
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Scott Heald
Director (Data & Digital Innovation) / Head of Profession for Statistics
Public Health Scotland
(by email)

15 October 2024

Dear Scott,

Re: Waiting times statistics in Scotland - Issues relating to the NHS informs website and the number of people waiting for appointments

Thank you for your letter setting out the forthcoming work that you are planning to undertake to address some of the recent issues regarding waiting times data interpretation in Scotland. I have addressed each of these separately as they are distinct issues that have been raised as concerns with us.

1. Presentation of waiting times data on the NHS Inform website

We welcome your plans for Public Health Scotland to take sole responsibility for the presentation of these statistics including the launch of a new website with improved metrics. These metrics will help to inform the public of more realistic expectations of waiting times for treatment than is currently available via NHS Inform. It is good to hear that you will be undergoing extensive testing with a wide range of stakeholders including the public to ensure accessibility for all, and that the website will have the functionality to incorporate future enhancements resulting from user feedback.

2. Number of people waiting for appointments

Claims about the proportion of the population in Scotland waiting for appointments or treatment have often been made publicly, particularly during the recent election period. As you have stated, these claims are often incorrectly based on the combination of three types of waiting lists: outpatients, inpatients and key diagnostic tests. As such, the claims do not always accurately represent the number of unique people waiting.

We support your approach to clarify this by including an estimate of the number of people waiting for appointments/admissions within your [NHS waiting times – stage of treatment quarterly release](#). Your plans to give users clearer guidance about what the statistics do and do not measure will help to increase awareness about the difficulty to estimate the total number of people waiting and reduce the instances that these data are misrepresented.

My team are happy to assist with any queries or with user testing of the new website.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', written in a cursive style.

Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation