



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES

Diagnosics Recovery and Transformation Strategy for Wales 2023 – 2025

How we will use diagnostics to support
the recovery of NHS services and
prepare for future need.

First published: April 2023

gov.wales

Contents

Ministerial foreword	1
What this strategy is about	2
Nine themes of focus	4
Diagnostic vision	8
References	10

Ministerial foreword

Diagnostic services are a fundamental aspect of modern healthcare delivery. Clinical pathways can only function properly with sufficient capacity to turnaround diagnostic tests, procedures, and reports in a timely manner. Large backlogs of diagnostic procedures hold NHS Wales back from making improvements in referral to treatment times, impair screening pathway effectiveness, result in poor patient experience, and have the potential to result in harms and poorer outcomes.

COVID-19 has not gone away, and alongside the effects of global changes in behaviours and other factors, it will continue to present us with new and emerging challenges that must be addressed to drive improvement and deliver safe, sustainable services for the people of Wales.

Through **'Our programme for transforming and modernising planned care and reducing waiting lists in Wales'** I have requested the formation of a dedicated National Diagnostic Board tasked to aid the recovery of our NHS Wales diagnostic services, and provide clear sight of the evolving requirements of our population and a concerted requirement transition to services that are suitable and sufficient for our future generations.

We must work together to map out how we can leverage and coordinate investment and actions for the challenges we face as a system for the people of Wales. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of using evidence to inform our actions and we must do this again in order to accurately and openly describe the problems; address them through our policies, and for NHS Wales to deliver by NHS Wales. In doing so, we will improve the health and well-being of people in Wales and create modern and sustainable diagnostic services in NHS Wales; inclusive of new and emerging services, and new diagnostic models across a range of pathways and diseases. There is a need to act swiftly, but we must ensure that any short-term intervention can be used as the foundations for longer term ambitions.

This strategy sets out the immediate priorities and objectives of the National Diagnostics Board and how it intends to deliver against the extraordinarily challenging needs of now but engaged with one eye on the needs that are yet to come.



Eluned Morgan MS
Minister for Health and
Social Services

What this strategy is about

Who is this strategy for?

This strategy is for all of NHS Wales.

It is aimed at leading and coordinating supportive actions to aid recovery of diagnostic services as we move away from the acute phase of the pandemic.

This will also ensure that interventions and commitments implemented in the immediate term align with foreseeable future demand and shift towards optimised delivery models as the foundation of long-term sustainable transformation.

By working together according to the principles set out here we will design and implement better public services that will have a direct beneficial impact on patient health outcomes whilst reducing inequalities across the country.

What are the Outcomes and Experiences we want to improve?

- To improve outcomes and reduce pressure on secondary care.
- To address unmet care need that has been exacerbated by COVID-19.
- Enable people to live longer, healthier lives at home.
- Identify, manage and intervene more rapidly and earlier in disease.
- Create a sustainable and intelligent integrated health system which reduces inequality.
- Make Wales a great place to live and work.

How will we do it?

We will:

1. Rapidly create additional diagnostic capacity.
2. Move to a combined approach of diagnostics as a whole.
3. Provide more directional national leadership for NHS Wales through the National Diagnostics Board.
4. Establish a dedicated National Diagnostic Transformation Strategy as part of the NHS Wales Executive.
5. Expedite transformation in diagnostic service models.

Accountability and leadership

We, the Welsh Government and NHS Wales, have a clear leadership role in delivery of this strategy, but we will not deliver the step change needed across Wales on our own. The ambition described here can only be delivered through partnership working, collaboration and coordination; breaking down existing silos in order to support delivery.

To assist in the deployment of this strategy, the National Diagnostics Board will recruit a National Clinical Lead and Programme Director for Diagnostics.

The National Diagnostics Board will support delivery across all of NHS Wales and help monitor progress and reporting on this strategy.

We will set an ambitious but deliverable timetable for the intended actions in order for us to meet our described goals by 2025.

Nine themes of focus

Exploration of the historical, current and likely future needs for diagnostic services has identified nine key themes which will require specific focus:

1. People and Patients

- Do what matters for people with a determination to co-produce and understand value.
- Vigorously pursue and reduce inequalities in all of our work.

