

Address:  
110 George Street  
Edinburgh  
EH2 4LH

Telephone:  
0845 146 1010  
Fax:  
0845 146 1009

Website:  
[www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)



## Press release

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# The NHS has cut diagnostic waiting times and now needs to ensure services are as efficient as possible

The NHS in Scotland has significantly cut patients' waiting times for diagnostic tests through use of targeted additional government funding and changes to how it manages and delivers services.

An Audit Scotland report published today, *Review of NHS diagnostic services*, focuses on specific radiology, endoscopy and laboratory services, which provide more than 87 million procedures and tests a year at a cost of more than £280 million.

The report says that the number of patients waiting more than nine weeks for key tests has fallen from 10,638 in July 2006 to two patients in July 2008. NHS boards have achieved these reductions by using £50 million additional government funding and making longer-term improvements to how they provide services.

The report found that efficiency of diagnostic services varies across boards and there is scope for NHS boards to make better use of resources. It also found that the NHS needs better information to compare the efficiency of services across boards.

NHS boards are taking measures to improve patient experience of diagnostic services. Patients having endoscopy procedures are getting better quality of care and hospitals performed well in how quickly they carry out inpatient CT and MRI scans. But the time it takes to report radiology and laboratory test results varies across hospitals. NHS boards could do more to offer patients choice of appointment date and time.

Caroline Gardner, the Deputy Auditor General for Scotland, said: "Diagnostic services help patients get an accurate diagnosis and the right treatment. Delays mean patients have symptoms and are anxious for longer and treatments may be less effective.

"The NHS has significantly cut diagnostic waiting times. The challenge now is to continue to improve diagnostic services as the NHS faces shorter waiting times targets.

"A lot of money is spent on diagnostic services and the NHS needs to ensure efficiency of these high cost services".

**For further information please contact Simon Ebbett on 0131 625 1652 or Anne McCubbin on 0131 625 1653**

### Notes to editors

1. In the 2006/07 financial year, NHS laboratory services carried out 73 million clinical chemistry tests, around 13 million microbiology and haematology tests and almost a million histopathology blocks. The number of patients who had a CT, MRI or ultrasound test was almost 736,000 and the health service performed almost 168,000 endoscopy and cystoscopy procedures. The cost of £280 million does not include barium studies and endoscopy procedures.
2. In 2005 the then Scottish Executive introduced a national target to improve patients' access to diagnostic tests: from the end of 2007, patients should wait no longer than nine weeks for eight key radiology and endoscopy tests. The target was back by £50 million of extra government funding over three years to 2007/08. The eight key tests are magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computed tomography (CT), non-obstetric ultrasound, barium enema, upper gastrointestinal (GI) endoscopy, sigmoidoscopy, colonoscopy and cystoscopy. These cover about 75 per cent of patients on a waiting list for a diagnostic test.
3. The Scottish Government's new referral to treatment waiting time target says that, by the end of 2011, the time between referral and a patient starting treatment should be no longer than 18 weeks. This target covers

all stages of a patient's care including diagnostic tests and will effectively replace existing targets relating to different parts of NHS services.

4. In 2007, the Scottish Executive changed its name to the Scottish Government. Where appropriate, the report refers to the Scottish Executive rather than the current Scottish Government.
5. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 can be found on Audit Scotland's website [www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)
6. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland.
7. The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Government and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament.