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## **Factsheet: Supporting early diagnosis of cancer by addressing local variation in outcomes**

Cancer outcomes in England are poor when compared with the rest of Europe. The main gap on a national basis is present in one year survival, suggesting late stage diagnosis.

Cancer incidence is also continuing to increase by about 4 percent per annum<sup>1</sup> and this growth will put continuing pressure on cancer services capacity unless we can find a more sustainable approach to managing cancer.

Success in delivering early diagnosis (and cancer prevention) is likely to be dependent on CCGs working in partnership across the whole healthcare system, with Area Teams, Strategic Clinical Networks and through Health and Wellbeing Boards with Local Authorities, to ensure a joined up approach to early diagnosis. Early diagnosis strategies are likely to be most effective when combined with a comprehensive prevention strategy across local communities, which supports practices to take action on the key avoidable causes of cancer – tobacco, alcohol, poor diet, physical inactivity and obesity.

A key suggested action that commissioners can take, in partnership with NHS England's Area Teams and Strategic Clinical Networks, is to understand the variance in performance of local practices in terms of referral patterns, screening participation rates, and outcomes for people with cancer. Whilst CCGs are not responsible for commissioning primary care, the geographical area covered by Area Teams and Strategic Clinical Networks in such that it is likely to prove difficult for them to support improvements in outcomes at individual practice level. CCGs may be able to identify those practices locally with the poorest outcomes from cancer, which can derive from a complex range of factors, including demographic and social factors and to work with them to understand the reasons for variance.

There is a wealth of information produced in relation to cancer services which commissioners can use to understand how local services are performing.

- Further information about local cancer statistics can be accessed on the Cancer Research UK website [here](#).
- Detailed local profiles (currently by PCT area) are published detailing cancer commissioning outcomes [here](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health (2011) *Improving outcomes: A Strategy for Cancer* [pdf] Available from: [www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/breastscreen/improving-outcomes0strategy-for-cancer.pdf](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/breastscreen/improving-outcomes0strategy-for-cancer.pdf) [Accessed on September 2013]

- [GP practice profiles](#)

Tools such as practice profiles, mapped to CCGs from 2012 onwards, can also show areas where there is significant variation in referral practices and access to diagnostics, and commissioners, can support early diagnosis by actively engaging with their member practices and supporting them to understand this variation and address it where it is unwarranted. Commissioners can also work with local practices to ensure they are aware of resources such as Risk Assessment Tools and Significant Event Audits that can help manage suspected cases of cancer, and support them to use these effectively. There is an emerging evidence base showing the positive impact use of these kinds of tools can have on two week wait referral conversion and cancer detection rates.

Resources and NICE guidance for cancer by topic can be found [here](#).

#### **Additional resources to support early diagnosis**

- [Self-assessment of bowel cancer risk](#)
- [Self-assessment of inherited breast or ovarian cancer](#)