2. Workforce

- Significantly increase the training pipeline of diagnostic specialists, including advanced practice roles (e.g. reporting biomedical scientists, reporting radiographers, advanced audiology primary care practitioners) and consultant grade roles (e.g. consultant clinical scientists) as part of the service and workforce redesign.
- Adopt the Imaging Academy model for other disciplines to support training and development of the diagnostic workforce.
- Continue to develop prudent multi-professional working for diagnostics.
- Actively pursue hybrid working and 'reporting from home'.

3. Service Transformation

- Create national or regional models for fragile services with consolidation of some services to improve safety, throughput and efficiency.
- Push less complex diagnostics closer to primary and community care.
- Implement national planning for complex imaging provision such as PET-CT.

4. Digital

- Integrate and digitalise all test requesting and reporting via single national platforms, with reporting across Health Board boundaries and adopt innovative digital technology solutions including artificial intelligence (AI).

5. Commissioning and Procurement

- Development of national diagnostic service specifications using the developed knowledge and experience within Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee to describe expected standards across all modalities within NHS Wales.
- Development of national value-based sustainable and resilient procurement principles for integration as standard across all of NHS Wales, using the inherent expertise within NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership and Health Board/Trust procurement teams.

6. Quality and Safety

- Ensure all diagnostic (and supporting) services gain formal accreditation.
- Develop safe and sustainable asset management and support services for diagnostics.

7. Performance

- Be data driven and evidence informed.

8. Estates

- Utilise managed service contracts to provide regional and/or community diagnostic hubs.
- Invest capital in upgrading diagnostic facilities to meet decontamination and accreditation standards.
- Consolidate 'cold' laboratory services into regional footprints to drive innovation and efficiency – moving away from old hospital-based models and creating laboratory environments with collision points for service, academia and industry.

9. Research and Innovation

- Thorough testing of emerging technologies and accelerated scale up across Wales.
- Use research to ask important questions and improve outcomes.
- Have more trusted partnerships with academia, industry, Welsh, and UK Governments to drive investment, innovation and improved outcomes in Wales; creating an environment for collaborative working across organisational boundaries.

The National Diagnostics Board will challenge the National Diagnostic Transformation Strategy to develop a detailed delivery plan which incorporates these themes as key principles of concern.

Our approach

In developing this strategy, we have engaged broadly with a range of stakeholder groups and forums, including representatives from across NHS Wales.

We have measured the growing pressures experienced by our NHS Wales diagnostic services caused by the exacerbating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. These effects have further highlighted the crucial role of diagnostics across most care pathways and the rate limiting bottleneck to patient progression through the healthcare system these services create when demand outstrips capacity.

Welsh Government has previously highlighted our commitment to developing fit-for-future diagnostic services through a number of specific national instruments. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the urgency for action and directed effort. By liaising with relevant clinical and service experts across NHS Wales we have realised the necessary resource through the National Diagnostics Board and associated programme whose remit will be to ensure NHS Wales is supplied with the support and guidance necessary for rapid recovery and transformation.

Our aim is to ensure that the Welsh population has access to timely diagnostic services suitable and sufficient to inform the clinical management of their condition.

Evidence

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for improvements, transformation and redesign of diagnostic pathways were well described in Welsh Government strategies, policies and by others^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8}.

A Healthier Wales (HW)⁷ pointed to routine diagnostics amongst services which can be delivered as an integrated one stop shop, as close to home as possible safely, and to a high quality. Healthcare Science in NHS Wales – Looking Forward⁴ referred to the role of healthcare professionals in realising the potential from new technologies and diagnostics. There are well documented arguments and evidence why this is the case; such as increasing diagnostic demand and aging population to reduce inequalities, and to provide for sustainable safe services^{4,8}.

