

**Address:**  
110 George Street  
Edinburgh EH2 4LH

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

**Telephone:**  
0845 146 1010

**Email:**  
[info@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:info@audit-scotland.gov.uk)

## News release

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### Recent improvement but the NHS in Scotland still faces challenges achieving the A&E waiting times target

**Performance against the four-hour accident and emergency (A&E) waiting times target has deteriorated since Audit Scotland previously reported on A&E departments. The number of patients who waited longer than four hours increased from around 36,000 in 2008/09 to around 104,000 in 2012/13, although performance improved during 2013.**

The Audit Scotland report, Accident and Emergency Performance Update, which is published today, reports on the NHS in Scotland's performance against the A&E waiting times target and looks at why patients are waiting longer than the four-hour target.

The report says:

- Although performance against the A&E waiting times target is not as good as when last reported, it has improved in recent months. In December 2013, more patients were seen within four hours compared with the previous December. However, performance against the A&E target varies considerably between A&E departments and many face challenges meeting the 95 per cent target.
- A&E departments are part of a complex health and social care system and a lot of factors can lead to patients being delayed. These include staffing pressures, and hospital beds not being available at the time when A&E patients need to be admitted.
- The Scottish Government launched the National Unscheduled Care Action Plan in February 2013. It is too early to comment on the impact of the Action Plan, but the Scottish Government and NHS boards are taking steps to address some of the causes of delays in A&E.

#### **Auditor General for Scotland Caroline Gardner said:**

"A&E departments provide a really important service in assessing and treating patients with serious injury and illness. Maintaining good performance in A&E was one of the Scottish Government's key objectives in 2013/14.

"Delays in A&E can be a sign of pressure across health and social care. While there has been improvement in performance, such as the progress made in tackling the longest waits in A&E, performance against the target still remains lower than it was when we last reported.

"It is important that the Scottish Government and NHS boards build on their whole system work and continue to reduce delays for A&E patients."

Today's report recommends that the Scottish Government shares good practice on initiatives that can help improve performance and therefore improve the experience for patients.

Ends

**For further information contact Susan Lumsden Tel: 0131 625 1648 [slumsden@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:slumsden@audit-scotland.gov.uk) or Kirsty Gibbins Tel: 0131 625 1658 [kgibbins@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:kgibbins@audit-scotland.gov.uk)**

## **Notes to editors**

1. This audit, Accident and Emergency: performance update, provides an update on our 2010 Emergency Department report. It comments on how NHS boards have been performing in this area, the main reasons for delays in A&E departments and what the Scottish Government has done to improve performance.
2. The Scottish Government set the standard that, by the end of 2007, 98 per cent of patients in A&E departments and Minor Injury Units should wait no longer than four hours from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge. In April 2013, the Scottish Government introduced a new interim target of 95 per cent being treated within four hours by year ending September 2014.
3. The Scottish Government launched the National Unscheduled Care Action Plan in February 2013, supported by planned funding from the Scottish Government and NHS boards of £50 million over three years.
4. There are 31 A&E departments in Scotland and 64 Minor Injury Units where patients are treated for less serious, but urgent, injuries.
5. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at [www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk).
6. The Auditor General appoints auditors to Scotland's central government and NHS bodies; examines how public bodies spend public money; helps them to manage their finances to the highest standards; and checks whether they achieve value for money. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament.
7. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission for Scotland.