# Rishi Sunak urges government to fast-track prostate cancer screening amid life-saving potential



Rishi Sunak has urged the UK Government not to abandon plans for a national prostate cancer screening programme, warning that any delay in implementation will “undoubtedly cost lives.” The Prime Minister’s intervention comes amid reports that the UK National Screening Committee, which advises the Government on such matters, is leaning towards rejecting proposals for routine NHS prostate cancer tests targeted at men most at risk.

The screening tests in question aim to detect early signs of prostate cancer, the most commonly diagnosed cancer among men in England, with over 58,000 cases identified in the past year alone. A source close to the committee indicated to The Mail on Sunday that the decision to shelve the programme may be based on concerns over cost-effectiveness. However, Mr Sunak challenged this view, insisting that the evidence increasingly supports the feasibility and life-saving potential of a targeted screening scheme.

“The evidence is increasingly clear that a targeted screening programme is deliverable and would save lives,” Sunak said in a rare public statement on the matter. “Now is the time to implement a targeted screening programme for the most common cancer among British men. Delay will undoubtedly cost lives.”

This call is aligned with Sunak’s ongoing advocacy for prostate cancer awareness and early detection, which has included support for community testing events and collaboration with research organisations. Earlier this year, Sunak backed an initiative by the Darlington Lions Club to encourage men to undergo free blood tests for early detection, emphasising that about 12,000 men die annually from prostate cancer in the UK. He also responded to findings from Prostate Cancer Research UK, which highlight the benefits of increased screening for high-risk groups and the potential for NHS cost savings when cancer is caught early.

Prostate Cancer UK described the notion of abandoning the screening plans as “a deep disappointment.” Its chief executive, Laura Kerby, expressed concern that shelving the programme would be a blow to the many men and families who have campaigned for improved screening options. The charity launched the ambitious £42 million TRANSFORM trial in late 2023, partially government-funded, to establish the most effective screening methods and to address diagnostic inequalities, particularly among Black men who face higher risks.

While there remains no national prostate cancer screening programme in England, this is largely due to the limitations of the current PSA blood test. Cancer Research UK notes that the PSA test can miss some cancers and falsely indicate cancer when none is present, leading to overdiagnosis and potentially unnecessary treatment. Research is ongoing to develop more reliable tests. For instance, the innovative EpiSwitch PSE test, supported by Prostate Cancer Research UK, boasts 94% accuracy and could dramatically improve the detection landscape.

Public figures such as Olympic cyclist Sir Chris Hoy and actor Sir Stephen Fry, both prostate cancer survivors, have backed the campaign for national screening, underscoring the disease’s stealth and severity. Sir Stephen described the potential shelving of plans as a “crushing blow,” noting that his own diagnosis was unexpected and aggressive, reinforcing the need for systematic early detection rather than reliance on luck.

The Department of Health and Social Care has reiterated that any decision must be evidence-led but confirmed the Government's aspiration to implement a safe and effective screening programme, recognising the potential to save thousands of lives.

The National Screening Committee is expected to reconvene soon to discuss the latest proposals. With public support mounting and scientific advancements on the horizon, the debate over a national prostate cancer screening programme remains a critical issue in public health policy.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15183743/Rishi-Sunak-Government-U-turn-prostate-screening-lives.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.rishisunak.com/news/rishi-joins-darlington-lions-highlighting-importance-prostate-cancer-screening)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15183743/Rishi-Sunak-Government-U-turn-prostate-screening-lives.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.rishisunak.com/news/rishi-calls-government-act-findings-prostate-cancer-report)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15183743/Rishi-Sunak-Government-U-turn-prostate-screening-lives.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.rishisunak.com/news/rishi-sunak-calls-national-prostate-cancer-screening), [[5]](https://prostatecanceruk.org/about-us/news-and-views/2023/11/introducing-transform)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15183743/Rishi-Sunak-Government-U-turn-prostate-screening-lives.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://prostatecanceruk.org/about-us/news-and-views/2023/11/introducing-transform), [[6]](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/prostate-cancer/getting-diagnosed/screening)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15183743/Rishi-Sunak-Government-U-turn-prostate-screening-lives.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cj0q228ry5yo)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15183743/Rishi-Sunak-Government-U-turn-prostate-screening-lives.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15183743/Rishi-Sunak-Government-U-turn-prostate-screening-lives.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.rishisunak.com/news/rishi-sunak-calls-national-prostate-cancer-screening> - In February 2025, Rishi Sunak, then Prime Minister, advocated for a national prostate cancer screening programme. He highlighted the urgency of early detection, noting that prostate cancer had become the UK's most common cancer without a screening programme. Sunak emphasised that implementing a targeted screening programme could save thousands of men's lives and reduce NHS costs. He also expressed support for Prostate Cancer Research UK's mission to revolutionise diagnosis and treatment. This call to action aimed to address the rising incidence of prostate cancer and the lack of a national screening initiative.
3. <https://www.rishisunak.com/news/rishi-calls-government-act-findings-prostate-cancer-report> - In January 2025, Rishi Sunak highlighted the need for a national screening programme for prostate cancer, the most common cancer affecting men in the UK. Speaking in the House of Commons, Sunak urged the government to consider the findings of Prostate Cancer Research’s latest report, which recommended increased screening of at-risk groups. He emphasised that such a programme could not only save the NHS money but, more importantly, save thousands of lives. Health Secretary Wes Streeting responded, stating that the government was actively considering the report.
4. <https://www.rishisunak.com/news/rishi-joins-darlington-lions-highlighting-importance-prostate-cancer-screening> - In May 2025, Rishi Sunak supported an initiative by Darlington Lions Club to encourage more men to get tested for prostate cancer. He joined members at their third testing event, where 200 men signed up for free blood tests to detect early signs of the disease. Sunak praised the Lions' efforts, stating that early detection is key to successful treatment outcomes. He also called for a national screening programme, noting that around 12,000 men die from prostate cancer each year in the UK.
5. <https://prostatecanceruk.org/about-us/news-and-views/2023/11/introducing-transform> - In November 2023, Prostate Cancer UK launched the £42 million TRANSFORM trial, aiming to identify the best method for screening prostate cancer. Backed by £16 million of government funding, the trial involves hundreds of thousands of men and is the largest prostate cancer diagnosis trial in 20 years. The initiative seeks to provide definitive evidence for the most effective screening approach, with the goal of saving thousands of men's lives annually. The trial also aims to address inequalities in prostate cancer diagnosis, particularly among Black men, who are at higher risk.
6. <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/prostate-cancer/getting-diagnosed/screening> - Cancer Research UK explains that there is no national screening programme for prostate cancer in the UK due to the unreliability of the current PSA test. The PSA test can miss some cancers (false negatives) and suggest cancer when there isn't any (false positives). Additionally, it can lead to overdiagnosis, detecting cancers that would not have caused problems. Research is ongoing to find more reliable tests or methods for screening, but currently, the PSA test is not recommended for routine screening.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cj0q228ry5yo> - In February 2025, former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak became an ambassador for Prostate Cancer Research UK, supporting their campaign for a national screening programme for men at high risk of the disease. Sunak met with researchers developing a new blood test, the EpiSwitch PSE test, which can detect prostate cancer with 94% accuracy, a significant improvement over the commonly used PSA test. He expressed hope that his involvement would encourage more men to get tested, potentially preventing further needless deaths.