



PHILIPS

Improving regional diagnostics in the NHS

Philips stands to improve the health of nation. We are a critical partner to the NHS and are committed to helping the health system become more resilient. As Covid-19 moves from a pandemic to endemic state, we need to apply learnings from this turbulent time to protect the future of our healthcare system and the talented healthcare professionals at the centre of it.

One of the most significant challenges facing our health system is how to rapidly and accurately reduce the staggering patient backlog. As of publication, hospital waiting lists have hit more than 6.1 million, with approximately one in 20 of those waiting for more than a year for routine treatment.

And that's not all. A record number of people are coming forward for cancer tests, with almost a quarter of a million referrals in November 2021 alone.

Tackling the backlog will require a combination of funding, innovation and cutting-edge technology to reduce it. New care pathways are critical. However, if steps are not taken now, the backlog risks being prolonged, further widening healthcare inequalities.

With this in mind, Philips is proposing recommendations that could help tackle the backlog and improve regional diagnostic services, for example by adopting a data driven approach to help guide the roll-out of Community Diagnostic Centres.

We believe these steps will help improve the health of the nation and ultimately build a more resilient healthcare system.

National recommendations

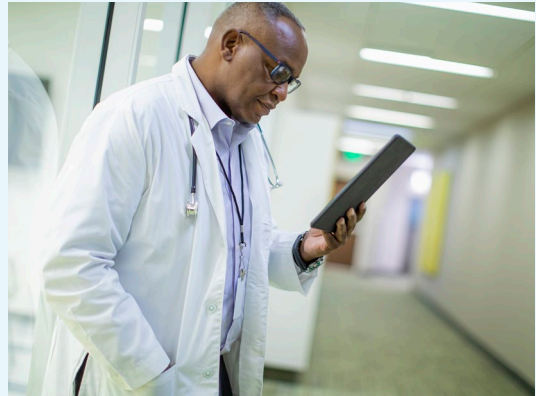
Government – through policy and funding:

- Invest at scale and over a prolonged period to return the NHS to pre-pandemic levels of performance across all pathways, maximising existing commitments in the government backlog recovery plan.
- Expansion of community diagnostic services should be directly connected to a proposed expansion of surgical hubs (or “Community Treatment Centres”) for minor invasive procedures to address ever growing waiting lists for planned procedures.
- Ensure that investment in infrastructure and equipment is backed up by efforts to train, recruit and retain the workforce required to provide services. In the near term, efforts to retain existing staff are vital to prevent loss of the experienced professionals required to guide local services through the implementation of proposed changes.



NHS England – through guidance:

- Adopt a data-driven approach to identifying bottlenecks across the entire clinical diagnostics pathway at a local level. Capitalise on regional and local diagnostic and performance data to target resources to where they are needed most urgently.
- Expand diagnostic capacity to minimise the impact of diagnostic delays on reaching national NHS targets for cancer and non-emergency treatment.
- Expand access to diagnostics and system resilience through an expansion of community diagnostics pathways, bringing services closer to patients’ homes, particularly in less well served areas. Deliver improvements in reporting efficiency for diagnostics by expanding use of regional reporting hubs.



ICS Level – through regional coordination:

- Involve local managers and decision makers to ensure local challenges are tackled, so that Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs) are opened where they are needed most. Encourage cross sector collaboration within ICS footprints, for example by engaging with newly created Levelling Up Directors on health provision.
- Monitor performance at an organisational level to ensure that no local areas are left behind and care providers learn from one another as they recover from the impact of the pandemic.
- As further CDCs are announced, priority should be placed on identifying locations outside of existing NHS sites to bring diagnostic services closer to communities of patients that are currently underserved.
- The views of patients and the general public should be solicited and incorporated when identifying future CDC sites. This should occur alongside greater transparency and ease of access to local clinical performance data so residents can compare waiting times in their locality to other areas.



Regional recommendations

East of England recommendations

- Improve access to diagnostics for patients in this region through community diagnostic centres where they are likely to have the greatest impact:
 - A CDC in the Fenland area of North Norfolk would assist in reducing current long diagnostic wait times for patients in this area and overcome some of the long travel distances to current diagnostic sites. These areas also have older, more deprived populations, and a CDC would improve local diagnostics access for these residents and facilitate earlier diagnosis and improved monitoring of chronic diseases.
 - A CDC in or around Norwich may help to assist with processing an increasing number of patients through referral to treatment and cancer pathways. A CDC here would also benefit a local population with relatively high levels of deprivation.
- Allocate additional resources to expand clinical capacity and improve pathways at Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust. These trusts are seeing higher numbers of urgent cancer referrals than before the pandemic and the proportion of these seen within 2 weeks is significantly below national averages and NHS standards.
- Encourage regional collaboration between providers to address regional disparities in diagnostic, cancer and referral to treatment pathways.



South West of England recommendations

- Expedite the establishment of CDCs in this region to address the delays in diagnostics relative to national levels, particularly regarding CT, echocardiography and GI endoscopy.
 - Placing CDCs in Bristol and Plymouth may assist in addressing concerns regarding access to timely diagnostics for populations associated with higher levels of deprivation.
- Provide additional resources and clinical pathway support to reduce waiting lists for non-emergency treatment at Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust, including the creation of Community Treatment Centres.
- Monitor diagnostics activity in the functioning CDC in Taunton (Rutherford Diagnostic Centre) and how these impact waiting times for diagnostics through the Somerset NHS Foundation Trust.



East London recommendations

- Increase diagnostics and clinical pathway support for Barts Health NHS Trust, which has seen a significant increase in patients waiting for diagnostics and waiting times for tests.
 - A CDC located near to the Royal London Hospital, where socioeconomic deprivation is relatively high, will improve access to diagnostics for patients in this area and reduce the backlog of diagnostic tests at Barts Health NHS Trust.
- Improving access to CT, MRI and non-obstetric ultrasound will assist in reducing long waiting times for patients having these tests in this area of London.
 - Additional CDCs providing these tests may also allow many patients to be processed through or removed from referral to treatment pathways which are under pressure in this region.
- Ensure continual evaluation of waiting times for patients across the ICS to ensure disparities based on socioeconomic deprivation or ethnicity do not emerge or widen.



Frimley recommendations

- Improve access to community diagnostics, in particular non-obstetric ultrasound and echocardiogram, to reduce the proportion of patients waiting more than six weeks for these tests.
- Establish a CDC near Slough to improve access to community diagnostics for some of the more deprived populations in the area and reduce the burden of travel for patients that may otherwise have their tests performed in Frimley at Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust.



i <https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/03/Jan22-RTT-SPN-publication-v2.pdf>

ii <https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/03/Jan22-RTT-SPN-publication-v2.pdf>

iii <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2022/01/nhs-cancer-checks-at-record-high-with-quarter-of-a-million-in-one-month/>

iv <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/40-community-diagnostic-centres-launching-across-england>

v <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2022/02/C1466-delivery-plan-for-tackling-the-covid-19-backlog-of-elective-care.pdf>

