

The levels of unmet surgical need

There are various steps – or hoops – people need to pass through in order to get booked for elective surgery in the public system. At each stage, a number of people do not pass through. Each subset is a smaller group than the total number – those who have seen a GP and need elective surgery.

GP – even if a GP agrees that a patient may benefit from elective surgery, many do not get referred to a specialist because the GP knows from experience that they won't meet the threshold to get their operation. So only a percentage of these get to the next stage – referred by GP to specialist.

Specialist – Those referred for first specialist assessment may not be accepted. Some are returned back to the GP, or have their assessment delayed. Even where the Specialist recommends surgery, they know that the maximum wait time is four months. This means the waiting list at any time only has capacity for four months' worth of patients (about a third of total annual elective volumes). The others are in limbo.

How the numbers add up:

How many are waiting at each stage

