# New report shows patients value NHS diagnostic services but face barriers to access

**Monday 12 February, 2024**

**EMBARGOED: 00:01 GMT 13 February 2024**

**London, 13th February 2024 –** UK patients want better access to early and accurate diagnosis of health problems, according to new survey data from the Patients Association.

Many patients would consider paying to get tests done privately if they faced a long wait for NHS tests.

- Nine in ten (90%) of UK patients say it should be more straightforward to get the diagnostic tests they need
- Three in five (60%) said they would be willing to pay to get a test done if they faced a long wait, or the test they needed was not available
- More than three in five (61%) believed being able to test at home could help speed up diagnosis
- Patients want to know how to get the tests they need, why they are having them, and when they can expect results.

The survey, undertaken in partnership with Roche Diagnostics UK and Ireland, represents the views of more than 1,000 patients from across the UK, who had received diagnostic support from the NHS in the preceding six months.

Nine out of ten (90%) of the people who completed the survey said it should be easier to obtain access to the diagnostic tests they need. They also wanted:

- Better understanding of why they were being sent for a test
- Increased speed and urgency
- Improved access
- A greater sense of empowerment when it comes to diagnostic tests, results, and subsequent treatment and care.

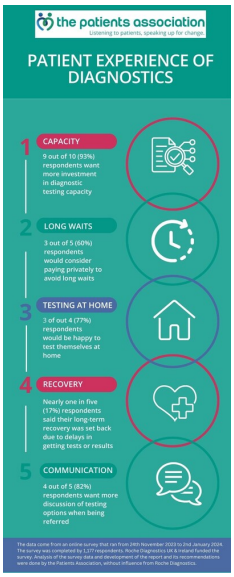
**Access challenges**

The findings demonstrated several challenges experienced by patients in gaining access to diagnostic tests.

- One-third of respondents (33%) said when they tried to get a test, they found there were no appointments available locally. This reflects national data on the large numbers of patients unable to access diagnostic tests and services, even before consideration is given to any waiting lists for any treatment they may need.
- Almost four in five (78%) patients felt testing facilities should be provided closer to patients' homes to make access easier
- Seven in ten (70%) wanted a clearer understanding of how to access tests. Some respondents highlighted that services are sometimes not available as advertised.

Speed and urgency of access to testing was another significant problem identified by survey. Only one in ten (11%) of respondent said they have never had any issues getting either a test or their results, or faced no consequences if they did. For those living with long-term conditions, delays and difficulties in accessing diagnosis have had significant consequences. Nearly one in five (17%) respondents said their long-term recovery was set back significantly. Many more reported consequences for their mental and

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physical health, and their wider work and family life.

Respondents were also unhappy about a lack of access to, and clear explanation of, test results. Almost nine in ten (88%) patients wanted a realistic timeline for their test results to come through and a similar number (87%) called for a better explanation of what those results meant for them and their treatment.

**Patient-created solutions**

The survey discovered patients are finding ways around the challenges they faced. For example, when asked whether they would be willing to pay to get a test done privately if they faced a long wait or if the test they needed was not available on the NHS, three in five (60%) of respondents said they would. This included patients who did not consider themselves to be 'rich'.

The finding that so many patients would consider paying for tests shows the importance they place on getting a timely and accurate diagnosis, even if they had to pay.

**Sustainable solutions**

The survey's results show many patients have a clear view on how diagnostic services in the UK could be improved.

Being able to test at home was seen as one way to make services more accessible. Nearly two thirds (61%) of respondents believed expanding opportunities to test at home could help speed up diagnosis. When asked about specific examples, the numbers were even higher, perhaps building on our collective experience of testing at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. More than three quarters (77%) said they would be happy to test themselves at home.

Investing in diagnostics and new technology was supported by most respondents. For example, more than half (57%) the respondents felt the use of new technology such as artificial intelligence could speed up diagnosis and reduce pressures on the NHS – an important factor since nearly one-third (29%) said they delayed seeking tests to avoid wasting NHS time and resources.

**Looking to the future**

Almost nine in ten (86%) felt testing and diagnosing conditions more quickly would help reduce the NHS backlog. While patients want to feel more empowered in taking charge of their own health, they are also keen that solutions are sought to support NHS efficiency and sustainability in the longer-term.

**Rachel Power, Chief Executive of the Patient Association, says:**

"Patients value diagnostic services – that's very clear from the survey. Frustrations about access to tests came over loud and clear. Those taking the survey clearly value being partners in their care. And to partner with the professionals sending them for tests, patients need and want clear communication on how to get tests, why they need a test, and when they'll get results. Healthcare professionals can improve patient-centred care when ordering diagnostic tests by explaining how, why and when."

**Geoff Twist, Managing Director, Roche Diagnostics, UK & Ireland says:**

"Tests that detect or diagnose disease early, or in some cases prevent it altogether, can play a vital role in the patient journey, and in helping the health system work efficiently. This report shows that patients themselves see and understand the importance of diagnostic tests, and that they will proactively seek them out to find the answers they need about their health. The message is clear. But to realise this we need a renewed policy focus, setting out how we can speed up getting existing diagnostic tests and innovations to the people who need them. Prioritising diagnostic services can help to relieve some of the pressure on our NHS today and protect it for generations to come."

Download Patient Experience of Diagnostics Report

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**Notes for editors**

**Survey methodology**

This report is based on the results of an online survey that ran from 24th November 2023 to 2nd January 2024. It was promoted to the Patients Association membership via the weekly newsletter, social media audiences, and through organisations in our stakeholder network. The sample of 1177 was drawn largely from England, but included people from around the UK. Respondents needed to have received support from the NHS in the last 6 months to be eligible for the survey. The full questionnaire and demographic information of our sample are given in the appendices of this report.

The survey explores patient understanding of diagnostics, the importance patients place on diagnostics, and their attitudes to where and how services should be delivered. It also covers how patients' views their willingness to self-test, and thoughts on the future of diagnostics.

**About the Patients Association**

The Patients Association is an independent patient charity campaigning for improvements in health and social care for patients. we believe patients should be actively involved in decisions made about their care and in the design of the health and care system. As an independent charity campaigning for improvements in health and social care, we believe improvements can only be achieved if the system works in partnership with patients. Through our helpline and information services we provide information to thousands of people each year about the health and social care system, enabling them to advocate for themselves.

**About Roche in the UK**

At Roche, we focus our energy and investment in developing tests and treatments that change lives and give us more time with the people we love.

More than 820 million Roche diagnostic tests were used to confirm, rule out or manage health conditions in the UK in 2020 and our business sites contribute £290m GDP and 2,190 jobs to the UK economy. We work from bench to bedside – researching new medicines and diagnostics, running global clinical trials, and working in partnership with the NHS to ensure rapid uptake and delivery of our products and services. For more information, please visit www.roche.co.uk.

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