

NHS Referral to Treatment Waiting Times

February 2016

Introduction

This briefing provides information on the performance of Local Health Boards (LHBs) against the Welsh Government targets for NHS treatment waiting times. Most NHS waiting times in Wales are measured against the time from referral to treatment (RTT), although there are a number of exceptions.¹ **The RTT is the period of time from referral, by a GP or other medical practitioner, to hospital for treatment.**²

The current Welsh Government targets for NHS RTT waiting times are to ensure that:

- **At least 95 per cent of patients waiting to start treatment must have waited less than 26 weeks from referral to treatment**
- **100 per cent of patients not treated within 26 weeks must be treated in 36 weeks.**

The Welsh Government measures progress against these targets each month, and the figures used **are those for patients waiting to start treatment at the end of the month.** Separate figures for patients treated during each month are published, but as these are not covered by the targets they have not been included in this release. The LHB figures

¹ The targets apply to the majority of referrals to NHS hospitals for treatment; however there are a number of exceptions. In addition, some conditions such as cancer have their own specific target, and are therefore not included in the general targets. Further information on referral to treatment targets is available at: Welsh Government, [Waiting Times for NHS Services: Frequently Asked Questions](#), 9 June 2011 [accessed 11 February 2016]

² Welsh Government, [Referral to treatment times](#), 11 February 2016 [accessed 11 February 2016]

included in this release are for patients treated by each LHB rather than the LHB they live in. The Welsh Government has issued revised figures for October 2015

NHS Referral to Treatment Waiting Times in December 2015

Table 1 and figures 1 and 2 show performance against the 26 and 36 week referral to treatment waiting time targets for each LHB, and for the whole of Wales, using the latest figures from December 2015.³ It can be seen from table 1 and figures 1 and 2 that:

- In December 2015, neither the 26 week nor 36 week targets were met on an All Wales basis.
- **Powys Teaching Health Board** achieved both the 26 week and the 36 week referral to treatment waiting time target in December 2015.
- **Hywel Dda Health Board** was the worst performing LHB for both the 26 week target and the 36 week target.

³ [Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#), (accessed 11 February 2016)



Table 1: Performance against waiting time targets at end of December 2015 (a), (c)

Local Health Board	Under 26 weeks		Under 36 weeks (b)		Over 36 weeks	Total patients waiting for treatment
	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	
Abertawe Bro Morgannwg	64,914	84.9	71,426	93.5	4,990	76,416
Aneurin Bevan	71,299	84.5	80,252	95.1	4,158	84,410
Betsi Cadwaladr	75,127	83.1	84,227	93.1	6,202	90,429
Cardiff and Vale	69,681	85.0	79,884	97.4	2,107	81,991
Cwm Taf	34,345	80.9	39,318	92.7	3,117	42,435
Hywel Dda	45,991	79.2	52,280	90.1	5,768	58,048
Powys	5,339	99.6	5,361	100.0	.	5,361
Wales	366,696	83.5	412,748	94.0	26,342	439,090

Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales, **Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks**

Notes:

- (a) This includes patients who are waiting for cardiac treatment. Cardiac RTT is defined differently from the rest of RTT; please refer to the **Referral to Treatment Time quality report** for further details.
- (b) The figures for patients waiting under 36 weeks for treatment include those waiting under 26 weeks and between 26 and 36 weeks for treatment.
- (c) The values in the purple shaded boxes met the referral to treatment waiting time target in December 2015.

Figure 1: Percentage of patients waiting less than 26 weeks for treatment at end of December 2015

