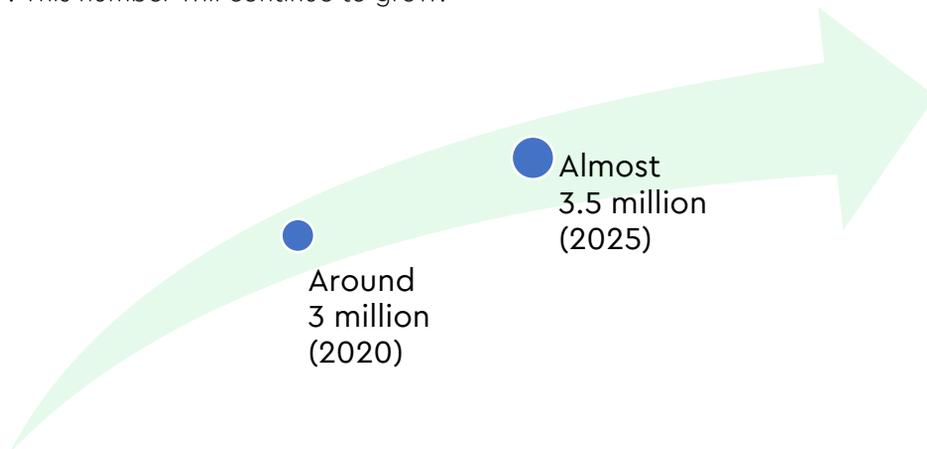


Last updated: February 2026

## Prevalence

### The number of people living with cancer

We estimate that there are **almost 3.5 million people** living with cancer in the UK, an increase from around 3 million in 2020<sup>i</sup>. This number will continue to grow.



For more information, please visit our main [Cancer prevalence](#) webpage.

## Incidence

### New cases of cancer diagnosed each year

More than **420,000 people** are diagnosed with cancer each year in the UK. On average someone is diagnosed with cancer **at least every 75 seconds** in the UK.

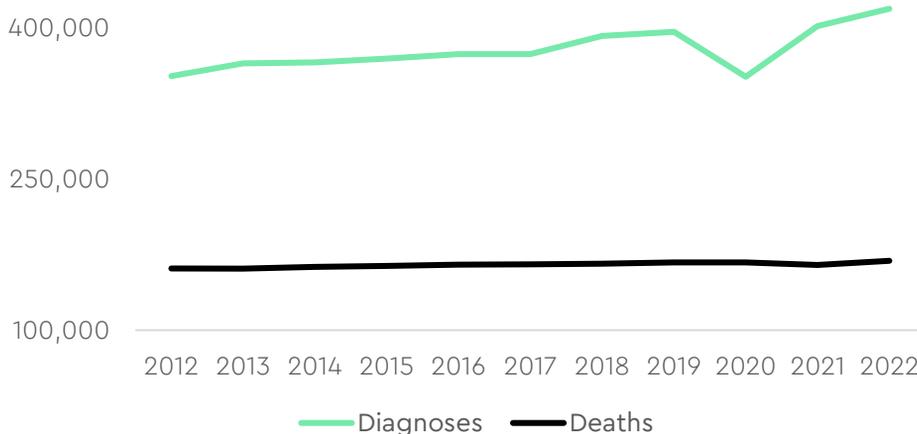
Nation	Every year	Every month	Every week	Every day
England (2023)	354,800	29,600	6,820	970
Scotland (2023)	37,200	3,100	720	100
Wales (2022)	21,000	1,750	400	60
Northern Ireland (2022)	10,900	900	210	30
<b>UK</b>	<b>423,900</b>	<b>35,300</b>	<b>8,150</b>	<b>1,160</b>

The number of people diagnosed with cancer increased by **19%** between 2012 and 2022<sup>ii</sup>. This is likely due to the growing and aging population who are at higher risk of developing cancer, as well as improvements in diagnosis initiatives and public awareness. Due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, cancer incidence in the UK decreased between 2019 and 2020, but has continued to increase each year again from 2021 onwards.

## Mortality

### People dying from cancer

Cancer remains the biggest overall cause of death for people in the UK<sup>iii</sup>. Each year, more than **168,000 people** die from cancer in the UK, an average of around **460 people** every day. However, mortality has increased at a much slower rate in comparison to incidence, with the number of people dying from cancer rising by **5%** between 2012 and 2022.



