

The NHS faces its biggest urgent and emergency care (UEC) crisis in decades. Last winter saw 40% of A&E patients waiting over 4 hours, ambulance response times hitting 48 minutes for emergencies like strokes, and an estimated 16,000 excess deaths. With ambulances spending a quarter of their time queuing outside hospitals and "corridor care" becoming the norm, the entire system is reaching breaking point. NHS England's plan for 2025/26 represents a move to whole system accountability and taking action across the end-to-end pathway from Prevention to Discharge.

Performance targets

Clear, measurable goals to restore constitutional standards and patient safety across the urgent care pathway.

- **30-minute Category 2 ambulance response** – cutting response times from 35 minutes to 30
- **45-minute maximum handover delays** - ending 8-12 hour waits, freeing up ambulances
- **78% of A&E patients seen in 4 hours** – up from 75%, treating 800,000 people more quickly
- **Eliminate 24-hour mental health waits in A&E** – treating those in crisis quicker
- **10% maximum for 12-hour waits** – tackling the 1.7 million attendances that exceed 12h
- **Children's 4-hour A&E standard prioritised** – addressing the thousands of infants that wait 6h+



End-to-end pathway action

- **Prevention:** Proactive measures, including enhancing childhood vaccination uptake (with every thousand childhood vaccinations saving around 4 hospital admissions) and aiming for 70% RSV vaccination in older adults, are being implemented to reduce future demand and prevent avoidable admissions.
 - **Demand Diversion** - An aim to increase utilisation of appropriate community care settings, recognising that 1 in 5 A&E attendees don't require urgent care, with successful examples showing over 30% reductions in attendances and 80% of eligible patients managed without attendance.
 - **Mental Health Prioritisation** - Frontline mental health services are being improved to provide faster care for the thousands in crisis every month by reducing the number of patients waiting over 24 hours in A&E for mental health admissions.
- **Ambulance Handover Elimination** - Eliminate ambulance handover delays by meeting the maximum 45-minute standard, which is projected to get 550,000 more ambulances back on the road and contribute to reducing Category 2 ambulance wait times by over 14% (from 35 to 30 minutes)
- **Patient Discharge Improvement:** A whole-system approach of "Home First" to streamline discharge, targeting the 30,000 patients a year staying 21 days over their discharge-ready-date to save up to half a million bed days annually, and reducing 12-hour waits for admission or discharge
- **System Integration:** Expanding the use of data systems, like FDP and Connected Care Records for ambulance services, and initiating a review of UEC data by the end of June with site-level performance data on total attendances and long waits set to be published in 2025/26 for more effective decision-making



Investment package

Strategic capital investment totaling £370 million to build the infrastructure and technology needed for sustainable improvement

- **£250 million for same-day emergency care centres and urgent treatment centers** - separating urgent from emergency care so >95% of patients can be discharged within 4h
- **£75 million for local mental health inpatient capacity** - eliminating inappropriate out-of-area placements and reducing around 150 patients at any time who are treated far from home and family support networks
- **£26 million for mental health crisis assessment centers** - providing therapeutic alternatives to A&E for people in mental health crisis, reducing 24-hour waits and improving patient experience
- **£20 million Connected Care Records expansion** - giving all ambulance crews access to unified patient records including recent treatment history, enabling better care decisions and avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions