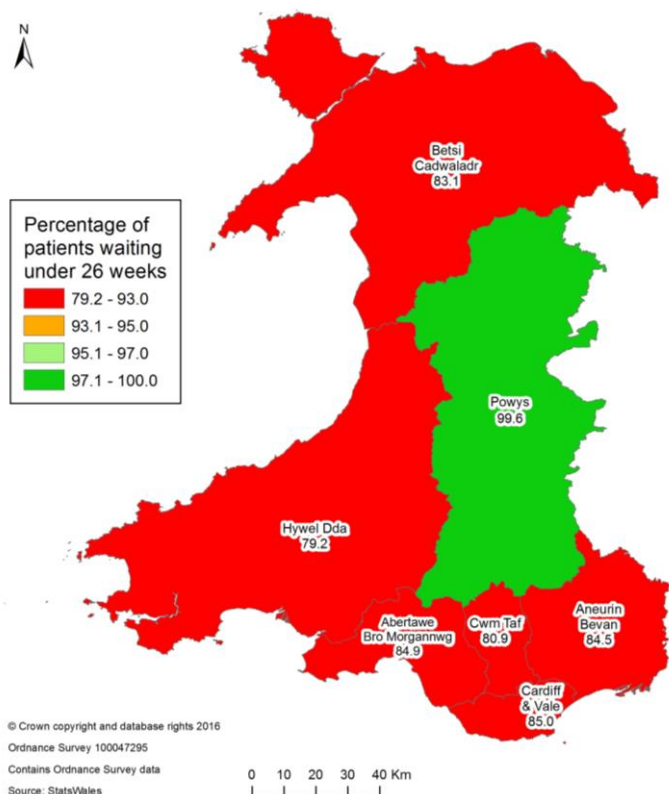
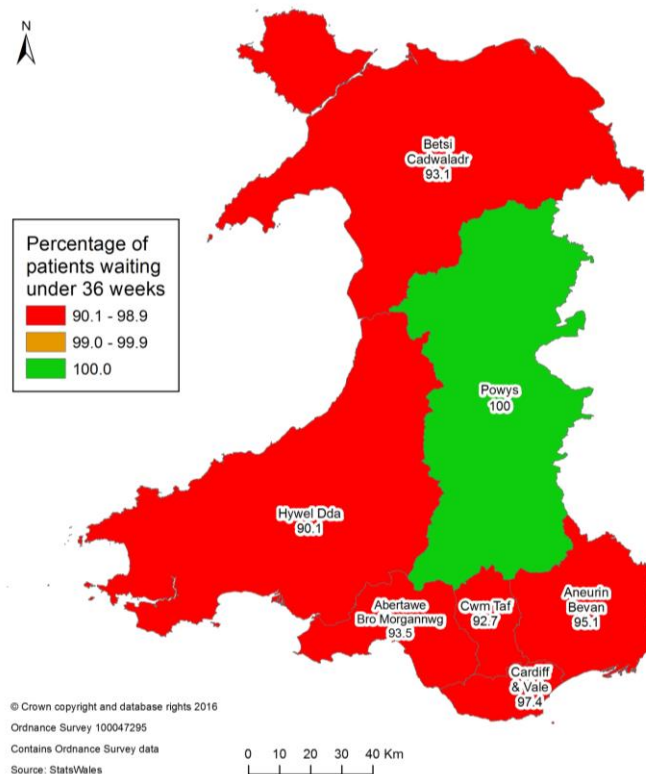


Figure 2: Percentage of patients waiting less than 36 weeks for treatment at end of December 2015



Performance against RTT waiting time targets since December 2014

Table 2 and figure 3 focus on the performance against the referral to treatment waiting time targets, on an All Wales basis since December 2014.⁴

It can be seen from table 2 and figure 3 that:

- **Neither target has been met in any month** at an All Wales level between December 2014 and December 2015.
- The percentage of patients waiting less than 26 weeks for treatment in December 2015 was 1.2 percentage points lower than in November, the lowest since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.
- The percentage of patients waiting less than 36 weeks for treatment in December 2015 was 0.1 percentage points lower than in November, the third lowest since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.
- The number of patients waiting over 36 weeks for treatment was 5,000 more than in December 2014. It was the third highest since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.
- The number of patients waiting for treatment at the end of December 2015 was over 18,000 more than in December 2014.⁵ It was the sixth highest since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.

Table 2: Performance against waiting time targets, on All Wales basis, December 2014 to December 2015 (a), (b)

Date	Under 26 weeks		Under 36 weeks (b)		Over 36 weeks	Total patients waiting for treatment
	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	
December 2014	357,883	85.1	399,303	95.0	21,230	420,533
January 2015	349,703	84.3	391,142	94.3	23,532	414,674
February 2015	354,687	85.3	392,499	94.4	23,238	415,737
March 2015	360,496	86.2	399,444	95.5	18,938	418,382
April 2015	364,092	84.9	406,166	94.7	22,753	428,919
May 2015	364,338	83.8	409,501	94.1	25,519	435,020
June 2015	372,810	84.8	414,256	94.2	25,373	439,629
July 2015	377,531	85.1	416,531	93.8	27,313	443,844
August 2015	374,689	84.3	416,013	93.6	28,654	444,667
September 2015	370,824	83.8	417,677	94.3	25,013	442,690
October 2015	373,041	84.1	417,812	94.1	26,007	443,819
November 2015	371,963	84.7	413,085	94.1	25,872	438,957
December 2015	366,696	83.5	412,748	94.0	26,342	439,090

Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales, [Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#)

Notes:

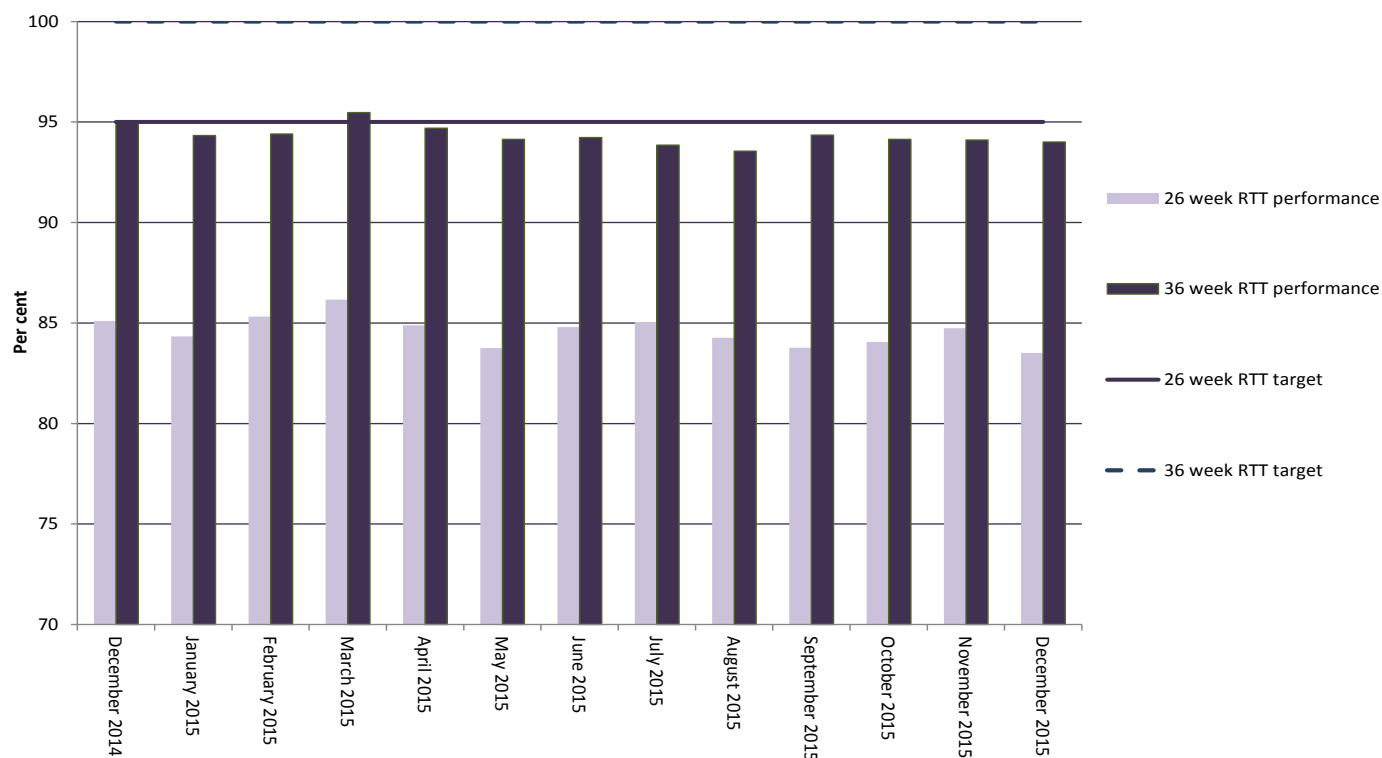
- This includes patients who are waiting for cardiac treatment. Cardiac RTT is defined differently from the rest of RTT; please refer to the [Referral to treatment time quality report](#) for further details.
- The figures for patients waiting under 36 weeks for treatment include those waiting under 26 weeks and between 26 and 36 weeks for treatment.

⁴ Welsh Government, Stats Wales, [Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#) [accessed 11 February 2016]

⁵ Ibid



Figure 3: Percentage of patients waiting less than 26 and 36 weeks at end of month from December 2014 to December 2015



Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales, [Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#)

Notes – See notes from Table 2

Trauma and orthopaedic speciality

While **waiting time targets are allied to performance across all specialties**, it is useful to see the contribution of individual specialties towards performance.

