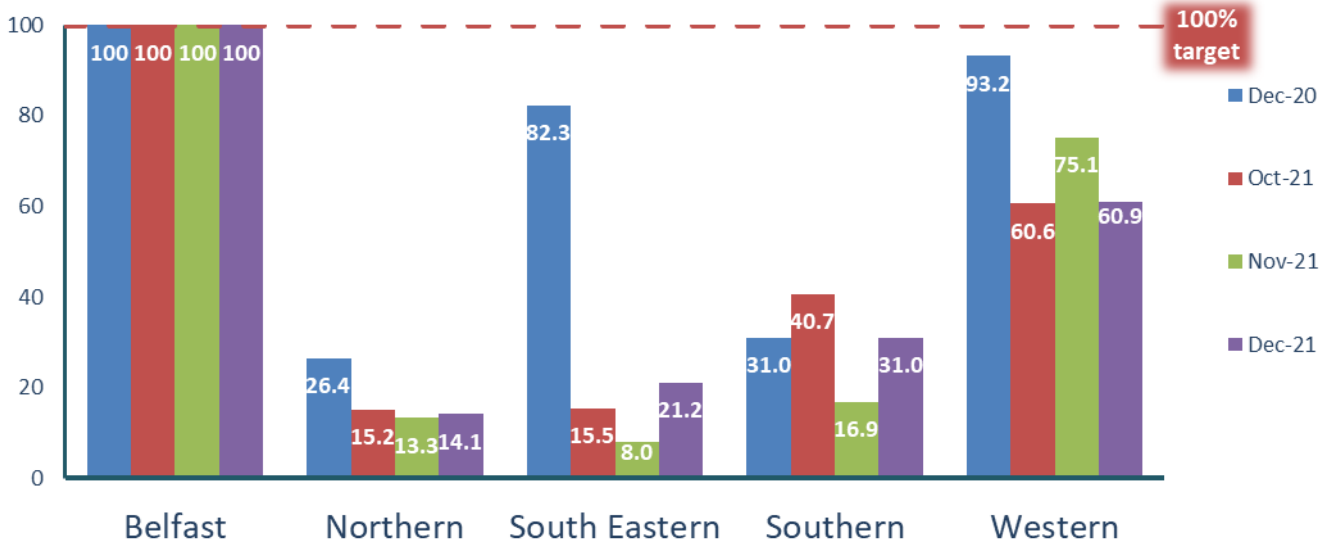
Figure 10. Percentage of patients seen within 14 days



Trust Performance

At an HSC Trust level, Belfast was the only Trust to achieve the target in any of the three months of the quarter, with all patients seen within 14 days in October, November and December.

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.

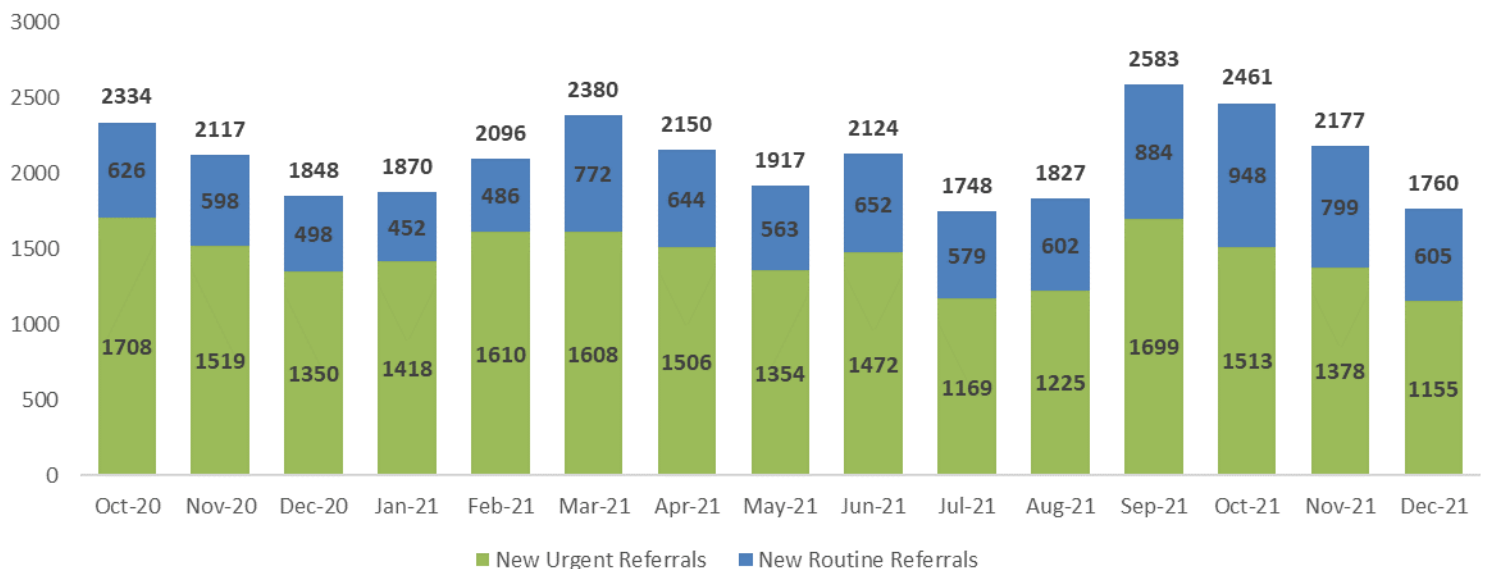
Readers should note that these data are not National Statistics but have been validated and quality assured by HSC Trusts prior to publication. Currently the Department is in the process of refining validation processes for these data, which should therefore be treated with caution. However, they have 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

During the quarter, new referrals for suspect breast cancer decreased from 2,461 in October to 2,177 in November, to 1,760 in December. There were 4.8% fewer new referrals in December 2021 when compared with December 2020 (1,848).

