# Cancer 360 faces scepticism amid rising NHS cancer treatment delays and funding concerns



The recent unveiling of the Cancer 360 initiative by Health Secretary Wes Streeting has come under significant scrutiny, casting a shadow over its touted potential to reshape cancer care in the UK. Billed as a groundbreaking scheme to centralise patient data regarding tests, appointments, and treatments, Cancer 360 is ostensibly designed to expedite diagnosis and alleviate treatment delays. However, the lofty ideals of this initiative seem increasingly divorced from the stark realities of the current NHS framework, raising doubts about its viability.

Critics—including many within the medical community—have pointed out that the ambition to unify patient records on a single platform ignores the fundamental challenges facing NHS operations. It’s telling that the Health Foundation has estimated a staggering £21 billion would be necessary for digitising the UK’s health services over the next five years, revealing just how underprepared the system is for such an extensive overhaul. This colossal funding is aimed at modernising technology, with £14.75 billion specifically allocated to England for critical upgrades like electronic patient records and cybersecurity improvements. Yet experts warn that spurious technological fixes will not remedy the deep-rooted systemic failures beleaguering the NHS, and any real progress demands a holistic strategy that examines all aspects of implementation.

The grim reality is that, since 2012, the waiting times for cancer treatment in England have spiralled, with the proportion of patients waiting beyond the 62-day target jumping from 11% in 2012 to over 33% today. This alarming escalation is symptomatic of the broader inefficiencies within the NHS, a situation only worsened by the disastrous consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. As Streeting extols the virtues of Cancer 360, he faces mounting pressure to produce tangible solutions to these enduring crises. While Labour has proposed increasing the number of cancer scanners to enhance diagnostics, the truth remains that sweeping reforms are sorely needed to address the soaring waiting times that have now become a hallmark of NHS inadequacy.

In a bid to tackle these growing challenges, the government recently announced a £1.5 billion investment intended to facilitate two million additional appointments across the healthcare system, particularly through essential infrastructure improvements like new surgical hubs and radiotherapy equipment. While such funding may be heralded as a measure to “arrest the decline” of the NHS, it is increasingly clear that Streeting’s efforts will demand extended timelines, emphasising a shift towards long-term resilience rather than short-term measures.

As part of a broader strategy to engage stakeholders, Streeting is planning to initiate a ‘national conversation’ to gather insights from clinicians, experts, and the public regarding a new 10-year health plan. This proposal aims to bolster primary care, enhance digital services, and focus on disease prevention. However, some analysts contend that these proposed reforms may be drowned out by the lingering ramifications of chronic underfunding and austerity measures that have left the NHS in a vulnerable position.

Modern healthcare's intricacies necessitate an acute awareness that patients often face a multitude of health challenges beyond their immediate needs. Although Streeting's intention to shift treatment from hospitals to community settings reflects a broader understanding, the skepticism regarding the capacity of the current infrastructure to support such a paradigm shift looms large.

Innovative tools, akin to those observed by Streeting during a recent tour of the Leeds Cancer Centre, underscore the advances in cancer diagnosis and treatment. Nonetheless, the widespread adoption of these innovations is contingent upon navigating major operational barriers and ensuring equitable access for all NHS patients.