In a written statement in March 2011, the then Minister for Health and Social Services highlighted the difficulty in achieving waiting time targets due to pressures within orthopaedic services resulting from increased GP referrals.⁶

Following additional funding allocations for orthopaedic treatment in 2011-12 and 2012-13, the

⁶ Welsh Government, Edwina Hart (Minister for Health and Social Services), [Waiting Times and Orthopaedic Services update](#), Cabinet Written Statement, 10 March 2011 [accessed 11 February 2016]

Welsh Government stated that £16.6 million will be allocated in recurrent annual funding from 2013-14 with the purpose of sustaining improvements in orthopaedic waiting times.⁷

In his report published in June 2015, [A Review of Orthopaedic Services](#), the Auditor General for Wales concluded that while orthopaedic services have become more efficient in the past decade, NHS Wales is not well placed to meet future demand. This is because there has been a focus on securing immediate reductions in waiting times, however less attention has been paid to developing more sustainable, long-term solutions to meet demand.

⁷ Welsh Government, [Draft Budget 2013-14: A Budget for Growth and Jobs](#), page 38, October 2012 [accessed 11 February 2016]

Table 3 shows the latest figures for the trauma and orthopaedic specialty, at the end of December 2015.

Table 3: Waiting times for trauma and orthopaedic specialty at end of December 2015, (a), (b)

Local Health Board	Under 26 weeks		Under 36 weeks (a)		Total patients waiting for treatment
	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	
Abertawe Bro Morgannwg	7,549	68.2	9,242	83.5	11,073
Aneurin Bevan	11,199	73.0	13,405	87.4	15,342
Betsi Cadwaladr	8,952	63.0	11,422	80.4	14,204
Cardiff and Vale	8,348	77.3	10,275	95.2	10,796
Cwm Taf	3,877	78.1	4,560	91.8	4,966
Hywel Dda	5,231	69.6	6,338	84.3	7,517
Powys	326	98.5	331	100.0	331
Wales	45,482	70.8	55,573	86.5	64,229

Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales [Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#)

Notes:

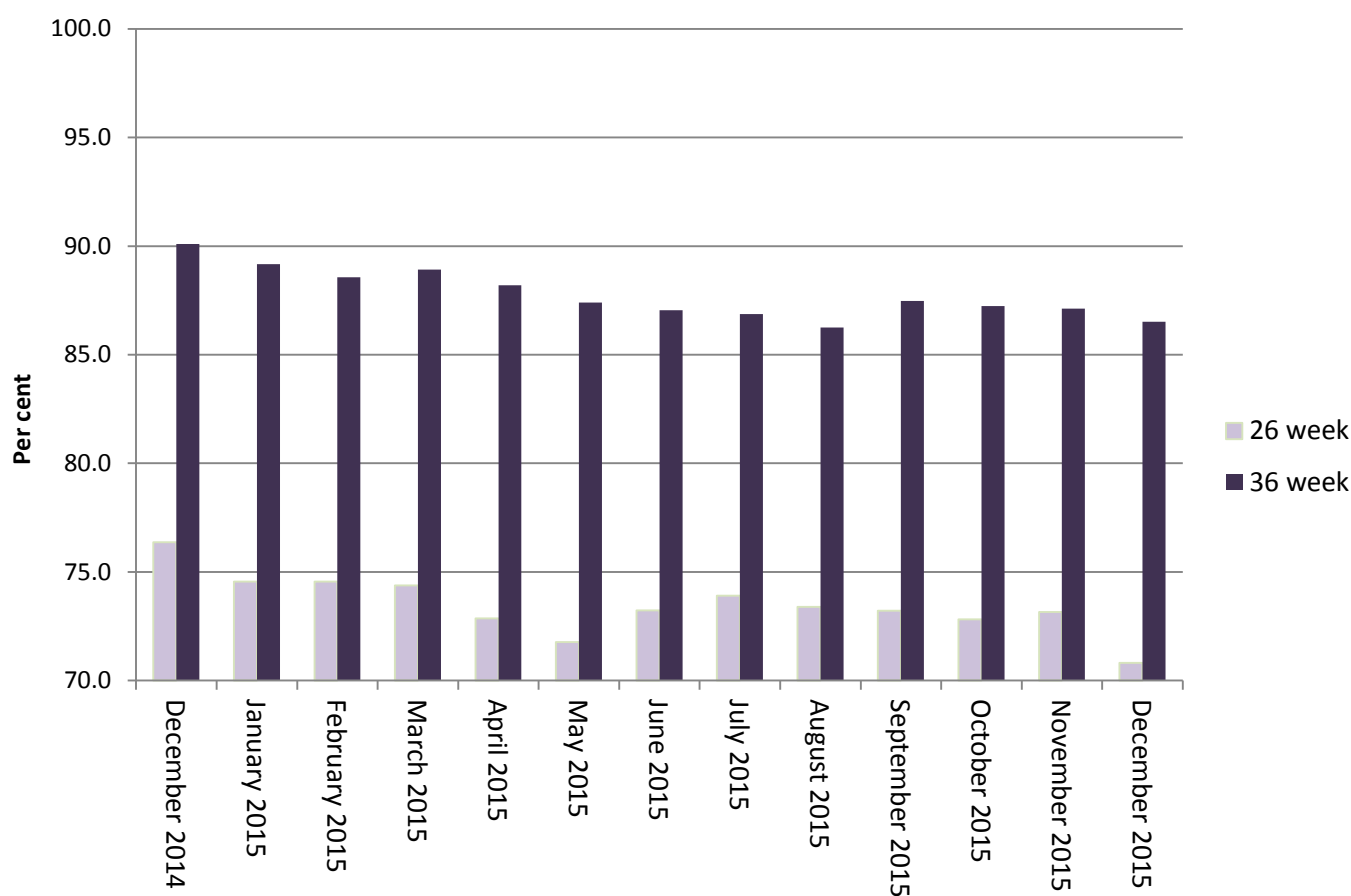
- (a) The figures for patients waiting under 36 weeks for treatment include those waiting under 26 weeks and between 26 and 36 weeks for treatment.
- (b) Values in the purple shaded boxes indicate a level of performance in December 2015 equal to or above that needed to achieve the waiting time targets.