Additionally, age-standardised rates of cancer mortality per 100,000 people, [allowing for comparisons despite the aging population](#), decreased by **around 10%** on average across UK nations between 2012 and 2022<sup>iv</sup>. Please note: cancer incidence and mortality statistics for 2020 and 2021 in particular have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Diagnosis and treatment

### Cancer waiting times

For over a decade, published figures on the number of people waiting for a diagnosis or treatment for cancer have shown the huge challenge facing NHS cancer services, with tens of thousands of people waiting for too long for diagnosis or vital treatment. This has been an ongoing issue, but has worsened further in recent years, partly as a result of ongoing staff shortages and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, across the UK.

Performance against cancer waiting times targets in all UK nations fell to among the worst on record in 2023 and 2024, and showed a mixed picture with only some partial improvements in 2025. As of January 2025, half of people having cancer treatment in the UK (50%) were worried about general pressures on the NHS affecting their chances of survival, according to a Macmillan/YouGov survey of over 2,000 adults diagnosed with cancer<sup>v</sup>.

Further cancer waiting times data and information is available across the UK from [NHS England](#), [Public Health Scotland](#), [Welsh Government](#) and the [Department of Health for Northern Ireland](#). Our analyses of the national publications on cancer waiting times are regularly updated and included in Macmillan's [press releases and statements](#).

## Survival

### Living beyond a cancer diagnosis

While there is still much need for improvement, particularly for some cancer types and compared with other countries, average survival rates for cancer patients in the UK have increased significantly in recent decades. One study showed that in England and Wales in the 1970s, around half of people with cancer survived an average of one year, whereas by 2010 around half of patients survived an average of 10 years<sup>vi</sup>.

However, there are noticeable differences in age-standardised net survival rates between different cancer types. For example, in England in 2021, melanoma of the skin had the highest 1-year (98.0%) and 5-year (92.6%) age-standardised net survival rates and pancreatic cancer the lowest 1-year (27.7%) and 5-year (8.3%) survival<sup>vii</sup>.

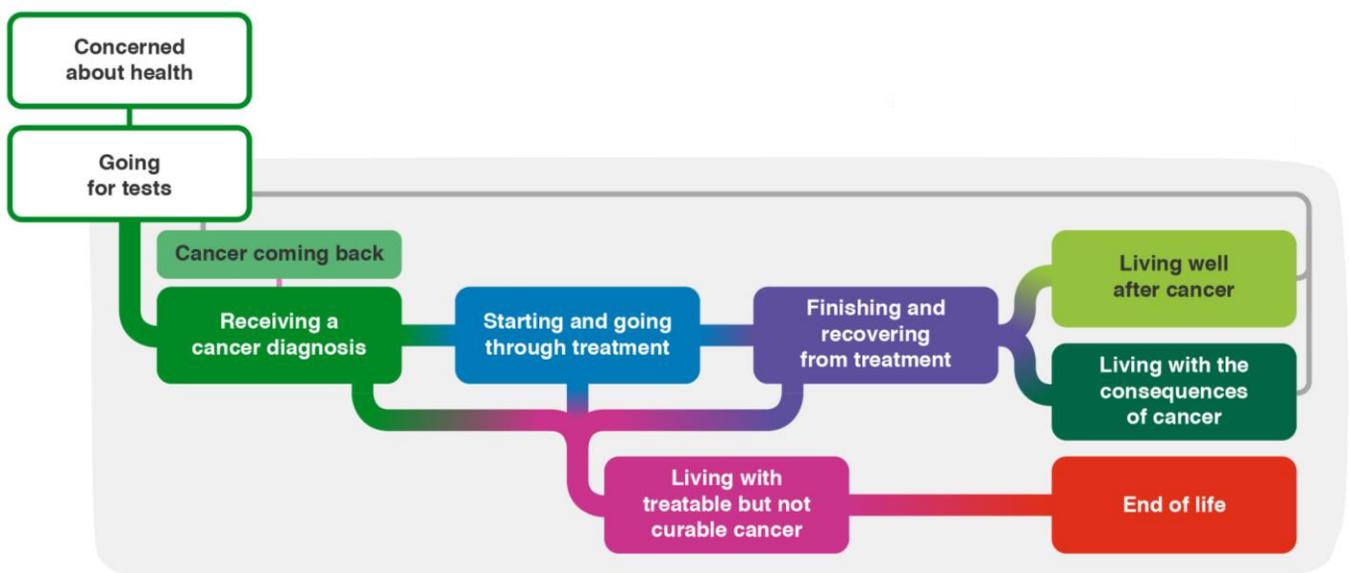
[Macmillan analysis](#) also shows that UK cancer survival rates are up to 25 years behind other European countries.

