
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Clare Griffiths
Head of Profession for Statistics
Public Health England
(by email)

17 December 2020

Dear Clare

Statistics on Cancer Survival in England

As you are aware, we recently completed our compliance check of Public Health England's (PHE) statistics on [Cancer Survival in England](#) against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). The COVID-19 pandemic led to the cessation of much non-urgent NHS treatment and care, which could have consequences for the survival of people with cancer. This means that these statistics will likely form a key role in examining the wider impact of the pandemic on the population. Following constructive conversations with John Broggio, the lead statistician for these statistics, I am pleased to confirm that these statistics should continue to be designated as National Statistics.

We found positives in the way that PHE produces and presents these statistics, which enhance their value and quality. For example,

- PHE has streamlined separate geographical, adult and child survival statistics into one output which makes the information more coherent and presents some of the data in [interactive graphs](#).
- PHE is developing data on the survival of rarer cancers and planning to provide more granularity about cancers covering multiple areas of the body.
- PHE plans to review the feasibility of linking data on income and deprivation to the cancer survival data, analyse and publish its findings.
- The datasets present confidence intervals at the 95% level, to allow users to take into account uncertainty of the estimates provided in their use.

Our review also identified several ways in which we consider that the trustworthiness and value of these statistics could be further enhanced:

- The methodology, references and related publications are all linked in the data tables and report, but these were first published by the previous producer (the Office for National Statistics) in 2019. To improve transparency and ensure that the documentation reflects the latest position, PHE should review and publish the methods and quality assurance documentation under its own name.
- The statistical report discusses the main limitations and cautions against making comparisons across years, but the content generally is aimed at the expert data

user, with little commentary and insight provided for those with less knowledge of the complexities of cancer survival. It is good that PHE plans to publish a summary in simpler language alongside the report and should work with less-expert users to develop the narrative to provide and enhance the insights offered to them.

- PHE usually obtains a wide range of user views on its cancer statistics during its annual Cancer Data Conference. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, this was cancelled for 2020. To supplement the stakeholder information currently available, PHE should consider engaging in some structured virtual stakeholder engagement exercises in lieu of the conference and use the feedback to develop the outputs further.

Thank you to you and your team for your positive engagement during this review. Our Health and Social Care team will continue to engage with PHE on progress in the coming months.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like to discuss any aspects of this letter further. I am copying this letter to John Broggio, Lead Statistician.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Pont', with a horizontal line underneath.

Mark Pont
Assessment Programme Lead