

Worried & Waiting: One Year On

A review of paediatric waiting times in Scotland

21 March 2025



In March 2024, we published our Worried and Waiting report on paediatric waiting times in Scotland from October 2012 to September 2023.

This report highlighted the need to adopt a holistic approach towards caring for children, encompassing greater support across all levels including primary care, paediatric care, education settings and community services.

One year on, we are examining paediatric waiting times from September 2023 to September 2024. I'm relieved to see there has been a 16% decrease in ongoing paediatric waits, as I am well aware of the severe consequences prolonged waits have on children and young people. Last year we called for bold action to improve waiting times and access to services. Our recommendations to Scottish Government are yet to be taken forward and despite the paediatric workforce's best efforts to reduce waiting times, children and young people are still left worried and waiting.

Dr Mairi Stark, RCPCH Scotland Officer

Key data



The total number of ongoing paediatric waits in September 2024 (latest data) was 8,839, a decrease from 10,512 in September 2023.



The number of ongoing waits for up to 12 weeks have remained constant.



The proportion of ongoing waits that are over 12 weeks were 48.9% of total ongoing waits in September 2023, compared with 39% in September 2024.

Recommendations

Investing in early support and intervention for children and young people (CYP) is economically, socially, and educationally beneficial for both CYP and society. Allocating resources to support CYP during their formative years leads to better health and educational outcomes, significantly reducing the likelihood of conditions worsening or becoming more challenging to manage in adulthood. This proactive approach ultimately saves on the higher costs associated with health and social services later in life.

Our recommendations from **Worried and Waiting 2024** remain unchanged and have become increasingly urgent. It is imperative that paediatric services become a priority for the Scottish Government to make substantial improvements in waiting times, enhance the experience of CYP accessing services, and ensure they receive timely and effective care.

Recommendation 1: The Child Health Workforce

A full review of the child health workforce must be carried out to ensure it is sufficiently resourced and funded to tackle waiting times.

Recommendation 2: Data Collection

Improvement in the collection and utilisation of child health data which must include implementing monthly data collection for paediatric community health services across all health boards.

Recommendation 3: Access to Services

Improved access to and funding of primary care and cross-sector community-based services, resources and advice for children, young people and families to support their health and wellbeing.

[Our full recommendations can be found here.](#)

“Lots of anxiety from not having any answers, started having panic attacks. I need support.”

Young person, RCPCH &Us Voice Bank 2025

Scottish waiting times data

This briefing considers comparable paediatric data from the period of September 2023 to September 2024. The data records waits for paediatric patients and includes outpatients,