And while it is clearly good news that more people are surviving cancer, progress can be a double-edged sword unless those living longer after cancer receive appropriate support. Our report '[Throwing Light on the Consequences of Cancer and its Treatment](#)' (and the accompanying lay summary report '[Cured – But at What Cost?](#)') revealed another vital aspect of the changing cancer story. We estimated around **one in four** (25%) people with cancer are living with the long-term consequences of cancer or its treatment<sup>viii</sup>.

## Times of need

### The cancer 'journey'

Macmillan has identified stages along people's cancer journey when experiences are commonly shared, with five key moments ([diagnosis](#), [treatment](#), [recovery](#), [living with treatable but not curable cancer](#) and [end of life](#)) where there is a particularly high level of unmet need.



## Experience

### Holistic Needs Assessment (HNA)

The [Holistic Needs Assessment](#) (HNA or eHNA, in its electronic format) is a questionnaire to identify the concerns of people living with cancer at any stage of the cancer pathway, to facilitate a conversation about their needs and to develop a Personalised Care and Support Plan, through their cancer journey.

In 2024, **65,000** eHNAs were carried out through Macmillan's platform, which helped identify tens of thousands of concerns from people living with cancer. This was an 11% increase on 2023<sup>ix</sup>.

### Cancer Patient Experience Survey (CPES)

The Cancer Patient Experience Survey (CPES) is a survey to understand the experiences of people living with cancer. In England, the national CPES is run by NHS England. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, it has been run by the following organisations with support from Macmillan: the Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland, the former Wales Cancer Network (now NHS Wales National Cancer Team), and Northern Ireland's Public Health Agency and former Health and Social Care Board.

The most recent national surveys reported mostly positive results (on a scale of 0-10, where 10 is 'very good') with improvements needed in various areas.

- In **England**, although respondents to the most recent survey (2024) gave an average rating of 8.94 for overall care, only 73.1% said they were able to have a discussion about their needs or concerns prior to treatment<sup>x</sup>.
- In **Scotland**, 95% of respondents to the most recent survey (2024) said their care was positive overall, rating it 7 or more. However, 30% of respondents said they did not receive emotional or psychological support by healthcare professionals during their treatment<sup>xi</sup>.
- In **Wales**, 92% of respondents to the most recent survey (2021) said their care was positive overall, with 90% saying they were treated with dignity and respect when in hospital. However, 36% of people said that they had not been offered information about how to access financial help or benefits<sup>xii</sup>.
- In **Northern Ireland**, the most recent survey was carried out in 2018, and on average respondents rated their overall care as 9 out of 10<sup>xiii</sup>.

Analysis of CPES results also reveals significant variation in experience between different groups of people with cancer. For example, England's national CPES has consistently shown since its first publication in 2010 that people from ethnically diverse groups, as well as the young, the very old and women, overall report a poorer experience of cancer services than the national average.

### Cancer Quality of Life Survey

Conducted by NHS England, the [Cancer Quality of Life Survey](#) is a national survey composed of two questionnaires, focused on general health and quality of life. It is completed by people with cancer in England around 18 months after their diagnosis, along with a sample of the general population for comparison.

Results from survey responses received up to May 2025 highlighted that people with cancer gave a lower score for overall health (74 out of 100), in comparison to that of the general population (90 out of 100). People with cancer also gave lower scores in the quality of life categories of work or leisure activities (74 out of 100). The results also suggested that difficulty sleeping (reported by 26% of respondents with cancer) was one of the symptoms which may benefit from further investigation, for its impact on people's quality of life<sup>xiv</sup>.

