# Cancer care in the UK faces mounting crisis as patient concerns rise and system strains deepen



The number of cancer patients in the UK raising concerns about their care is increasing significantly, according to the chief executive of Macmillan Cancer Support. Gemma Peters highlighted emerging issues such as delays in diagnosis, difficulties in getting GP appointments, and lengthy waits for treatment as growing challenges within the system. She described Macmillan as a “safety net” for those experiencing problems but warned that the cancer care system remains under serious strain, with administrative pressures preventing it from fully meeting patient needs.

Macmillan’s latest annual report reveals that the charity supported more than 2.4 million people affected by cancer in 2024, up from 2.3 million in the prior year, spending £150.4 million on services. The charity’s network has also expanded, now including 11,000 professionals who provide tailored support throughout the cancer journey—a number that grew by 1,000 in 2024 alone. Peters noted the complexity of needs has increased alongside a rising cancer prevalence, with nearly 3.5 million people living with the disease in the UK, and that number expected to approach 4 million soon.

The rising prevalence underscores an urgent need for systemic improvements in cancer care, as many patients report finding cancer more difficult to live with than ever before. According to a survey conducted by YouGov for Macmillan, around 40% of cancer patients in the UK have chosen to travel to different hospitals seeking shorter waits or better treatment options, reflecting significant inequities in access to timely and effective care depending on where individuals live. These findings add further pressure on policymakers to address regional disparities in cancer services.

Macmillan’s five-year strategy, shaped by input from patients, healthcare professionals, and volunteers, aims to tackle these challenges head-on. Peters expressed confidence in the strategy’s focus on areas promising the greatest impact, such as expanding professional support across the country. However, she emphasised that despite positive steps, the charity remains cautious, acknowledging the persistent financial and operational pressures on the cancer care system—a system still “teetering at crisis point” in many respects.

The charity awaits the publication of a national cancer plan later this year with anticipation, hoping for a robust response that puts patients’ needs at the centre. With the number of people living with cancer continuing to rise, and access difficulties becoming more pronounced, Macmillan’s role as both advocate and direct provider of support looks set to remain crucial in navigating these complex challenges.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/cancer-patients-with-care-concerns-increasing-significantly-charity-warns-RHNA4GEXWZNCPDESIUL7A34R6M/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/cancer-patients-with-care-concerns-increasing-significantly-charity-warns-RHNA4GEXWZNCPDESIUL7A34R6M/), [[3]](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/about-us/organisation/annual-reports), [[6]](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/about-us/latest-news/news-and-stories/demanding-better-cancer-care-for-today-and-tomorrow)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/cancer-patients-with-care-concerns-increasing-significantly-charity-warns-RHNA4GEXWZNCPDESIUL7A34R6M/), [[2]](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/about-us/latest-news/news-and-stories/change-is-needed-3-5-million)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/cancer-patients-with-care-concerns-increasing-significantly-charity-warns-RHNA4GEXWZNCPDESIUL7A34R6M/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/cancer-patients-with-care-concerns-increasing-significantly-charity-warns-RHNA4GEXWZNCPDESIUL7A34R6M/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/cancer-patients-with-care-concerns-increasing-significantly-charity-warns-RHNA4GEXWZNCPDESIUL7A34R6M/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/about-us/latest-news/news-and-stories/change-is-needed-3-5-million> - Macmillan Cancer Support reports that the number of people living with cancer in the UK has risen to almost 3.5 million, the highest figure ever reported. This increase underscores the urgent need for improvements in cancer services to address the unacceptable gaps in patient experiences. The charity highlights that as the number of cancer patients continues to rise, many are finding it harder to live with the disease than ever before, emphasizing the necessity for systemic changes in cancer care.
3. <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/about-us/organisation/annual-reports> - Macmillan Cancer Support's Annual Report and Accounts provide detailed insights into the charity's activities and financial performance. The 2023 report highlights that the charity helped more than 2.3 million people affected by cancer, an increase of 250,000 from the previous year. The report also outlines the charity's income and expenditure, showcasing its commitment to supporting individuals living with cancer through various services and initiatives.
4. <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research/cancer-statistics-fact-sheet> - Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Statistics Fact Sheet offers comprehensive data on cancer prevalence and the charity's outreach efforts. In 2023, Macmillan's services reached and supported 2.3 million people affected by cancer. The fact sheet provides detailed statistics on the number of individuals receiving support through various channels, including the Macmillan Support Line, local cancer information and support centres, and financial support services.
5. <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/impact> - Macmillan Cancer Support's Impact page outlines the charity's contributions to cancer care. In 2023, Macmillan facilitated 59,000 Holistic Needs Assessments for people living with cancer, enabling structured conversations with healthcare professionals about their needs and concerns. Additionally, the charity's local cancer information and support centres offered a range of clinical, emotional, and practical support, with an estimated 92,000 people diagnosed with cancer using these services.
6. <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/about-us/latest-news/news-and-stories/demanding-better-cancer-care-for-today-and-tomorrow> - Macmillan Cancer Support's article discusses the charity's ongoing efforts to improve cancer care. In the first six months of 2025, the community supported more than 330,000 people affected by cancer, nearly 85,000 more than the same period last year. The article also highlights the expansion of the Macmillan Professionals programme, with over 500 new cancer professionals joining since January, aiming to provide better care to people when they need it most.
7. <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/get-help/booklets> - Macmillan Cancer Support's Get Help Booklets page provides information on various resources available to individuals affected by cancer. The Macmillan Support Line is a free and confidential phone service for people living and affected by cancer, offering support seven days a week. The page also highlights other resources, including email support, online chat, and local cancer support services, ensuring comprehensive assistance for those in need.