

Alternative choice – FAQs

How long will the process take?

In the majority of cases, the patient should be told if a new provider has been found or not within eight weeks of starting the process.

If a patient is not clinically appropriate to move they should be told within three weeks.

If an alternative provider is not identified, the patient will be informed and will remain on the waiting list with their original provider.

Who is responsible for informing the patient they could be eligible to switch provider?

The NHS trust or independent sector provider who is currently overseeing the patient's care is responsible for contacting those eligible.

If the patient's request progresses, it is the responsibility of the ICB to try and find an alternative hospital appropriate for the patient.

What happens to a patient's position in the original waiting list if they decide to explore their options?

The patient's position on their current waiting list will not be impacted if a new provider isn't identified.

When will other patients on the waiting list be offered an opportunity to switch provider?

We are currently inviting patients waiting over 40 weeks and we will continually be reviewing progress.

Can all patients waiting for treatment over 40 weeks change their provider?

Not all patients waiting over 40 weeks will be invited to request to move provider. Patients who have been waiting over 40 weeks and have an appointment date within the next 8 weeks will not be included as it will be quicker for them to remain with their current hospital.

In addition, there may be some patients whose clinical condition means that it would not be appropriate to move provider. This is particularly relevant to patients whose condition is clinically complex.

This offer only relates to patients on a consultant led RTT elective pathway.

How will patients' details be shared with other providers?

As part of the process patients will agree to share their details.

Are under 18s eligible for this offer?

No.

If a patient who has been waiting over 40 weeks chooses to go to a different provider will they be entitled to expenses for travel and accommodation?

There is the existing [NHS Travel Reimbursement Scheme](#) which can be utilised.

We have also asked ICBs to ensure that the longest waiting patients who are prepared to travel beyond their local hospitals to receive earlier treatment are not disadvantaged based on their personal circumstances. Each individual will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

After the first outpatient appointment is a patient transferred back to their local NHS trust?

No, the patient will be under the care of the chosen provider throughout their whole pathway of care until they are discharged. This includes any subsequent appointments or treatment.

When a patient receives the communication is there a time limit for them to respond in?

No. Some patients may respond immediately - others may take weeks to decide that they wish to opt in. There are no restrictions.

If an independent sector hospital takes forward a patient's care will there be an additional cost?

There will be no additional cost to the NHS or the patient if they are transferred to an independent sector provider.

How will those patients who are not digitally enabled be supported?

A telephone assistance line will be provided in any direct communication to eligible patients.

Can't patients already change provider if they've been waiting over 18 weeks for treatment?

If a patient has been waiting over 18 weeks, they have the right to request to move provider.

If a patient has been waiting over 26 weeks, it is the responsibility of the ICB to make every effort to identify an alternative provider to enable the patient to receive earlier treatment.

This announcement relates to patients who have been waiting over 40 weeks, and meet the eligibility criteria, as they will now be contacted proactively and asked if they would like to move provider if one with a shorter waiting time can be found.

How many patients are expected to be part of this cohort? How many people will be contacted from 31 October?

Nationally around 400,000 people have been waiting over 40 weeks and do not have an appointment in the next eight weeks. They will be contacted from 31st October. Experience from previous workstreams around patient choice, and from information seen at the pilot sites, we know the vast majority of patients will want to remain with their local hospital.

How will the system find capacity when it is already overstretched?

As we work to reduce the elective backlog and ensure the longest waiting patients get the treatment they need, some patients may be able to be seen sooner if they are willing to travel to a suitable alternative provider.

Does this mean patients with complex clinical needs will be waiting even longer?

No.

Will this mean most of these patients are moved to independent sector providers?

No. Both NHS Trusts and independent sector providers will be able to accept transferred patients.

Will patients who are moved to a new provider be prioritised over patients already on that provider's waiting list?

Hospitals will only offer to take forward a patient's care if they can see them within four weeks. They will not be prioritised over someone already on that hospital's waiting list unless there is a clinical need.

What is the definition of clinically appropriate? Will this be consistent across Trusts?

Where appropriate, clinical decisions will be made on whether the patient is suitable to be seen at an alternative provider for treatment. There are a number of factors that will need to be considered and this will therefore always be based on the individual's circumstance and condition.

How will patients be contacted to be invited?

Patients will be contacted directly by text message, letter, or email.

Will there be guidance or support for patients to help make their decision?

If an offer is made to the patient for a suitable alternative hospital, they can use trusted NHS websites to carry out research before making a decision.

Can patients specify which provider they would like to move to?

Patients can't specify a hospital they would like to go to. They will only be given an option to choose if they are offered more than one hospital as part of the process.

If a patient thinks they should have been contacted, but hasn't been, what should they do?

Hospitals have gone through their waiting list to identify and contact all eligible patients. Please do not contact your hospital.