



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

## CABINET STATEMENT

# Written Statement: Improving cancer care in Wales

**Jeremy Miles MS, Cabinet Secretary Health and Social Care**

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Audit Wales last week published its 'Cancer Services in Wales' report, which followed a review by the Welsh Government of the national leadership of cancer service improvement. This statement sets out the changes we are making to leadership and governance to improve cancer care in Wales.

I welcome Audit Wales' finding there is a clear commitment to improving cancer services in Wales and the Welsh Government and I want to pay tribute to all those NHS staff who are delivering high-quality care for the people of Wales. As the report acknowledges, there has been a significant increase in spending on cancer care over the past decade and an improvement in outcomes. As our population ages, and the capability of what the NHS can do continues to evolve, the sustainability of services will depend on how we can create the capacity to investigate and treat people in a timely manner – this a challenge faced by the NHS throughout the UK.

I agree with the breadth and complexity of the work to improve cancer care and outcomes, I accept the Auditor General's view that greater clarity is required about how the Welsh Government leads these improvements. I am therefore setting up a National Cancer Leadership Board, chaired by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, to

better coordinate this activity and to deliver greater pace through the various programmes that are involved in making service improvements.

These actions build on work already undertaken to strengthen cancer services in recent weeks.

We set out our expectations for cancer services in the 2021 **Quality Statement for Cancer** (<https://www.gov.wales/quality-statement-cancer.html>). This has 22 planning expectations and a series of detailed, nationally agreed pathways and service specifications for the NHS to implement through its local planning processes.

The annual NHS Planning Framework requires NHS organisations to implement the Quality Statement. This has been reinforced every year through a **national cancer summit** (<https://www.gov.wales/cancer-summit-18-september-2024>). The priority for the NHS is to improve performance against the national target of at least 75% of people starting first definitive treatment for cancer within 62-days; reducing the backlog of people waiting more than 62-days and implementing the nationally agreed pathways of care. To provide clarity about how the NHS responds to the Welsh Government's expectations, an **NHS Cancer Improvement Plan** (<https://executive.nhs.wales/functions/networks-and-planning/cancer/>) was published in January 2023.

Since the pandemic, there has been an unprecedented focus on improving access to cancer care. Every month, senior Welsh Government officials – supported by experts in the NHS Executive – meet every health board to focus on cancer performance and improvement. This is in addition to the standard monthly and six-monthly accountability meetings. NHS managers and senior cancer clinicians also come together in national meetings to share intelligence, good practice and learning.

Performance against the 62-day target has stabilised and there are some signs of progress in some parts of Wales, such as Cardiff and Vale University Health Board which exceeded 70% in October. But there is still too much variation in performance between health boards and between cancer types. My discussions with Health Board Chairs routinely focus on cancer performance.

We have allocated £2m to the NHS Executive to deliver a package of support for health boards. This involves expert clinicians and programme managers working

with health boards to change how cancer pathways and service models work. The initial phase focuses on breast, skin, gynaecological, lower gastrointestinal, and urological cancer to improve productivity and efficiency in how health boards deliver care, such as sending people straight to test without an outpatient appointment.

We are also improving the pace of innovation and have set up the 'Making It Happen' programme to bring government, NHS and industry together, led by the Life Sciences Hub. We have also published Wales' first national approach to **cancer research** (<https://walescancerresearchcentre.org/crest/>), supported by investment in the Wales Cancer Research Centre.

A wider range of service improvements are underway, which will also help to improve cancer outcomes, services, or care – from reducing smoking and tackling obesity to HPV vaccination and our **diagnostic** (</diagnostics-recovery-and-transformation-strategy-wales-2023-2025>) and **genomic strategies** (</genomics-precision-medicine-strategy-0>).

The Welsh Government is responsible for setting the priorities and expectations for the NHS in Wales. The NHS is responsible for delivering those cancer priorities, with national support from the NHS Executive. Welsh Ministers hold the NHS to account for delivery of services and are, in turn accountable to the Senedd and the public.

I will update the 2021 Quality Statement for Cancer to provide greater clarity about the respective roles, the relationship between various national programmes, and the metrics used to oversee delivery.

I will also be taking a number of key decisions in the coming months, I have asked for advice from Public Health Wales on the implementation of a national lung cancer screening programme to be brought forward by six months to the spring, and I will expedite agreement of a data development roadmap for cancer.

Despite the action we have taken in recent years, but our own analysis and that of Audit Wales tells us there is more to do and I will continue to focus NHS organisations on improving access to high-quality cancer care so we can achieve the best possible outcomes for our population.