

£250 million in NHS technology to modernise diagnostics

- Government injects nearly £250 million to digitise diagnostics care across the NHS using the latest technology
- Funding will allow hospital labs to share patient results, tests and scans more easily and quickly between different hospitals and doctors, reducing the time it takes to diagnose a health problem
- It aims to drive up efficiency by saving staff time, and comes as part of the government's ambition to tackle waiting lists and speed up routine treatment for patients

The NHS will receive £248 million over the next year to invest in technology that will deliver more diagnostic tests, checks and scans to help provide faster diagnosis of a health condition, earlier treatment and reduce waiting lists.

The investment will reduce the administrative burden on NHS staff so they can analyse more tests, checks and scans while also reducing the turnaround time from a patient taking a test to receiving a diagnosis and then starting treatment.

Diagnostics services across the NHS will be digitalised using the latest technology to improve the way tests, images and results can be shared across computer systems in hospitals, labs and GP surgeries. It means the nurses, doctors and other clinicians caring for a patient can access these results more quickly and easily, even if they are working from different settings.

The new technology will allow imaging specialists – the experts analysing a scan or x-ray and providing a diagnosis – to review high-res images remotely without needing to be in an imaging lab, 24 hours a day.

The funding will also provide a new tool to help GPs and other clinicians choose the most suitable scan for their patient based on the patient's symptoms and medical history. This will cut inappropriate requests made to radiology departments, saving radiologists' time and ensuring patients get the right scans at the right time.

It follows the recommendations from Professor Sir Mike Richards' independent review of NHS diagnostics capacity showing improving digitisation should be prioritised to drive efficiency and deliver seamless care.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Today's multi-million pound investment will play a big role in levelling up diagnostics services across the country so patients can get faster results and healthcare professionals can get their job done more easily, reducing unnecessary administrative burden and making every taxpayer's pound count.

Getting a faster diagnosis for a health condition is the first step to getting more people the treatment they need and earlier on, and our funding will help ensure our NHS has access to the latest digital technology to drive up efficiency.

Professor Stephen Powis, NHS medical director, said:

The NHS is facing a winter like no other with rising cases of COVID and flu as well as record demand for emergency services, all while we continue to deliver the biggest vaccination programme in health service history, including rolling out booster jabs for the most vulnerable.

However, NHS staff are making efficient use of additional funding and following the recent rollout of new diagnostic centres, the number of patients waiting for a diagnostic test is falling for the first time in a year, meaning more people are getting the checks they need and if required, are able to begin treatment sooner.

Diagnostic tests are used to confirm or rule out health conditions and disease and over 1.5 billion diagnostic tests are carried out in England every year. They are crucial to providing early diagnosis, screening and monitoring of long-term conditions and are often the first step to understanding the right care and treatment for a patient. Recovering diagnostics services is vital to recovering the overall NHS backlog and reducing waiting times for cancer services and other treatments.

Today's announcement follows the £2.3 billion investment announced at the latest Spending Review over the next three years to transform diagnostic services with at least 100 community diagnostic centres across England – helping millions of patients access earlier diagnostic tests closer to home.

GPs can refer patients to these new one-stop-shops for patients to access life-saving checks, scans and tests more quickly, leading to faster diagnosis and treatment. The centres will be staffed by a multi-disciplinary team of staff including nurses and radiographers and are open seven days a week.

The government has provided record funding this year, and will continue to do so over the next three years through the health and care levy.

To go further faster and increase efficiency government has set out its ambition for the NHS to find innovate ways of working which make every taxpayer's penny count through new technology which speeds up diagnosis, or surgical robots to help deliver more complex surgery with faster recovery times.