# Majority of men in England support targeted prostate cancer screening amid calls for NHS policy update



More than three quarters of men in England would attend a prostate cancer screening programme if invited, according to a recent survey commissioned by Healthwatch England. The poll, conducted by Savanta and involving 3,575 men over the age of 18, found that 79% expressed willingness to participate in such a programme. Support was particularly strong among men aged 65 to 74, those who described themselves as financially “very comfortable,” and Black men—groups known to be at higher risk of developing prostate cancer. However, the survey also revealed lower support among those experiencing financial hardship.

Currently, the only screening test available is the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test, which is used primarily when a general practitioner (GP) suspects prostate issues, including cancer. Men over 50 can request a PSA test through their GP, even without symptoms. Yet, routine PSA screening is not offered across the NHS, and national guidance does not recommend a formal screening programme, mainly due to concerns around test accuracy and potential harms.

The survey found that 36% of men over 50 had requested a PSA test, while 60% had not; notably, 7% of those who asked were refused the test. Louise Ansari, chief executive of Healthwatch England, highlighted the importance of clarifying guidance around PSA testing and called for policymakers to consider men's preferences alongside clinical and economic evidence in decisions regarding a national screening policy. She urged the NHS to ensure men can discuss the benefits and risks of prostate cancer testing with their GPs.

Prostate Cancer UK has been campaigning vigorously for the introduction of a national screening programme, emphasising that prostate cancer remains the only major cancer in the UK without one. Amy Rylance, assistant director of health improvement at Prostate Cancer UK, noted that their £42 million TRANSFORM trial is underway to identify the safest and most effective methods for screening. Funded partly by £16 million from the government, this large-scale study aims to provide robust evidence on screening approaches, including combining PSA testing with MRI scans, and is expected to deliver results that could shape policy decisions in the near future. The trial also seeks to address inequalities, particularly the increased risk Black men face from an earlier age.

While enthusiasm builds for national screening, some experts remain cautious about widespread PSA testing, citing mixed evidence from previous long-term studies. The 15-year CAP trial, which involved over 400,000 men aged 50 to 69, showed a small reduction in prostate cancer mortality among those invited for PSA testing but also highlighted significant issues, including overdiagnosis and missed aggressive cancers. Research indicated that one in six prostate cancer diagnoses flagged by PSA screening could be incorrect, raising concerns about potential harms such as unnecessary biopsies and overtreatment.

Such findings have contributed to the UK National Screening Committee’s current stance against recommending population-wide PSA screening, emphasising the need for tests that can reliably detect cancers that require treatment. Despite these challenges, recent advances—such as integrating MRI scanning with PSA testing—are seen as promising steps that may mitigate past drawbacks, which is why many GPs support focused screening, especially for high-risk groups. A separate survey of 400 GPs found overwhelming support for targeted screening programmes aimed at men at greatest risk, with 94% agreeing it would improve diagnosis and outcomes. However, the study also revealed gaps in GPs’ awareness of key risk factors, such as the heightened risk for Black men and those with a family history.