## Services

### The reach of Macmillan's services

We estimate that **2.4 million people affected by cancer** were reached by Macmillan's services in 2024. This included:

- **484,000 people** with cancer who we supported with information and support about their diagnosis, treatment and care via our telephone Support Line, information centres, Online Community, website, email support and Buddies service, which included:
  - **286,000 people** with cancer who found support through our Online Community.
  - **105,000 people** with cancer who visited one of our Macmillan information centres at hospitals and community settings across the UK<sup>ix</sup>.

For more information see our latest [Annual Report and Accounts](#).

## References

- i. Analysis based on time-limited cancer prevalence published for each nation in the UK. The relationship to complete cancer prevalence is derived from 2013 complete prevalence ([Macmillan-NCRAS Cancer Prevalence Project](#)). This is projected forwards using the UK growth rates in [Maddams et al. \(2012\)](#). This includes all people who have ever had a cancer diagnosis, some people in this group may no longer consider themselves to be living with cancer. For more information see: Macmillan Cancer Support. [Cancer prevalence](#).  
Note that the diameter and distance of the circles in the presented diagram are approximate representations of these data for complete cancer prevalence.
- ii. Based on aggregated UK-wide figures from the sources below. Figures include all malignant neoplasms excluding non-melanoma skin cancer (NMSC) (ICD-10 codes C00-97 excl. C44. Scotland does not use C97):
  - [NHS England](#)
  - [Public Health Scotland](#)
  - [Public Health Wales](#)
  - [Northern Ireland Cancer Registry, Queen's University Belfast](#)
- iii. Refers to cause of death from overall disease group, i.e. all types of cancer combined compared with e.g. all types of dementia combined, and all types of heart disease and stroke combined. Based on a combination of analysis from the following sources: 1) Office for National Statistics. [Deaths registered in England and Wales, 2024](#). Relevant figures shown in table 7 of the 2024 dataset 2) National Records of Scotland. [Vital reference events table 2024; Section 6: Deaths – Causes](#) 3) Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. [Registrar General Annual Report 2024 Cause of Death](#)
- iv. Based on three-year average of age-standardised rates for 2010-2012 and 2020-2022; the latter is the latest year for which cancer mortality data is available for all countries in the UK. Figures include all malignant neoplasms excluding non-melanoma skin cancer (NMSC) (ICD-10 codes C00-97 excl. C44. Scotland does not use C97):
  - [NHS England](#)
  - [Public Health Scotland](#)
  - [Public Health Wales](#)
  - [Northern Ireland Cancer Registry, Queen's University Belfast](#)
- v. Macmillan Cancer Support/YouGov survey of 2,057 adults in the UK who have had a cancer diagnosis, including 223 people going through treatment. Fieldwork was undertaken between 3rd and 27th January 2025. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of people living with cancer in the UK (aged 18+). Survey question was as follows: How worried, if at all, are you about the following? 'General pressures on the NHS affecting my chances of survival'
- vi. 'Average survival' in this context refers to index of net survival. For patients diagnosed in 1971–72, the index of net survival was 50% at 1 year after diagnosis. For 2011–12, the same value of 50% was predicted at 10 years after diagnosis. Source: Quaresma M, Coleman MP, Rachet B. 40-year trends in an index of survival for all cancers combined and survival adjusted for age and sex for each cancer in England and Wales, 1971-2011: a population-based study. *Lancet* 2015; 385: 1206-1218. [doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736\(14\)61396-9](#)
- vii. NHS England. Cancer Survival in England, cancers diagnosed 2016 to 2020, followed up to 2021. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/cancer-survival-in-england/cancers-diagnosed-2016-to-2020-followed-up-to-2021>
- viii. Macmillan Cancer Support (2013). Throwing light on the consequences of cancer and its treatment. <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/documents/aboutus/research/researchandevaluationreports/throwinglightonthesequenceofcanceranditstreatment.pdf>
- ix. Macmillan Cancer Support. [Annual Report and Accounts 2024](#).
- x. NHS England/Picker. [National Cancer Patient Experience Survey](#).
- xi. Scottish Government. [Scottish Cancer Patient Experience Survey](#).
- xii. NHS Wales. [Wales Cancer Patient Experience Survey](#).
- xiii. Northern Ireland Cancer Network. [Northern Ireland Cancer Patient Experience Survey](#).
- xiv. NHS England's National Disease Registration Service (NDRS). [Cancer quality of life survey](#). Accessed December 2025