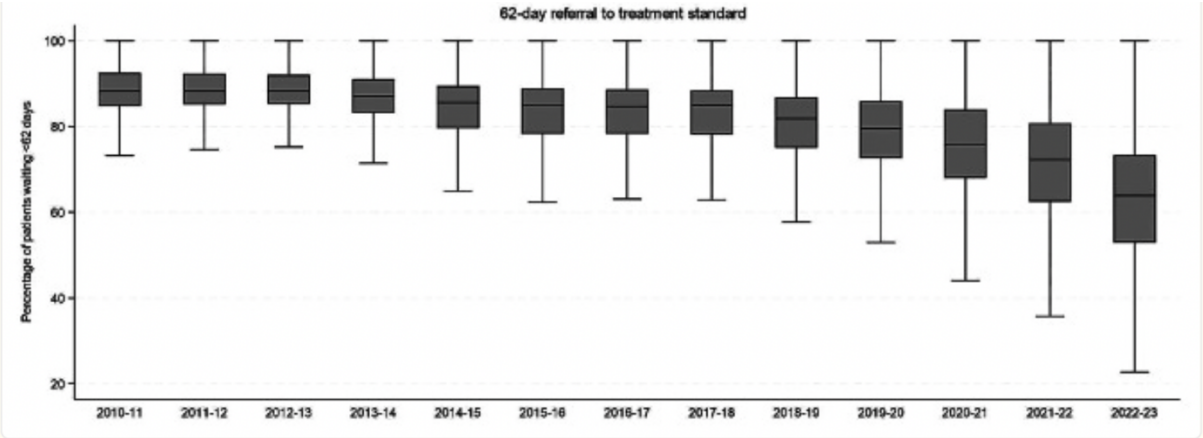
Descriptive analysis of NHS 62-day referral confirmed cancer patients' performance across 18 London trusts between 2022-2025

Background:

The 62-day referral 85% performance thresholds describe an English healthcare trust's ability to initiate cancer treatment of a new cancer patient within 62 days of initial diagnosis. Early diagnose to treatment improves medical outcomes (1). Additionally, well defined wait times may help to relive patient anxieties along with maintaining standardised care within a public health care system. Trusts that do not meet the 62-day referral 85% threshold face financial penalties of 1000 pounds per patient breaching the 62-days. At present, the national average 85% threshold performance is 62%. National performance consistently has declined over the last decade, with the COVID-19 pandemic believed to majorly contribute to the large decline between 2020-22.



62-day standard performance of all English patients of accumulated cancer types between 2010/11-2022/23.

Source(https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11323589/)

There are roughly 124 acute trusts across England, 18 of which are within the Greater London area. London Health Trusts serve roughly 8.17 million people through both general practices and over 140 specialised services. Given that London's trusts serve approximately 16% of England's total population, a London-specific descriptive analysis would provide valuable insights for healthcare planners in Greater London. Such analysis can support the monitoring of 62-day referral performance and the incidence patterns of various cancer types across the region.

This analytical report utilise NHS gathered cancer data to generate performance percentages over three years for each of the London based trusts. Although NHS data includes both suspected and confirmed, this report focuses exclusively on the threshold rates of confirmed cancer cases. While filtering of suspected cases may narrow the estimation of London trust performance, a confirmed cancer case focus can reveal diagnose-treatment pathway efficiency across the Greater London.

Objectives:

A key performance question directs the inquire of this report:

"*Do NHS Greater London healthcare trusts meet the national 62-day referral 85% threshold target amongst patients with a confirmed cancer diagnosis?"*

"How do NHS Greater London healthcare trusts 62-day referral threshold performances compare to the national performance average?"

Other key sub-questions will direct further investigation into potential temporal variation in trust performance. Additionally, the incidence of cancer across Greater London and:

"How do NHS Greater London healthcare trusts vary in their ability to reach 62-day referral 85% threshold targets amongst patients with a confirmed cancer diagnosis over time?".

"How do the incidence of cancer amongst confirmed patients different between trust and cancer type?"

Methodology:

All data was gained through the NHS cancer waiting list website: https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/cancer-waiting-times/#cwt-statistics-up-to-september-2023

A detailed summary of this report's methodology can be accessed via GitHub link: "https://github.com/Handy1913/NHS_London_Cancer_62_day.git" within the "*methodology + python file*".