In December 2015, it can be seen that:

- **In Powys Teaching Health Board** almost all patients had been waiting less than 26 weeks. In all other LHBs, less than 79 per cent of patients had been waiting less than 26 weeks for treatment.
- **In Powys Teaching Health Board**, all patients had been waiting under 36 weeks for treatment. In all other LHBs, less than 96 per cent of patients had been waiting less than 36 weeks for treatment.
- The LHB with the lowest percentage of patients waiting under 26 weeks and under 36 weeks was **Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board**.

Figure 4 compares the percentage of patients waiting less than 26 and 36 weeks for treatment in the trauma and orthopaedic specialty in the months from December 2014 to December 2015.

Figure 4: Percentage of patients waiting less than 26 and 36 weeks in the trauma and orthopaedic specialty, from December 2014 to December 2015



Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales, [Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#)

- For each month since December 2014, the percentage of patients waiting under 26 weeks has been **well below the level needed to achieve the waiting time target across all specialties**. The percentage of patients waiting less than 26 weeks in the trauma and orthopaedic specialty in December 2015 decreased by 2.4 percentage points compared to November. This was the lowest of any point over the past year, and since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.⁸
- For each month since December 2014, the percentage of patients waiting under 36 weeks has also been **below the level needed to achieve the waiting time target across all specialties**. The percentage of patients waiting less than 36 weeks in the trauma and orthopaedic specialty in December 2015 was the second lowest of any point over the past year, and since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011. It decreased by 0.6 percentage points compared to November.

⁸ Welsh Government, Stats Wales, [Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#) [accessed 11 February 2016]



Further information

The links below provide further information about the data sources used in this briefing, and further information about NHS Referral to Treatment Waiting Times:

- Stats Wales, **Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks**
- Stats Wales, **Percentage of patients waiting to start treatment within target time by month and grouped weeks**
- Statistics on patients that have been treated during each month are available at:
- Stats Wales, **Treated patients by month and grouped weeks**
- Auditor General for Wales, **NHS Waiting Times for Elective Care in Wales**, January 2015
- Auditor General for Wales, **A Review of Orthopaedic Services**, June 2015

For further information and statistics on NHS Referral to Treatment Waiting Times, please contact **Nigel Barwise (Nigel.Barwise@Assembly.Wales)**, **Research Service**.

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