



Understanding more about unscheduled care use in people on the cancer waiting times list in Scotland

Publication date: 7 July 2025

In partnership with

MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT



Translations



Easy read



BSL



Audio



Large print



Braille

Translations and other formats are available on request at:

@ phs.otherformats@phs.scot

Public Health Scotland is Scotland's national agency for improving and protecting the health and wellbeing of Scotland's people.

© Public Health Scotland 2025



This publication is licensed for re-use under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#).

For more information, visit www.publichealthscotland.scot/ogl

www.publichealthscotland.scot

Public Health Scotland (PHS) and **Macmillan Cancer Support** are working together to use data to improve the understanding of the impacts of cancer and its treatment on the cancer population.

This project involved linking patient-level data together to attempt to understand more about urgent cancer referrals and people who are admitted as an emergency in the time between their referral and treatment.

Why?

This project began with an initial investigation into the impact of COVID-19 on cancer services before expanding into a wider analysis into emergency care use and cancer waiting times in Scotland.

Understanding more about how often and in what way people referred urgently with suspicion of cancer, who later have a diagnosis of cancer, end up accessing unscheduled care before they are treated could provide key insight to inform service management and delivery.

What are we doing?

Data on Cancer Waiting Times for people who go on to receive a diagnosis of cancer was linked for the first time with unscheduled care data for all relevant patients in Scotland between 2018-2022ⁱ. Data was also linked from the Scottish Cancer Registry and with inpatient/daycase data. This allowed us to look at a patient's journey from referral (from their GP, screening programme or as a direct referral) to diagnosis date and treatment date, with information about the cancer diagnosed

ⁱ This involves linking data on people eligible for the 62-day standard in the Scottish Cancer Waiting Times dataset (this includes only people with a subsequent diagnosis of cancer and received treatment/supportive care)

(stage, etc.), hospital activity and if they use A&E, NHS24, ambulance services, have an emergency admission to hospital or utilise any other out of hours services. Note, while information on use of unscheduled care is linked, we are not able to determine if this service engagement is cancer related. Information on how PHS collects and processes data can be found at <https://publichealthscotland.scot/our-privacy-notice/your-rights/>.

Progress to date

This novel data linkage has now been finalised, with rules for linkage established to also allow for easier future linkage to occur. There is a huge amount of potentially valuable information being examined and reported as a result of this work. The work has highlighted the different routes from referral to diagnosis and treatment which occur by cancer type and by how someone is originally referred, and how these factors relate to a person's need to use unscheduled and emergency care (and how often). Work is being undertaken to rationalise this into key messages which can influence service management and delivery, and we aim to report this through published papers, reports, presentations and other channels in the coming months.

To find out more

If you want to know more about this work, or are working in a related area and would like to share your insights, contact us

at phs.macmillan@phs.scot or HealthData@macmillan.org.uk

Acknowledgements

This work uses data provided by patients and collected by the NHS as part of their care and support.