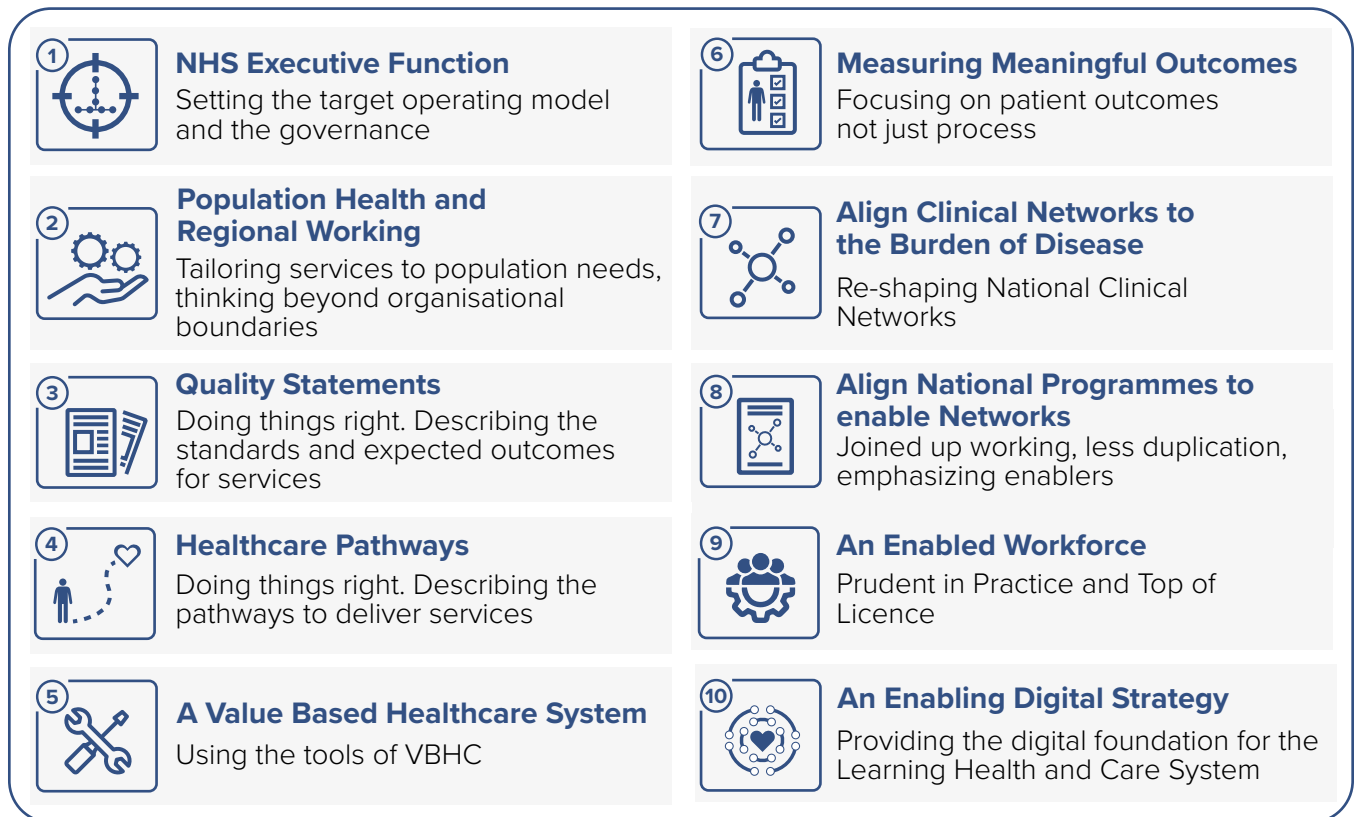
The Richard's Report for Diagnostics in NHS England provides us with a detailed route map

that we can also use in Wales to support our transformation.

Evidence across a range of diseases and pathways shows that there has been a deterioration in performance and health outcomes which includes missed diagnostic opportunities for long-term conditions, longer waiting times for elective care and unfortunately a recent increase in non-COVID-19 excess deaths.