In the face of these complexities, patient and public voices appear united in their desire for improved prostate cancer detection through screening, urging health authorities to act swiftly. Healthwatch England and Prostate Cancer UK both make a case for updating NHS guidelines to empower GPs to initiate conversations about prostate cancer screening earlier, from age 45 for those at highest risk. With multiple stakeholders—from researchers to clinicians and advocacy groups—converging on the critical need for effective screening solutions, decisions expected later this year about a national programme could mark a significant shift in men’s health.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/most-men-would-attend-a-prostate-cancer-screening-programme-poll-E4E23C42ZFLW5IK4ST2LDVWKCU/), [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/prostate-cancer-nhs-men-psa-healthwatch-england-b2841339.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/most-men-would-attend-a-prostate-cancer-screening-programme-poll-E4E23C42ZFLW5IK4ST2LDVWKCU/), [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/prostate-cancer-nhs-men-psa-healthwatch-england-b2841339.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/most-men-would-attend-a-prostate-cancer-screening-programme-poll-E4E23C42ZFLW5IK4ST2LDVWKCU/), [[4]](https://prostatecanceruk.org/about-us/news-and-views/2023/11/introducing-transform)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://prostatecanceruk.org/about-us/news-and-views/2023/11/introducing-transform), [[3]](https://www.prostate-cancer-research.org.uk/gps-support-launch-of-national-screening-high-risk-men/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://prostatecanceruk.org/about-us/news-and-views/2024/04/psa-screening-reduced-deaths-can-miss-aggressive-cancer/), [[6]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/06/prostate-cancer-screening-may-do-more-harm-than-good/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[7]](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/prostate-cancer/getting-diagnosed/screening), [[3]](https://www.prostate-cancer-research.org.uk/gps-support-launch-of-national-screening-high-risk-men/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/most-men-would-attend-a-prostate-cancer-screening-programme-poll-E4E23C42ZFLW5IK4ST2LDVWKCU/), [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/prostate-cancer-nhs-men-psa-healthwatch-england-b2841339.html), [[3]](https://www.prostate-cancer-research.org.uk/gps-support-launch-of-national-screening-high-risk-men/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/most-men-would-attend-a-prostate-cancer-screening-programme-poll-E4E23C42ZFLW5IK4ST2LDVWKCU/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/prostate-cancer-nhs-men-psa-healthwatch-england-b2841339.html> - A recent survey by Healthwatch England revealed that 79% of men would participate in a prostate cancer screening programme if offered. The study, conducted by Savanta and involving 3,575 men over 18 in England, found the highest support among men aged 65-74, those financially 'very comfortable', and Black men. The survey also highlighted that support decreased among individuals facing financial difficulties. The prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test, a blood test used to detect prostate conditions, is currently not part of the NHS's routine screening but can be requested by men over 50 without symptoms. Healthwatch England urges policymakers to consider men's perspectives alongside clinical and economic evidence when deciding on a national screening programme. Prostate Cancer UK is also advocating for a safe and effective screening programme for all men, emphasizing the need for change in current NHS guidelines to empower GPs to proactively discuss prostate cancer with men at higher risk from the age of 45.
3. <https://www.prostate-cancer-research.org.uk/gps-support-launch-of-national-screening-high-risk-men/> - A survey of 400 General Practitioners (GPs) revealed overwhelming support for a national prostate cancer screening programme targeting high-risk groups. Ninety-four percent of GPs supported the initiative, and 93% believed it would improve diagnosis rates and patient outcomes. The survey also found that 94% of GPs felt that recent diagnostic innovations, such as the introduction of MRI scans alongside PSA testing, have reduced the risks of overdiagnosis and unnecessary biopsies. However, the study highlighted a lack of awareness among GPs regarding major prostate cancer risk factors, with only 38% correctly identifying Black men and 53% identifying men with a close family history as high-risk groups. Prostate Cancer Research is calling for urgent improvements to screening provisions to address rising prostate cancer deaths and health inequalities in the UK.
4. <https://prostatecanceruk.org/about-us/news-and-views/2023/11/introducing-transform> - Prostate Cancer UK has launched the £42 million TRANSFORM trial, the largest and most ambitious trial to date, aiming to identify the most effective method for screening prostate cancer. Backed by £16 million of government funding, the trial will involve hundreds of thousands of men and is set to be the biggest prostate cancer diagnosis trial in 20 years. The trial seeks to compare various promising tests to provide definitive evidence for the best way to screen for prostate cancer, ensuring that all men at risk are invited for regular tests that can detect the disease at its earliest and most treatable stage. The initiative also aims to address existing inequalities in prostate cancer diagnosis, particularly among Black men, who are at a higher risk of developing the disease at a younger age. Prostate Cancer UK is collaborating with the NHS, National Screening Committee, and National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) to ensure the trial's robustness and relevance.
5. <https://prostatecanceruk.org/about-us/news-and-views/2024/04/psa-screening-reduced-deaths-can-miss-aggressive-cancer/> - New results from the 15-year-long CAP (Cluster Randomised Trial of PSA Testing for Prostate Cancer) study confirm that screening for prostate cancer using PSA blood tests slightly reduces the risk of men dying from the disease. However, the study also highlights significant concerns, including the potential to miss aggressive cancers and overdiagnose the disease. The trial involved more than 400,000 men aged 50 to 69, comparing those invited for PSA testing with those not invited. After 15 years, the data showed a small difference in prostate cancer mortality between the two groups. Despite the slight reduction in deaths, the study underscores the complexities and potential harms associated with PSA testing, such as overdiagnosis and unnecessary biopsies. These findings reinforce the need for careful consideration and further research into the benefits and drawbacks of PSA screening for prostate cancer.
6. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/06/prostate-cancer-screening-may-do-more-harm-than-good/> - Experts have raised concerns that prostate cancer screening may do more harm than good, following a 15-year trial that showed one in six flagged cases was incorrect. The largest study to date investigating the PSA (Prostate-specific antigen) blood test found it had a small impact on reducing deaths but also led to a significant level of overdiagnosis. In some cases, it missed early detection of aggressive cancers. Researchers from the universities of Bristol, Oxford, and Cambridge invited more than 400,000 men aged between 50-69 for screening, with just over half receiving a PSA test. After following up for 15 years, nearly seven men out of every 1,000 in the group invited for screening had died from prostate cancer, compared to nearly eight men out of every 1,000 who had not been tested. The results indicate that while PSA screening may reduce deaths, it also carries the risk of overdiagnosis and missing aggressive cancers, highlighting the need for careful consideration of its benefits and harms.
7. <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/prostate-cancer/getting-diagnosed/screening> - In the UK, there is no national screening programme for prostate cancer due to the lack of a reliable test that can detect prostate cancer needing treatment at an early stage. Research into the PSA test for screening asymptomatic individuals has shown only a small reduction in prostate cancer mortality and has led to overdiagnosis. Consequently, the UK National Screening Committee does not currently recommend screening for prostate cancer. Screening tests are not perfect and have some harms as well as benefits. The UKNSC bases its recommendations on the best scientific evidence, considering whether the benefits outweigh the harms and if the programme is good value for money for the NHS. Research continues to find more effective tests or alternative methods for screening prostate cancer.