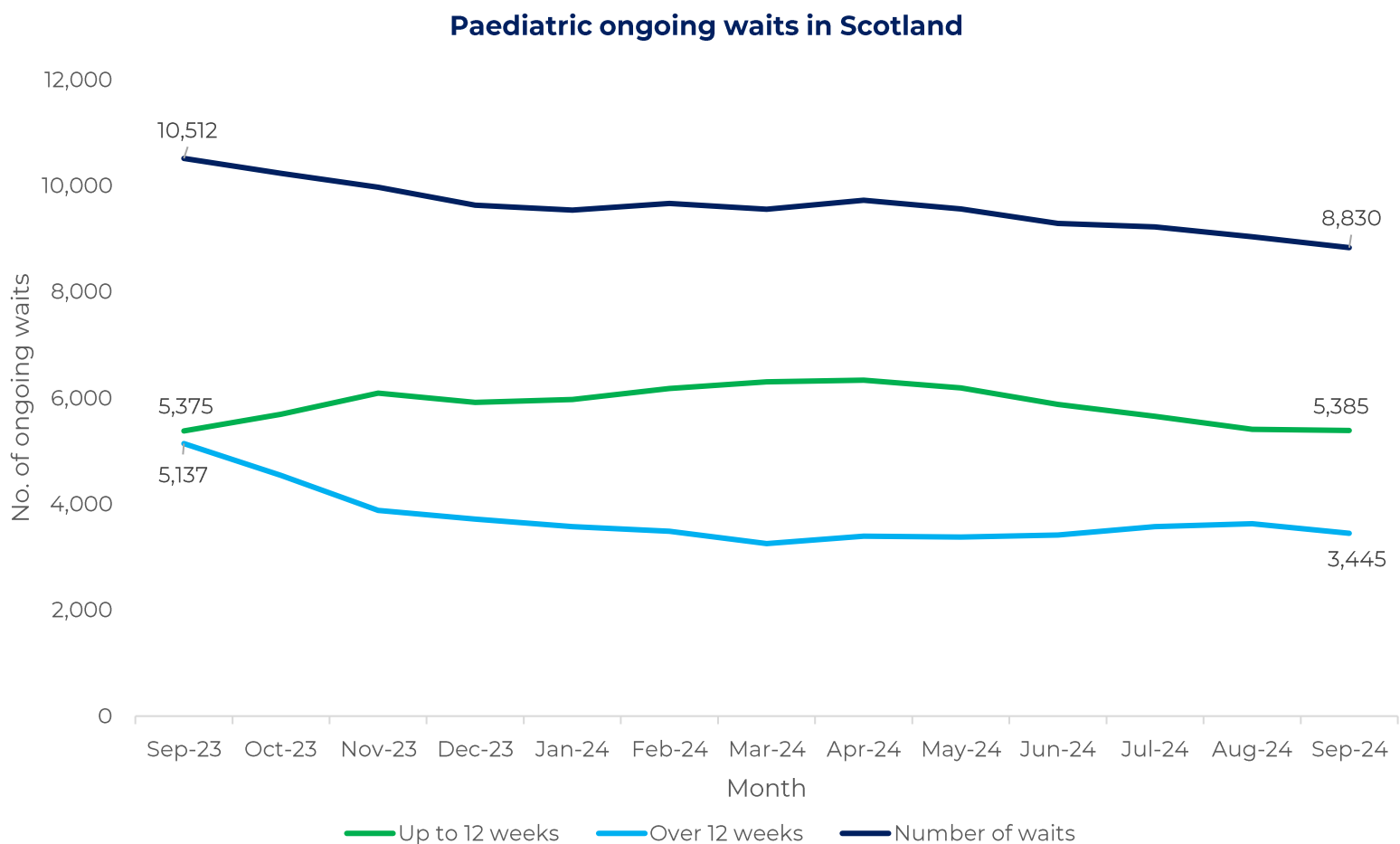
inpatients, and day cases for each month.¹ This does not include data from paediatric surgery, cardiology, dentistry, ENT, or CAMHS.

Paediatric ongoing waits

The overall number of ongoing waits for outpatient, inpatient and day cases² in Scotland in September 2024 was 8,830, compared to 10,512 in September 2023. This constitutes a decrease of 16%.

While the ongoing waits for up to 12 weeks have remained constant (5,375 in September 2023 and 5,385 in September 2024, a percentage change of 0.2%), the number of ongoing waits of over 12 weeks have decreased by 32.9% (5,137 in September 2023 compared with 3,445 in September 2024).

The data is grouped by patients that have been waiting for up to 12 weeks, patients that have been waiting for over 12 weeks, and the total number of waits.



¹ The data used for this report includes outpatients, inpatients, and day cases for each month. However, inpatient and day cases make up 1% or less of the cases each month.

² Public Health Scotland, ongoing inpatient, day case and outpatient stage of treatment waiting times at health board and Scotland level, broken down by specialty. <https://www.opendata.nhs.scot/dataset/stage-of-treatment-waiting-times/resource/5816ec92-66bf-4033-ae55-9df45ff19d49>