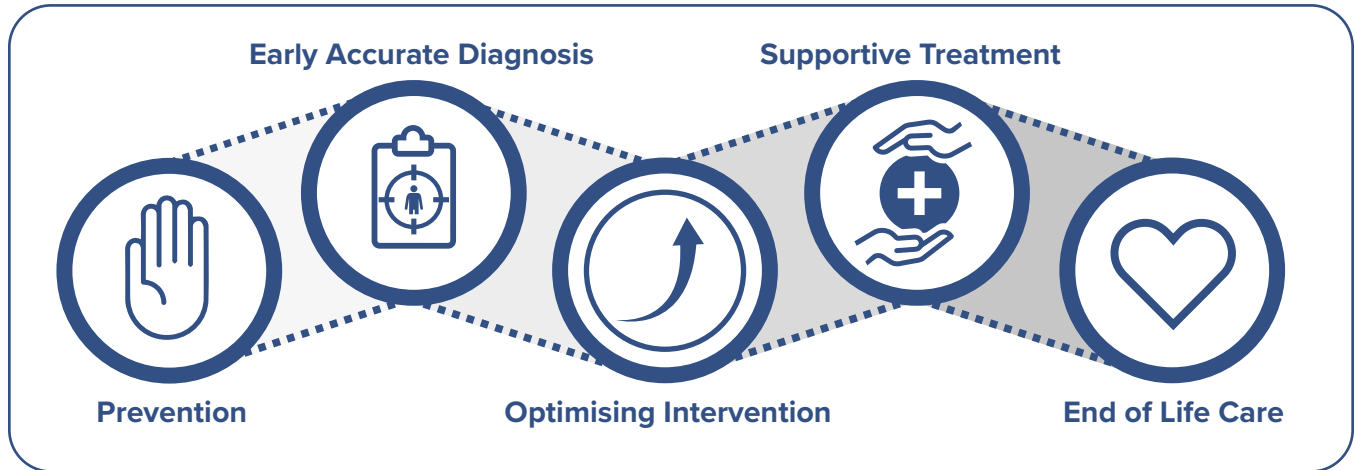
The National Clinical Framework (NCF) emerged from A HW and has been adopted as a key element of the NHS Executive's working model. The NCF is a point of reference and coalescence of nearly all actions within HW. The NCF describes a 'learning health and care system' as the model which will deliver the objectives of HW, using the philosophical principles of Prudent Healthcare and the practical toolkits of Value Based Healthcare (figure 1). It is data-driven, evidence-guided, co-produced and centred on patients and the population.

Figure 1. Summary of actions within the National Clinical Framework



The Diagnostic Transformation Strategy will be a key National Enabling Programme and interface with the Clinical Networks as they develop and overlap between the horizontal enabling programmes (e.g. primary care, planned care).

Figure 2. Value-based healthcare pathways



The intention of a National Diagnostics Plan is to bring together existing programmes of work in Wales, into one portfolio, to enable a coordinated approach that will help us deliver against new and existing challenges at pace and scale. We already have many of the building blocks in place with prior commitments and investments in key areas that will support the next phase of our diagnostic journey in Wales. These include:

- Investment in the National Imaging Academy.
- Procurement and implementation of a national Laboratory Information Network Cymru (LINC) system.
- Adoption and roll out of Digital Cellular Pathology.
- Procurement of an end-to-end diagnostic radiology system.
- Commitments to develop a national Point of Care Testing Plan.
- Investment and reframing of PET-CT in Wales.
- Investment and support for national diagnostic programmes in endoscopy, pathology, genomics, and imaging.
- Investment and support for the national healthcare science programme which includes the 50+ healthcare science disciplines across Wales, inclusive of the Physiological sciences (e.g. Cardiac Physiology, Respiratory Physiology, Neurophysiology).

Diagnostic vision

Diagnostics in Wales: improving the lives of everyone through collaboration, innovation and better public services.

The outcomes in this strategy and the actions which will be specified in the accompanying delivery plan are driven by this clear vision of what we want to achieve in Wales.

Six objectives to support the vision:

To recover diagnostic services by 2025 and set the groundwork for longer term sustainability, we will:

- Catch-up unmet diagnostics demand for urgent conditions in alignment with the Planned Care Recovery Plan⁹.
- Transform services and move beyond traditional boundaries to put patients at the centre, reduce inequality, improve outcomes and reduce secondary care demand.
- Create and sustain safe services with prudent value-based pathways and workforce models.
- Be informed by evidence and be data driven.
- Create an environment where research and innovation improves outcomes, experiences and success is scaled.
- Connect seamlessly with the National Clinical Plan¹⁰ and relevant enabling programmes (e.g. National Clinical Research Framework, National Data Resource) and government commitments¹¹.

Delivery and Action

We have identified six objectives in this strategy and will continue to engage across NHS Wales, statutory advisory bodies, national programmes and stakeholder groups to make sure our priorities are dynamic, responding to changes during the strategy's lifetime.

To make this a reality we will take a delivery focused approach. To assist in the successful enactment of this strategy a National Diagnostics Transformation Programme will be established within the NHS Wales Executive.

The National Diagnostics Transformation Programme will:

- Be Chaired by a Senior Responsible Officer and a National Clinical Lead for Diagnostics. These substantive positions will lead in the production, and delivery of, of a detailed Diagnostics Delivery Plan.
- Oversee ethical and equitable delivery of the above ambitions working as a conduit and oversight mechanism between national programmes, NHS Wales Executive and NHS Wales.
- Work with pre-existing programmes and accountability under the new structure, and support national networks for endoscopy, imaging, genomics, cardio-respiratory, healthcare science, pathology (including point of care testing) and digital to provide a sharp professional focus on delivery and excellence.

- Engage early and widely with clinical networks, and develop a detailed plan for delivery.
- Keep this strategy under constant review to ensure it continues to align with the overarching National Clinical Framework and horizontal programmes (e.g. primary care).
- Work with expert clinical insight and service engagement and emerging evidence to iterate this strategy as time progresses.

How will we know if we've succeeded?

In order to effectively monitor progress against our ambitions against the outcomes and experiences we wish to improve, the National Diagnostics Board will use the following metrics as the tools to evaluate progress:

- The Delivery Framework commitment on the number of pathways waiting eight weeks for a specific diagnostic test¹².
- The National Endoscopy Action Plan⁵ commitment to accredit endoscopy units.
- The Modernising and Transforming Planned Care commitment to improve access to diagnostics and introduce diagnostic hubs⁹.

In addition, the Diagnostic Transformation Strategy will be required to:

- Increase the speed of diagnostic service provision to ensure referral to report times for diagnostic tests is decreased to eight weeks by Spring 2024⁹.
- Provide bi-monthly reporting of recovery to the National Diagnostic Board.

More broadly, the Plan will support diagnostic services to recover waiting list volumes from the impact of the pandemic and develop sustainable services that have the workforce capacity and productivity to meet future need.

References

- 1 **Pathology Statement of Intent, 2019** gov.wales/sites/default/files/inline-documents/2019-04/pathology-statement-of-intent.pdf
- 2 **Imaging Statement of Intent, 2019** gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/imaging-statement-of-intent.pdf
- 3 **Genomics for Precision Medicine Strategy, 2017** gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/genomics-for-precision-medicine-strategy.pdf
- 4 **Healthcare Science in NHS Wales – ‘Looking Forward,’ 2018** gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/healthcare-science-in-nhs-wales.pdf
- 5 **National Endoscopy Action Plan, 2019** gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-10/national-endoscopy-programme-action-plan-2019-2023.pdf www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-future-of-uk-clinical-research-delivery-2022-to-2025-implementation-plan/the-future-of-clinical-research-delivery-2022-to-2025-implementation-plan
- 6 **The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, 2015** www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/
- 7 **A Healthier Wales, 2018/2021** gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-09/a-healthier-wales-our-plan-for-health-and-social-care.pdf
- 8 **NHS England Diagnostics Recovery and Renewal, 2020** www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/diagnostics-recovery-and-renewal-independent-review-of-diagnostic-services-for-nhs-england-2.pdf
- 9 **Our Plan for Transforming and Modernising Planned Care and Reducing Waiting Lists in Wales, 2022** gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-04/our-programme-for-transforming--and-modernising-planned-care-and-reducing-waiting-lists-in-wales.pdf
- 10 **National Clinical Framework, 2021** gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-05/national-clinical-framework-a-learning-health-and-care-system_0.pdf
- 11 **Programme for Government – Update, 2022** gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-01/programme-for-government-update-december-2021.pdf
- 12 **The Delivery Framework, 2023** www.gov.wales/nhs-wales-performance-framework-2022-2023 (gov.wales)