Results

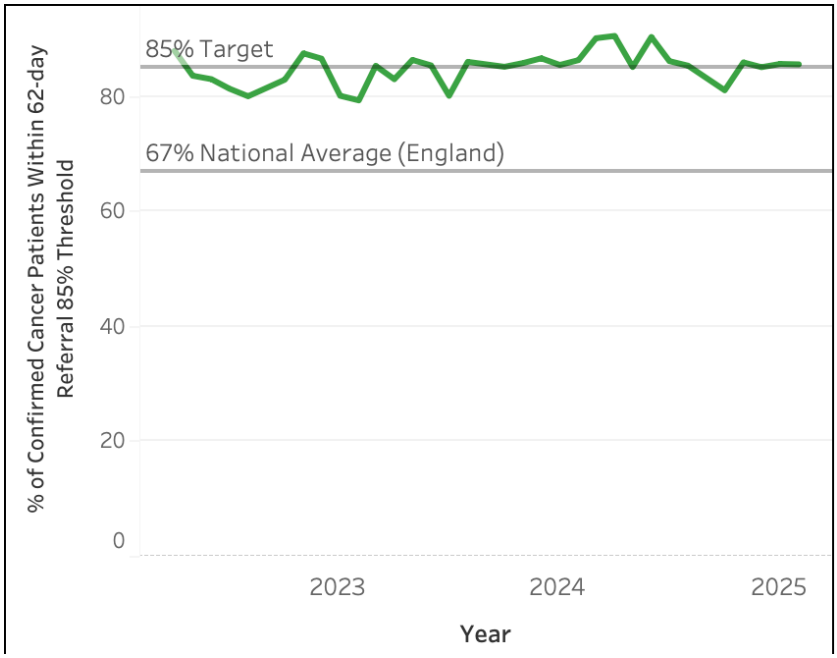
"*Do NHS Greater London healthcare trusts meet the national 62-day referral 85% threshold target amongst patients with a confirmed cancer diagnosis?"*

Of the 18 Greater London Trusts, only Epsom and St Helier University Hospital succeeded in coming close to the threshold level required (Mean 84.97% CI 84.04%-85.90%). The highest and lowest performing trusts include:

Top 5 performing Greater London Trusts	Lowest 5 performing Greater London Trusts
1. Epsom and St Helier University Hospital (84.97% CI 84.04%-85.90%)	Guy's and Saint Thomas' (47.74% CI 46.10%-49.39%)
2. Kingston Hospital (81.89% CI 80.69%-83.08%)	Royal Free London (56.69 CI 55.01%-58.37%)
3. Homerton Healthcare (81.12% CI 79.25%-82.99%)	North Middlesex University Hospital (57.68 CI 55.22%-60.13%)
4. Cheslea and Westminster (80.02% CI 78.00-82.04%)	Whittington Health (59.73 CI 56.92%-62.55%)
5. London Northwest University (75.29% CI 73.56%-77.01%)	Barts Health (64.32 CI 62.77%-65.87%)

Table 1.0 displays the highest and lowest performing Greater London Trusts average percentage and CI values.

Figure 1.0 The performance trend of the highest achieving Greater London Trust, Epsom and St Helier over the data period of 2022-2025. 85% target line is shown in grey alongside national 67% average (England) in grey.



"How do NHS Greater London healthcare trusts 62-day referral threshold performances compare to the national performance average?"

The national average *62-day referral threshold* performance for England is 67% (2). On average Greater London healthcare trusts over the four-year period reached just above the national average at 69.58%. However, as noted above, the performance scores between each trust varies greatly between the national average, with the bottom five healthcare trusts failing to meet the national average. It is important to note that the national average likely includes suspected cancer case performance along with confirmed. This inclusion likely limits comparability between this reports measure of performance and the national average.

"How do NHS Greater London healthcare trusts vary in their 62-day referral 85% threshold target performance amongst patients with a confirmed cancer diagnosis over time?".

Epsom and St Helier University Hospital, the top performing Greater London healthcare trust, experienced a number of dips in performance over the study period, notably between Dec-Feb 2022/2023 and Aug-Oct 2024. A number of trusts display a similar dip between Dec-Feb 2022/2023, with a decline in performance ten of the eighteen Greater London trusts during the same period (Croydon Health Services, The Hillingdon Hospital, The London North West University Hospital, The Royal Free London, St George's University Hospital, Barking, Havering, and Redbridge Hospital, King's College Hospital, Guy's and St Thomas', Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, and University College London Hospital).

Generally, NHS Greater London healthcare trusts 62-day referral 85% threshold target performance fluctuate between consistent borders of performance. A good example of this fluctuation between consistent values is London Northwest University. Performance in this trust can be seen to rise and fall between 65%-80% throughout 2022 and 2023, followed by a dip outside of this region during Oct 2023, before rising once again into the 65%-80% region during 2024. A similar pattern of consistent change in performance can be seen in a number of other trusts such as Kingston Hospital and Guy's and St Thomas'. However, not all trusts show this ebb and flow like trend. The Hillington Hospital for example suffered two large dips in performance in Jan 2023, at a point where the trust was experiencing a peak in caseload, and Jan 2024, incidentally at the point of lowest caseload. Such a change may highlight a particular connection with performance and changes in patient numbers over time.

Figure 2.0 The performance trend of the Hillingdon Hospital (Pink) over the data period of 2022-2025. 85% target line (Grey) alongside national 67% average (England) (Grey).

