

To test cancer sooner, we need the government to invest in the NHS

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Too many people are diagnosed with late-stage cancer each year.

We need to fix this. In its recent report, the Independent Cancer Taskforce estimated that, if the NHS implemented its recommendations, by 2020 almost 11,000 more people each year would survive their cancer for 10 years or more due to earlier diagnosis.

One way to make this a reality is to make sure people are diagnosed as quickly as possible, so that if they have cancer, they get the treatment they need sooner. To do this, they need the right tests, at the right time.

We want the NHS and the Government to make sure that 95 per cent of people receive the results of their tests – and know whether or not they have cancer – within four weeks.

But the NHS services that investigate possible cancer symptoms are under serious pressure – and as more people are referred for tests, this pressure is only going to increase.

In order to improve things we need investment into diagnostic services – endoscopies, scans, and other tests – to make sure they can meet this growing demand.

Today we're launching a new campaign, to ask the Government to Test Cancer Sooner.

Why is early diagnosis important?

The earlier a person's cancer is diagnosed, the better chance they have of successful treatment, with more options available.

For example, when [bowel cancer](#) is diagnosed at the earliest stage, more than nine out of 10 people survive at least five years. But if it's diagnosed at a late stage, this reduces to less than one in 10 people.

The graphic below shows survival variations between people diagnosed at early and late stage for a range of cancers.

SURVIVAL BY STAGE OF DIAGNOSIS

 = PEOPLE SURVIVING THEIR CANCER FOR FIVE OR MORE YEARS WHEN DIAGNOSED BETWEEN 2002 AND 2006

DIAGNOSED **EARLIER**
AT STAGE I

DIAGNOSED **LATER**
AT STAGE IV



How are patients diagnosed?

To diagnose someone with cancer, that person needs to have one or more 'cancer tests'. These tests vary dependent on the symptoms or screening someone has. For example, someone with persistent heartburn may need an endoscopy to check if it could oesophageal or [stomach cancer](#).

But these cancer tests are under increasing demand, mainly due to the increasing average age of the UK population. And as half of us will develop cancer at some point in our lives, this demand will only increase.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has recently updated its guidelines to help GPs refer patients with potential cancer symptoms – giving them more freedom to send patients to see specialists.

This is good news, but will leave even more people needing tests. For example, estimates suggest that, by 2020, more than 750,000 extra people will need endoscopies every year – that's more than the population of Leeds.

To be able to cope with this increased demand, two crucial things need to be in place: enough NHS staff with the right mix of skills, and appropriate equipment.

So what can we do about this?

In November, the Treasury will decide how much money to give to each Government department as part of the Spending Review – and this will include the budget for the NHS. So to make sure there's sufficient investment, we're asking our supporters to sign a petition to ask Chancellor George Osborne to significantly increase investment in [early diagnosis](#) in England, to boost the workforce and add to and renew the NHS's equipment.

We need a service that is adequately staffed to make sure the NHS can carry out diagnostic tests. Workforce shortages will take time to address and the NHS needs to ensure they are increasing training numbers, retaining existing staff, and exploring other ways of tackling shortages, such as through international recruitment.

We also need to have enough up-to-date equipment to deal with increased demand. For example, we have fewer MRI and CT scanners for our population than many other countries.

But it's not just about the immediate financial investment. The Government needs to work with the NHS to develop plans that take into account future demand and capacity, and include any additional investment that's required, to avoid workforce and equipment shortages in the future.

By improving early diagnosis in England, not only will many more lives be saved, but it could also save the NHS around £44 million a year in treatment costs for breast, bowel, lung and ovarian cancers.

How can you help?

Diagnosing [cancer](#) earlier is an important issue for everyone. Here's how you can help make a difference:

- Take two minutes to add your name to [our petition](#)
- Ask your friends, family and colleagues to sign up too
- Spread the word on social media using our campaign hashtag #TestCancerSooner

We know that petition campaigns work. Back in 2011, 36,000 of you called on the Government to invest in better radiotherapy services and they responded with £23 million of investment.

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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