

Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation
Office for Statistics Regulation

Date 26th August 2025
Your ref
Our ref SH/EH/260825
Enquiries to Scott Heald
Email scott.heald@phs.scot

Dear Ed,

NHS DIAGNOSTICS ACTIVITY AND STAGE OF TREATMENT WAITING TIMES STATISTICS - NEW DEVELOPMENTS

I am writing to update you about the new diagnostic activity statistics that PHS has been developing and to advise you of two important upcoming changes to the accredited official statistics publication NHS Waiting Times - Stage of Treatment.

As outlined in my [letter](#) of 18 March 2025, PHS has developed new statistics about diagnostic activity for eight key tests to help support monitoring of the commitments set out in the NHS Operational Improvement Plan. These were [published](#) today for the first time. We are currently developing new webpages to help users find all the PHS data relating to commitments in the Operational Improvement Plan. These will be published in October, to coincide with the developments outlined below that are underway to provide users with more insights about NHS performance.

I have decided to make two important changes to the accredited official statistics publication NHS Waiting Times - Stage of Treatment (SoT) which reports the length of time patients wait to be seen as a new outpatient or admitted for treatment as an inpatient or day case. The quarterly SoT statistics [published](#) on 26th August 2025 will be the last to report on waiting times using the criteria for their calculation contained in the Scottish Government waiting times guidance that was in place from 2012 until December 2023. From October, these statistics will report adherence using the revised criteria for calculating waiting times in the updated guidance issued by Scottish Government in December 2023. They will also be published monthly instead of quarterly. These changes will provide our users with more relevant and timely data on a topic with high public interest.

The updated guidance was introduced by Scottish Government to ensure consistency in how waiting lists are managed locally by Boards and includes updates to rules on clock pauses and resets. Applying consistent definitions means that users can have greater confidence that these waiting times statistics are comparable across Boards. To help users understand the impact of the forthcoming changes, today's release includes waiting times estimates using both the old and the updated guidance. The new rules on clock pauses and resets meant that the waiting times estimates using the new guidance are marginally shorter than was the case with the previous guidance. Our commentary makes clear that this difference is due to the adjustments Boards should now make in line with the 2023 guidance, and not because patients are being seen more quickly. The October release will include more detailed information about these changes so users will be able to judge the impact of the latest guidance on the calculation of waiting times. The changes will also be applied to the calculation of waiting times for IVF treatment (from the November 2025 statistics publication) and treatment by allied health professionals for musculoskeletal condition (to be published in June 2026).

PHS's role is to provide data to support the monitoring of national and local performance according to the most up to date applicable guidance for service areas. PHS has therefore updated its central data systems so that we can apply the definitions in the latest guidance when we receive data from Boards and then produce statistics. We understand that local Boards' own patient management systems are unlikely to be updated in all areas for at least another two years, so they will continue to report their own data using the previous guidance. However, PHS can use its data to provide up to date, consistent and timely waiting times statistics at a national and local level. We would not be fulfilling our core purpose if we did not release this information until the local reporting systems were also updated. In my judgement, user needs are best served by PHS publishing statistics aligned with the latest guidance, accompanied by clear information about how the changes have impacted the waiting times estimates and why they differ from locally reported figures.

The current high level of public interest in NHS waiting times has also prompted my decision to publish the SoT statistics monthly, rather than quarterly, from October. This will reduce the time lag between the release of data and the end of the reporting period to around 3-4 weeks. The data published on the waiting times [website](#) PHS

has developed for patients will also be updated monthly from October, enabling the public to have a more up to date picture of what is happening in their area.

I am copying this letter to Alastair McAlpine, Scottish Government Chief Statistician.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Scott Heald', with a stylized, cursive script.

Scott Heald

Director, Data and Digital Innovation

Head of Profession for Statistics