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An analysis of NHS performance in England in recent summers

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# Introduction

This summer, England witnessed high temperatures and long stretches of hot weather. Although for many this was welcome, for others, such as those living with long-term conditions or multiple medical problems, the reality was a summer where additional support was required for illness exacerbated by heat, particularly those more at risk such as socially isolated or older people. We set out to assess whether these support needs were associated with additional pressures put on the NHS in England this summer.

# Methodology

To assess the extent of increased pressures on the NHS in England this summer, we selected a number of indicators which are closely related to immediate patient need; performance against the A&E four-hour waiting time target; time spent waiting for a bed following the decision to admit; and the number of beds available overnight in hospital. We compared data from a four-month period this summer (May, June, July, August), with figures from the same four-month period from the previous four summers



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## Increased waits for those who need to be admitted

Not only are people waiting longer than in previous summers to be assessed at Emergency Departments, the data also shows that during summer, more patients are suffering long delays before being given a bed in the hospital, after a decision to admit them. These delays, known as 'trolley waits', can risk patient safety, as these patients have been assessed as being so unwell that they require inpatient treatment, but due to a lack of beds, are forced to wait for long periods in A&E. Our analysis shows that this summer, more than 150,000 people waited for more than four hours to be admitted, a 137% increase since summer 2014. In addition, over 500 people waited for more than 12 hours, a more than 10-fold increase since summer 2014. This indicates a worrying trend, with the highest numbers of people waiting in any summer period. As the population continues to grow and age, this challenge is likely to be

(May-August)

During 2014-15, 150,000 people waited for more than 4 hours to be admitted to hospital, a 137% increase since 2013-14.

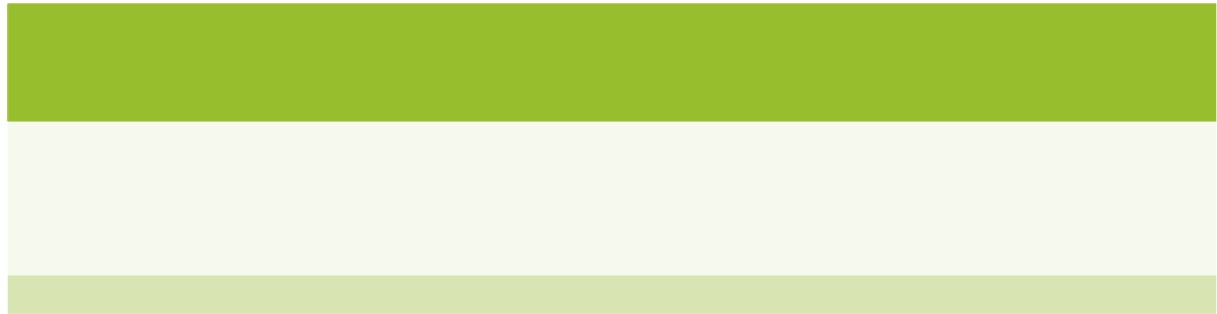
admission waits for more than 4 hours increased by 137% since 2013-14

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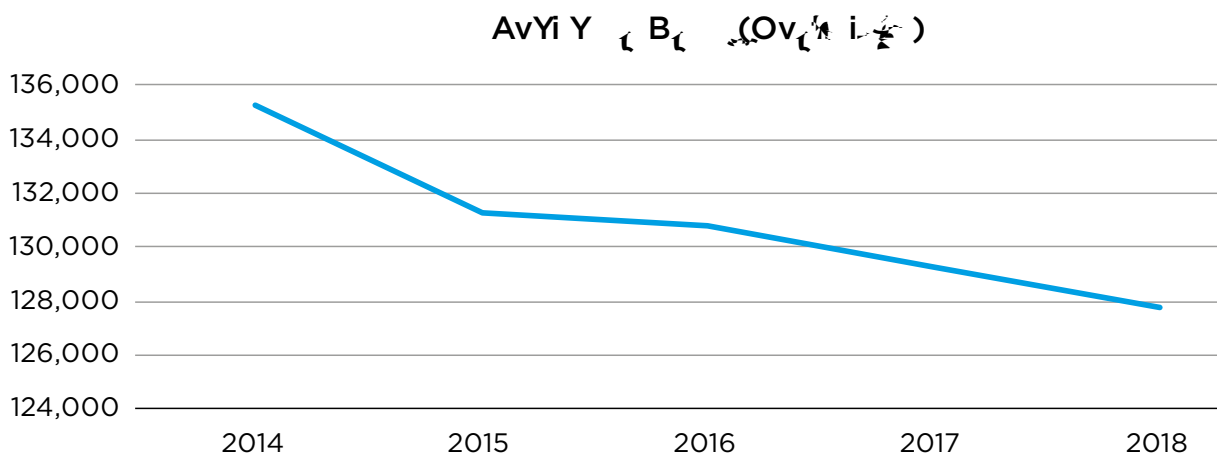
It is important to note that over the five summers analysed, the total number of admissions to hospitals has increased, but even when the number of patients waiting more than four hours for a bed following a decision to admit is expressed as a percentage of total numbers admitted, there has still been a significant increase over the past five summers.



[NHS England, A&E Attendances and Emergency Admissions 2018-19]

## Decreasing availability of beds for those who need inpatient support

Following increased waits to get assessed and to be admitted, health care professionals are also faced with a reducing number of available beds overnight<sup>4</sup>. When fewer beds are available, thresholds for admitting patients may rise, meaning that people who would ordinarily be admitted may be turned away. Alternatively, pressure may be placed on nursing staff within the wider multi-disciplinary team, to discharge those already in beds, or to find beds out of area, or in the private sector, thereby risking additional costs, in order to accommodate patients. Since 2010, the amount of beds available overnight has fallen by more than 10%.<sup>5</sup>



| Year | Available Beds<br>(Quarter 1) | Available Beds<br>(Quarter 2) | Available Beds<br>(Quarter 1 and Quarter 2) |
|------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| 2014 | 135,754                       | 134,753                       | 135,254                                     |
| 2015 | 131,812                       | 130,619                       | 131,215                                     |
| 2016 | 131,282                       | 129,972                       | 130,627                                     |
| 2017 | 130,297                       | 128,139                       | 129,218                                     |
| 2018 | 128,448                       | 127,305                       | 127,876                                     |

*[NHS England, Bed Availability and Occupancy Data – Overnight]*



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[Joint with 2006, 2003 and 1976]

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<sup>4</sup> Note: NHS England releases bed occupancy data on a quarterly basis. This data, therefore, reflects an average of Quarter One (April – June) and Quarter Two (July – September) statistics as to include all of the summer months.

<sup>5</sup> NHS England, Bed Availability and Occupancy Data – Overnight