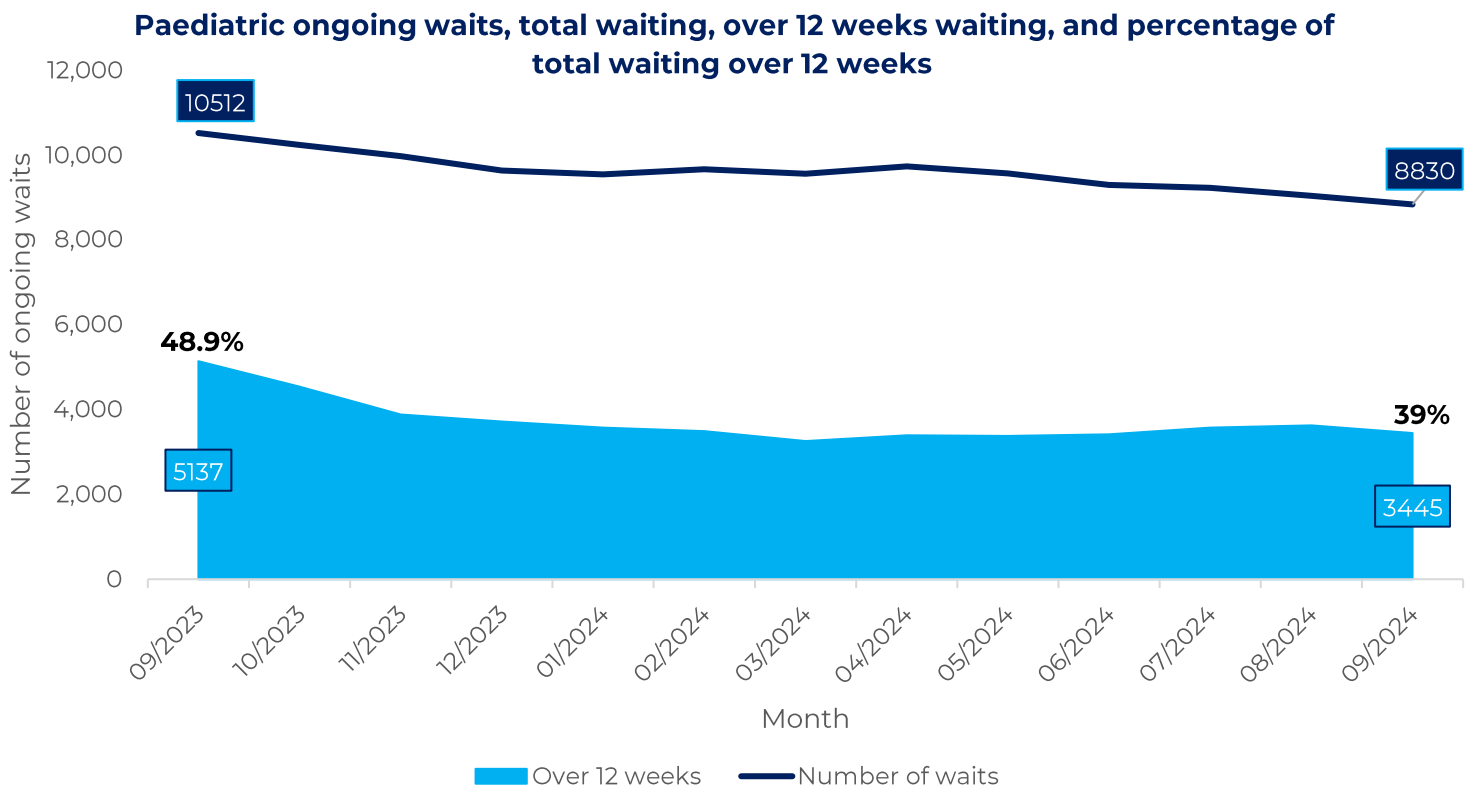
“Despite the clear feedback from our members and the children and young people we engaged with which highlighted the urgent need for significant improvements, we find ourselves in a similar position one year later, with overall waits still unacceptably high. We urge the Scottish Government to take immediate action and implement a bespoke child health workforce strategy to create sustainable, long-term change for the children of Scotland.”

Dr Mairi Stark, RCPCH Scotland Officer

Paediatric waits over 12 weeks

This chart focuses on the children and young people waiting over 12 weeks³ and looks at this in conjunction with the total number of waits. The proportion of ongoing waits over 12 weeks constituted 48.9% of total ongoing waits in September 2023, compared with 39% in September 2024.

There are still 3,445 ongoing waits over 12 weeks for paediatrics and while it is encouraging that there has been a 32.9% decrease, it is still incredibly worrying that a year on from our last report, there has been insufficient progress to significantly reduce waits over 12 weeks.



³ The standard target for Scotland states that 95% of new outpatients should wait no longer than 12 weeks from referral to being seen.

“While I am heartened by the progress we have made and the improvements in our services, it remains troubling that 39% of young people are still waiting over 12 weeks for care. The dedication and hard work of the paediatric workforce have been truly remarkable in driving these positive changes. But the existing workforce is already working at capacity or beyond and achieving any real change without additional investment is likely to remain elusive. It is imperative that the Scottish Government takes all necessary measures to invest in the service with an aim to reduce waiting times and provide timely access to care for every child and young person.”

Dr Rebecca Goldman, RCPCH Deputy Scottish Officer

“It’s important to manage expectations; we were told 6-8 weeks for the referral - it took 10 months.”

