# Record Number of UK Residents Choose Private Healthcare in Response to NHS Delays



A record number of people in the UK opted for private healthcare in 2023, according to data from the Private Healthcare Information Network (PHIN). Approximately 898,000 individuals sought private hospital treatment, marking a seven percent increase from 2022 and a 15 percent rise compared to pre-pandemic levels. This spike is attributed to lengthy NHS wait times, with about 7.54 million treatments pending.

The data showed Northern Ireland experienced the highest surge in private hospital admissions at 56 percent, followed by Scotland at 11 percent. Wales and England saw increases of seven and six percent, respectively. The growth in demand is driven by a rise in insured treatments, which reached 621,000 in 2023, up from 561,000 the previous year. Meanwhile, self-funded treatments rose slightly to 278,000.

NHS backlogs caused by staffing shortages, COVID-19 impacts, and strikes are significant contributors to the trend. Cataract surgery was the most requested private procedure, followed by chemotherapy, hip and knee replacements, colonoscopies, and endoscopies.

The sharp increase in private healthcare reflects public frustration with NHS delays. Policy experts caution that this shift could further strain NHS resources, as more doctors take on private work. However, private practitioners argue that their services help ease NHS waiting lists.

Government and NHS England aim to eliminate waits longer than a year by March 2025. Despite these efforts, the need for private alternatives continues to rise.