

## BACKGROUND QUALITY REPORT: NORTHERN IRELAND OUTPATIENT ACTIVITY STATISTICS

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| <p><b>Introduction</b></p>             | <p>The Code of Practice for Statistics states that statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.</p> <p>The full text of the Code is available at:</p> <p><a href="https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/">https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/</a></p> <p>Each Official and National Statistics output produced by Hospital Information Branch (HIB) within the Department of Health (DoH) contains key quality information in respect of the specific content of the statistical output. This information is provided in the definitions, notes to tables or notes to editors.</p> |
| <p><b>Publication</b></p>              | <p>Northern Ireland Outpatient Activity Statistics</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p><b>Department responsible</b></p>   | <p>Department of Health (DoH)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p><b>Release Date</b></p>             | <p>Annually</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <p><b>Web Link to Publications</b></p> | <p><a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-activity">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-activity</a></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <p><b>Background</b></p>               | <p>Information on outpatient activity in Northern Ireland is collected on a quarterly basis and published annually.</p> <p>Data are submitted via aggregated returns that include counts of the number of patients seen for both new and review face-to-face, virtual, independent sector and integrated clinical assessment and treatment services (ICATS) outpatient appointments as well as patient and hospital cancelled appointments, broken down by Health &amp; Social Care (HSC) Trust and specialty.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

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|  | <p>HSC Trusts are provided with technical guidance outlining the methodologies to be used in the collection, reporting and validation of outpatient activity data.</p> <p><a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/outpatient-activity-returns-and-guidance">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/outpatient-activity-returns-and-guidance</a></p> |
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## Dimensions of Quality

| Dimension        | Assessment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
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| <b>Relevance</b> | <p><b>The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.</b></p> <p>The information presented in 'Northern Ireland Outpatient Activity Statistics' derives from aggregated returns provided by each HSC Trust on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Trusts submit quarterly aggregate returns for outpatient (face-to-face and virtual) and ICATS activity and Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) submit quarterly returns for outpatient independent sector activity. These are used to provide the number of consultant led outpatient appointments that have taken place during the quarter and the number of patient and hospital cancelled appointments.</p> <p>Data contained in this release are published primarily to provide an indication of HSC performance. They allow the general public and the DoH Health Committee to assess the performance of the DoH and HSC Trusts. These data also provide policy makers with the necessary information to formulate and evaluate health services and are helpful in assessing the effectiveness of resource allocation in providing services that are fully responsive to patient needs.</p> <p>In addition, information from this publication is used to respond to assembly questions and ad-hoc queries from the public.</p> <p>HIB ensures that this statistical report remains relevant to users in a number of ways, including; openly welcoming feedback from known users upon issuing each quarter's publication,</p> |

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|  | <p>providing contact details publicly so that other users can easily get in touch and undertaking national statistics consultations as necessary. In this way the needs of users are continuously monitored, and if appropriate and practical, acted upon.</p> |
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**Accuracy and Reliability**

**The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.**

Data providers are supplied with technical guidance outlining the methodologies to be used in the collection, reporting and validation of outpatient activity.

This guidance indicates when the downloads will be taken each quarter and the dates on which returns and validations should be submitted to HIB. Information should include only those who have attended or cancelled a first consultant led appointment or ICATS appointment.

Downloads will be taken on the Monday after the second Friday of the month following the end of the quarter. HSC Trusts and SPPG submit their returns in the next few weeks following the downloads. Further quality assurance checks are undertaken by both HSC Trust providers and by statisticians in the DoH. Validation checks are also conducted to help improve the accuracy and reliability.

All information presented in this publication has been validated and quality assured by HSC Trusts prior to publication. Trusts are asked to validate any large differences in specialty figures between different quarters and any outlying data. Any irregularities identified are queried with the HSC Trust who are asked to provide a response to the query and confirm if the data is correct. If not correct, they should firstly indicate the correct information and an explanation for the error, update their system and submit an amended information return to HIB. HIB will then amend their final dataset for publication.

