

Older adults with multiple medical issues worse affected by canceled operations

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One in eight adults over 50 had a hospital operation or treatment canceled last year and this rose to one in five for those with two or more existing medical conditions, according to new research led by UCL. The most common treatments canceled were eye and cancer surgery.

The research, published as a briefing paper today, also shows that fewer cases of dementia were diagnosed in lockdown compared to before the pandemic but diagnoses for arthritis, [chronic lung disease](#), diabetes and hypertension all increased during the pandemic.

For the study, the researchers analyzed data from over 7,000 [adults](#) who are participants of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) and living in England.

Lead author, Dr. Paola Zaninotto (UCL Epidemiology and Public Health) said: "Our study shows that access to health and social care services during lockdown may have disproportionately affected older people and those with multiple [medical conditions](#).

"We found that the rates of diagnoses of new health conditions during the pandemic in the second half of 2020 were substantially higher from the pre pandemic rates reported in 2018 to 2019."

7,289 adults provided data before the pandemic in 2018-2019. 5,825 adults provided information in Wave 1 of the study between June and July 2020 and 5,339 took part for Wave 2 of the study between November and December 2020.

Of the 623 adults who had had their operations or treatments canceled between March and December in 2020, nearly half were still waiting in November and December for their hospital appointment to be rescheduled.

Diagnosis rates for dementia dropped from 9.09 per 1,000 adults pre-COVID-19 (2018/2019) to 4.53 per 1,000 adults in June/July 2020 and to 3.58 adults per 1,000 in November/December 2020.

Diagnosis rates for arthritis increased from 29.11 per 1,000 adults pre-

COVID (2018/2019) to 39.26 per 1,000 adults in June/July 2020 and 50.59 per 1,000 adults in November/December 2020. Chronic lung disease diagnoses were 7.18 per 1,000 adults pre COVID, 8.58 per 1,000 adults in June/July 2020 and 13.28 per 1,000 adults in November/December 2020.

The authors note that the findings regarding dementia diagnosis rates dropping must be interpreted carefully as the exact reasons are unknown.

Dr. Zaninotto explained, "The increased isolation during lockdown may have meant that [cognitive decline](#) went unnoticed by friends and relatives, or barriers to accessing healthcare may have been experienced more by those with early dementia.

"Conversely, other conditions were diagnosed more frequently than before the [pandemic](#), including arthritis, chronic lung disease, diabetes and hypertension. Again, the reasons for these increases are not clear, but fewer opportunities for physical activity and social interaction may have played a part."

More information: Multimorbidity, access to services and diagnosis of new health conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Provided by University College London

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