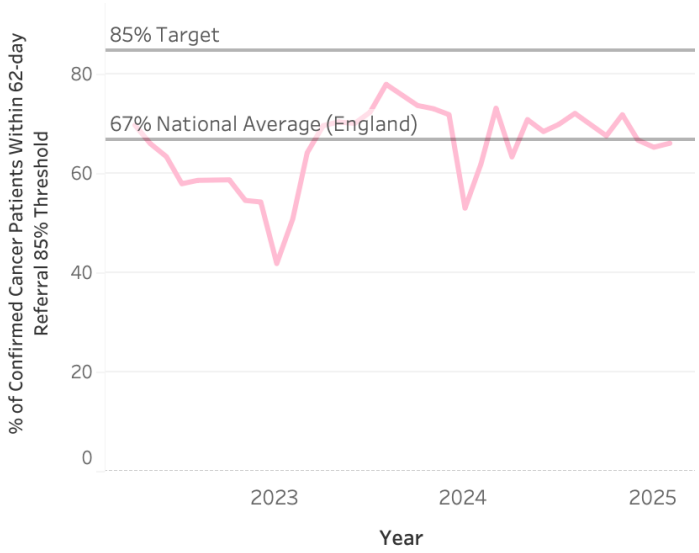
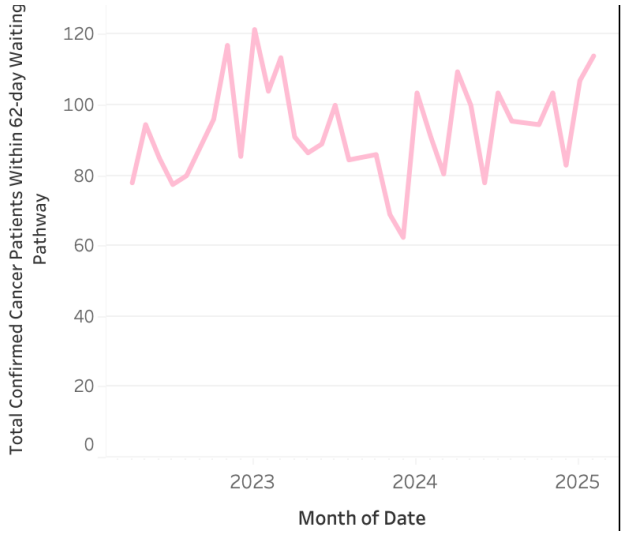


Figure 3.0 The total confirmed cancer patients' trend of the Hillingdon Hospital (Pink) over the data period of 2022-2025.



"How do the incidence of cancer amongst confirmed patients different between cancer type?"

Top 5 most prevalent confirmed patient cancer types within Greater London Healthcare Trusts between 2022-2025
1. Breast cancer 15,309 patients (15.89% of total cancers.)
2. Urological 12,245 patients (12.71% of total cancers)
3. Skin 11,107 patients (11.53% of total cancers)
4. Lung 10,521 patients (10.92% of total cancers)
5. Lower Gastrointestinal 9,577 patients (9.94% of total cancers)

In comparison to national figures of cancer occurrence by type, this report's findings are consistent with the results of *cancerresearchUK.org* estimations of the top five UK cancers:

1. Breast
2. Prostate
3. Lung
4. Bowel
5. Melanoma Skin Cancer

Visualisation and Dashboard

As part of this report an interactive dashboard was development to aid in the visualisation of this report's findings. Through selecting each specific Greater London trust on the map on the bottom left-hand side of the dashboard, specific performance metrics, cancer type case incidence, and trend visualisations will be generated for the user. Additionally, by selecting a Greater London trust on the coloured key just left of the map, the user will be shown trust performance and cancer type incidence in comparison to the other trusts.

All of this can be access via the tableau public link below:

Interactive Dashboard for NHS 62-day referral amongst confirmed cancer patients report

Key Takeaway Findings

- Only one Greater London trust (Epsom and St Helier) came close to meeting the 85% 62-day referral target for confirmed cancer cases, averaging 84.97% over the study period.
- The average performance across London trusts was 69.58%, slightly above the national average of 67%, though many trusts still performed below this benchmark.
- Several trusts showed seasonal dips in performance, particularly between December and February 2022/2023, indicating potential pressure points during winter months.
- Cancer incidence distribution was led by breast, urological, skin, lung, and lower gastrointestinal cancers—mirroring national prevalence trends reported by Cancer Research UK.
- Performance varied significantly by trust, with a gap of over 35 percentage points between the highest and lowest performers, highlighting inequality in timely cancer care delivery.

Conclusion

This analysis highlights the persistent challenge Greater London NHS trusts face in meeting the 62-day cancer treatment target, with wide variation in performance and consistent underachievement, that is consistent with national performance, relative to the 85% goal. While London's collective performance slightly surpasses the national average, clear performance disparities exist between trusts and time periods. Further investigation is required into the weak points surrounding both general and trust specific pathways before widespread meeting of the 85% threshold is likely to be achieved.

1. https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/resource/cancer-waiting-time-targets