As the dialogue surrounding Cancer 360 unfolds, it becomes painfully obvious that while the aspirations to reform cancer care are laudable, real change within the NHS will require more than mere technocratic solutions. A comprehensive, system-wide approach is imperative—one that confronts funding deficiencies, logistical impediments, and redefines the very principles of patient-centred care in a contemporary healthcare landscape.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2053079/wes-streeting-cancer-nhs> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/81a9fcfe-dae9-4145-948f-4638670a598e> - Digitising the UK's health and adult social care services is projected to cost £21 billion over the next five years, according to research by the Health Foundation. This investment is aimed at modernising the NHS by implementing infrastructure such as electronic patient records, cybersecurity, and WiFi. The majority of this spending—£14.75 billion—will be required in England. The breakdown includes £8 billion in capital expenditure, including hardware and software upgrades, and a one-off £3 billion for planning, training, and transitioning staff to new IT systems. An additional £10 billion over five years will be needed for ongoing costs like training and software maintenance. The Health Foundation emphasized that technology investment alone is insufficient, urging the government to also support implementation and transformation efforts. This digital shift aligns with Health Secretary Wes Streeting’s vision to reform NHS care delivery. Despite previous challenges with electronic records access, the Department of Health and Social Care maintains that digitalisation will lead to improved care and better value, citing current efforts to adopt AI, enhance the NHS app, and centralise records.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/ebc05420-4081-40a8-82b0-eff531f5cca6> - Waiting times for cancer treatment in England have significantly increased since 2012, with the percentage of patients waiting beyond the 62-day target tripling from 11% to 33.4%. Likewise, those waiting more than 31 days for treatment rose from 1.6% to 8.9%. These issues reflect broader challenges within the NHS and have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite recent efforts, performance has remained stable since February 2022 following an NHS plan to address the backlog of non-emergency treatments. Labour has promised to double the number of cancer scanners to improve diagnoses and treatment. The ONS noted the persistence of long waiting times, while Cancer Research UK emphasized the need for a dedicated long-term cancer strategy. NHS staff are working hard, but systemic issues persist, highlighting a critical need for reforms to meet treatment standards.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/c0dd420c-6bec-475a-8fbb-261f1033c461> - The NHS in England will receive £1.5bn in next year's Budget to enable 2 million additional appointments, primarily for capital investments such as new surgical hubs and radiotherapy machines. While Health Secretary Wes Streeting stated that this funding would help 'arrest the decline' of the NHS, he emphasized that substantial improvements will take time. The funding is a part of a larger multibillion-pound annual package aimed at fortifying the health service. Ministers have declined to specify the exact NHS funding for 2025-26, but a portion of the £20bn raised through increased national insurance contributions will be allocated to health services. Additionally, £240mn will be designated to help disabled and long-term sick individuals return to work. Labour's goal is to build an NHS fit for the future, pledging 40,000 extra weekly appointments to reduce waiting times. A report by Lord Ara Darzi highlighted significant delays in patient treatment, attributing the issues to past austerity policies. The Nuffield Trust estimates that a 3.6% real-terms funding increase is necessary to maintain NHS stability in the coming years.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/c18b4787-a343-4d0a-9a95-23ce740c99ed> - Health Secretary Wes Streeting is set to launch a 'national conversation' on Monday to gather ideas from clinicians, experts, and the general public on revitalizing the National Health Service (NHS) through a new '10-year Health Plan'. The public will be invited to share their suggestions via an online platform, change.NHS.uk, starting next year. This initiative comes ahead of an expected real-terms funding boost for the NHS from the Treasury, which will be detailed in the budget and spending review on October 30. Streeting emphasized that despite the positive outlook for NHS funding, any potential increase in National Insurance payments for the service's employers could counteract the benefits. He highlighted three priorities for the 10-year plan: improving primary care in communities, transitioning to digital health systems, and focusing on disease prevention. Additionally, the government's budget efforts, as discussed by Chancellor Rachel Reeves, underline the emphasis on enhancing NHS funding. However, substantial reform is deemed necessary due to longstanding underfunding exacerbated by austerity measures, leaving the NHS in a critical condition.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/1e71c913-4dea-4088-878e-4d3e2889b875> - Wes Streeting, the UK's health and social care secretary, outlined three critical shifts required for the NHS's sustainability during a speech at the Financial Times' Weekend festival. These shifts include moving treatment from hospitals to community settings, transitioning from analogue to digital systems, and focusing on sickness prevention rather than treatment. These changes aim to modernize NHS care, diagnose and treat illnesses faster, and emphasize prevention to reduce hospital pressures and improve long-term health. Currently, the NHS faces significant challenges, including lengthy waiting lists, a high number of vacancies, and strike actions. Streeting emphasized the necessity of good social care, although funding remains a significant issue, particularly in light of a £30bn shortfall for elderly care cost caps. Despite immediate challenges, Streeting asked for time to address more complex future issues and to enhance collaboration between the NHS and the life sciences sector.
7. <https://www.leedsth.nhs.uk/news/leeds-hospital-cancer-tech-hailed-as-blueprint-for-future-of-the-nhs/> - Health and Social Care Secretary Wes Streeting visited Leeds Cancer Centre to witness innovative approaches to cancer diagnosis and treatment. The hospital employs technologies like MRI simulators producing high-definition images for precise treatments, AI to analyze these images for quicker planning, and a device using focused ultrasound waves to target liver cancer tumors without harming healthy tissue. Streeting praised these advancements and expressed the government's intention to roll out similar technologies nationwide to improve cancer care. The initiative includes funding to double the number of CT and MRI scanners in the NHS over a parliament and streamline procurement processes, aiming to modernize the health service and enhance patient outcomes.