Previous data are revised if necessary and appropriate. All revisions are conducted in line with HIB's Revisions Policy which can be found in the Statistics Charter online at:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/doh-statistics-charter>

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| <p><b>Timeliness and Punctuality</b></p> | <p><b>Timeliness</b> refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. <b>Punctuality</b> refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.</p> <p>The statistical information returns used to produce this publication refer to the most recent quarter. Returns are submitted within four weeks of the end of the quarter. HIB publish a 'Submission Timetable' quarterly to notify HSC Trust and SPPG staff of the submission deadlines for each return. Delayed submissions are normally due to a lack of resources or validation issues within HSC Trusts. The four quarters are then combined to produce annual figures.</p> <p>'Northern Ireland Outpatient Activity Statistics' is always published on the first Thursday in August for the previous financial year.</p> <p>The 'Schedule of Publications', which provides twelve months advance notice of releases, is available at:<br/> <a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/statistical-releases-calendar">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/statistical-releases-calendar</a></p> <p>In the majority of cases, the target publication deadlines are met. However, in the event of a change to a pre-announced release date, the delay is announced, explained and updated regularly.</p> |
| <p><b>Accessibility and Clarity</b></p>  | <p><b>Accessibility</b> is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. <b>Clarity</b> refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.</p> <p>The annual 'Northern Ireland Outpatient Activity Statistics' National Statistics publication includes data visualisations, tabular data and commentary. In addition to this, all data tables are published in Open Data Spreadsheet formats.</p> <p>The report includes notes for readers which cover: guidance on using the data, important links to additional guidance for readers</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

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|                                                            | <p>on: the data collection, provision of data, data quality, contextual information, security and confidentiality and additional guidance on important terms and phrases.</p> <p>‘Northern Ireland Outpatient Activity Statistics’ publications are currently produced in HTML format and available to view / download on the Department’s website (link below):</p> <p><a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-activity">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-activity</a></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p><b>Coherence and Comparability</b></p>                  | <p><b>Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.</b></p> <p>There is currently no other official source of outpatient activity statistics in Northern Ireland. However, HSC Trusts and associated agencies have their own internal quality assurance checks. Performance &amp; Information Teams carry out data validation checks to ensure consistency in the data produced by HIB and the HSC Trusts or SPPG. Any data quality issues which arise are dealt with reactively and resolved as they arise. HSC Trusts have dedicated data quality resources to proactively manage data quality challenges across the organisations.</p> |
| <p><b>Trade-offs between Output Quality Components</b></p> | <p><b>Trade-offs are the extent to which different aspects of quality are balanced against each other.</b></p> <p>None</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <p><b>Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions</b></p>     | <p><b>The processes for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.</b></p> <p>Data presented in this publication helps to meet the information needs of a wide range of internal and external users.</p> <p>Within DoH, the ‘Northern Ireland Outpatient Activity Statistics’ publication is used by policy officials to monitor and report the details of outpatient activity – how many appointments have taken place and how many were cancelled and under which specialties, for corporate monitoring, for Ministerial briefing and</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

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|                                                          | <p>to respond to Private Office enquiries and parliamentary / assembly questions.</p> <p>It is also used by researchers looking at HSC Trust performance and by service users and other members of the general public to hold HSC Trusts and government to account.</p> <p>User feedback is invited in this publication. Readers are provided with contact details for the relevant statistician. Further details are placed on the statistics website:</p> <p><a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/doh-statistics-and-research/official-statistics-and-user-engagement#toc-4">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/doh-statistics-and-research/official-statistics-and-user-engagement#toc-4</a></p> <p>We gain awareness of users of our data from ad hoc requests for information and from the receipt of invitations to relevant meetings and conferences.</p> <p>Users' needs are prioritised, taking account of the resources available.</p> |
| <p><b>Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden</b></p>    | <p>The information collected by HSC Trusts for this publication is not collected specifically for HIB and would be produced whether requested by HIB or not.</p> <p>On receipt of the information returns and the validations returned from HSC Trusts, the statistics require approximately four weeks of working time from statistical staff to produce, plus a small amount of senior staff oversight.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <p><b>Confidentiality, Transparency and Security</b></p> | <p><b>The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.</b></p> <p>Information used to produce this publication is submitted to HIB using excel templates that are provided. As it is aggregate information it does not include personal information and thus is submitted without password protection.</p> <p>Data that are submitted are held on a network that is only accessible to the statisticians who need access.</p> <p>Data are published in such a way that individuals cannot be identified.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

DoH's Data Protection policy statement can be found at:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/dhssps-data-protection-policy-statement>