# Surge in Private Healthcare Opting Across the UK Raises Concerns of Health Inequalities



Between September 2019 and September 2023, there has been a notable surge in people opting for private healthcare across the UK. Analysis by the Nuffield Trust indicates that paid-for hospital admissions rose by 218% in Northern Ireland, 124% in Wales, 80% in Scotland, and 20% in England during this period.

The data suggests a marked increase in individuals choosing to pay out of pocket for hospital care since the pandemic, likely driven by record NHS waiting lists. The increase in private admissions and day cases is 32% across the UK overall. Additionally, there has been a 5% increase in hospital admissions through private health insurance.

Mark Dayan, one of the report's authors, highlighted that while most care remains NHS-funded, there's a discernible shift towards private healthcare. Northern Ireland experienced the sharpest rise, potentially due to its longer waiting times. David Furness from the Independent Healthcare Providers Network noted that independent providers play a significant role in delivering NHS care, with about one in five NHS operations being handled by private entities.

This trend towards private healthcare could risk exacerbating health inequalities, as access to care increasingly depends on the ability to pay rather than medical need. Health departments across the UK have been approached for comments on these findings.