New Urgent Suspect Breast Cancer Referrals

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



Urgent breast cancer referrals also decreased across the quarter, from 1,513 in October to 1,378 in November and 1,155 in December. The rate of urgent referrals was similar across the quarter with 61.5%, 63.3% and 65.6% of new referrals being urgent in October, November and December respectively.

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 (October - December 2021)¹

HSC Trust	% treated within 62 days		
	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21
Belfast	40.5%	40.8%	38.7%
Northern	46.7%	25.0%	34.9%
South Eastern	32.7%	42.7%	41.4%
Southern	48.5%	44.1%	49.6%
Western	59.3%	48.6%	50.3%
Northern Ireland	45.1%	41.6%	43.0%

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 (October - December 2021)²

Cancer Type	% treated within 62 days		
	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21
Brain Central Tumour	100.0%	100.0%	-
Breast Cancer	87.0%	89.1%	69.6%
Gynae Cancers	19.4%	14.3%	36.4%
Haematological Cancers	93.3%	78.6%	73.7%
Head/Neck Cancer	23.1%	28.6%	33.3%
Lower Gastrointestinal	27.9%	22.2%	31.0%
Lung Cancer	45.2%	48.3%	44.4%
Urological Cancer	25.3%	23.1%	17.9%
Sarcomas	-	50.0%	100.0%
Skin Cancers	44.8%	52.4%	52.1%
Upper Gastrointestinal	42.9%	25.8%	41.7%
Other	16.7%	50.0%	100.0%
Northern Ireland	45.1%	41.6%	43.0%

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 (January 2019 - December 2021)³

Month	Total Treated	Treated within 62 days from receipt of referral	% treated within 62 days
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%
Apr-21	390	214	54.9%
May-21	405	203	50.1%
Jun-21	448	243	54.2%
Jul-21	368	193	52.4%
Aug-21	355	156	43.9%
Sep-21	431	183	42.5%
Oct-21	412	186	45.1%
Nov-21	452	188	41.6%
Dec-21	374	161	43.0%

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 (October - December 2021)⁴

HSC Trust	% treated within 31 days		
	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21
Belfast	88.1%	90.1%	89.5%
Northern	82.5%	92.4%	90.1%
South Eastern	93.4%	89.4%	94.4%
Southern	86.9%	75.7%	89.5%
Western	99.4%	98.2%	98.6%
Northern Ireland	90.5%	89.5%	92.1%

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 (October - December 2021)⁵

Cancer Type	% treated within 31 days		
	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21
Brain Central Tumour	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Breast Cancer	91.7%	93.4%	92.8%
Gynae Cancers	70.9%	77.8%	93.2%
Haematological Cancers	98.6%	98.4%	98.6%
Head/Neck Cancer	84.6%	91.5%	97.3%
Lower Gastrointestinal	93.8%	87.2%	93.7%
Lung Cancer	97.2%	97.4%	85.6%
Urological Cancer	86.4%	89.1%	93.6%
Sarcomas	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Skin Cancers	86.7%	79.5%	85.2%
Upper Gastrointestinal	97.0%	95.8%	94.6%
Other	81.3%	87.5%	87.5%
Northern Ireland	90.5%	89.5%	92.1%

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 (January 2019 – December 2021)⁴

Month	Total Treated	Treated within 31 days from receipt of referral	% treated within 31 days
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%
Apr-21	863	760	88.1%
May-21	886	812	91.6%
Jun-21	966	902	93.4%
Jul-21	821	750	91.4%
Aug-21	794	722	90.9%
Sep-21	886	780	88.0%
Oct-21	870	787	90.5%
Nov-21	962	861	89.5%
Dec-21	819	754	92.1%

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 (October – December 2021)⁶

HSC Trust	% seen within 14 days		
	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21
Belfast	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Northern	15.2%	13.3%	14.1%
South Eastern	15.5%	8.0%	21.2%
Southern	40.7%	16.9%	31.0%
Western	60.6%	75.1%	60.9%
Northern Ireland	49.2%	38.1%	43.1%

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 (January 2019 – December 2021)⁶

Month	Total seen	Seen within 14 days or less	% seen within 14 days
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%
April 2021	1,283	423	33.0%
May 2021	1,497	519	34.7%
June 2021	1,586	1,129	71.2%
July 2021	1,112	858	77.2%
August 2021	976	685	70.2%
September 2021	1,337	1,010	75.5%
October 2021	1,349	664	49.2%
November 2021	1,277	486	38.1%
December 2021	1,298	559	43.1%

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 (January 2019 – December 2021)⁷

Month	Total New Referrals Received	New Urgent Referrals
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
April 2021	2,150	1,506
May 2021	1,917	1,354
June 2021	2,124	1,472
July 2021	1,748	1,169
August 2021	1,827	1,225
September 2021	2,583	1,699
October 2021	2,461	1,513
November 2021	2,177	1,378
December 2021	1,760	1,155

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 2021/22 Ministerial Target for cancer waiting times, as detailed in the Health and Social Care (Commissioning Plan) Direction (Northern Ireland) 2021, states that during 2021/22, (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 at the time of the survey, 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 January, February and March 2022 will be published on Thursday 30th June 2022.

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>