Parent / Carer, RCPCH &Us Voice Bank 2025

Paediatric waits over 12 weeks by Health Board

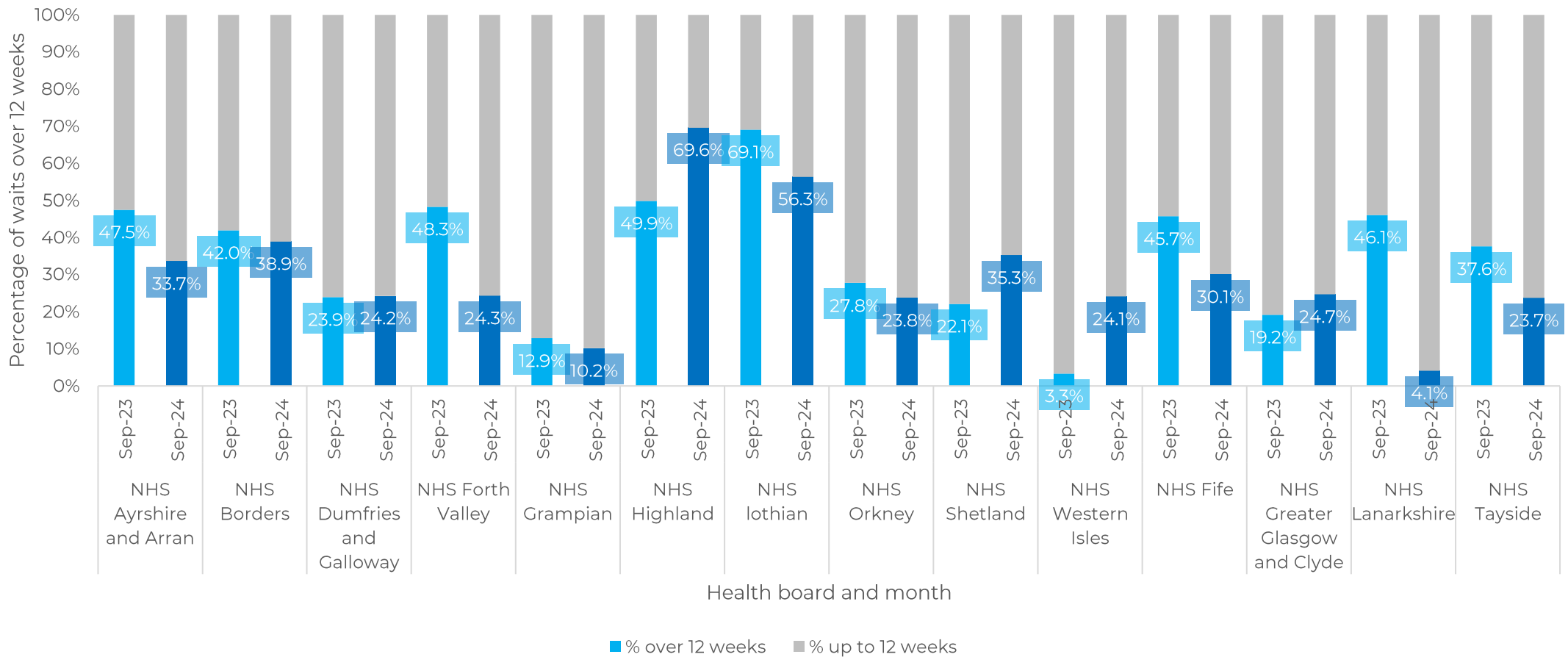
It is promising that over half of health boards have seen a decrease in waits over 12 weeks, with some even seeing significant reductions. This is not the picture across the country, however, as the proportion of waits over 12 weeks increased in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, NHS Highland, NHS Shetland, and NHS Western Isles.

Positive changes aside, it is very concerning that the number of health boards achieving the national standard rate in September 2024, was still only 1 out of 14. In September 2023, NHS Western Isles was the only health board achieving the national standard, while NHS Lanarkshire was the only one achieving it in September 2024.

“It’s been very difficult and has affected my mental health. I’ve not been in school for a few months now and have not been able to go out or meet with friends.”

Young person, RCPCH &Us Voice Bank 2025

Percentage of ongoing waits for over 12 weeks, September 2023 and September 2024



“Historically, we have managed waiting times for children well, but the current crisis in national waiting times has developed over many years. With significant government support and investment, we can improve waiting times and enhance services for children and young people. Early intervention and support benefit not only the child and family in the present, but they also lead to healthier, happier, and more productive adults in the future.”

Dr Gavin Cobb, RCPCH Deputy Scottish Officer

“It’s taken so long I can’t remember if it’s been 2 or 3 years now.”

Young person, RCPCH &Us Voice Bank 2025

About RCPCH

The **Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH)** is the membership body for paediatricians, representing more than 24,000 child health professionals in the UK and abroad. We are responsible for the training, examinations and professional standards of paediatricians across the country, and we use our research and experience to develop recommendations to promote better child health outcomes.

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