

Report

# Attitudes to Hospital Waiting Times and Treatment

Public understanding and experience of NHS patient choices in England in 2020 & 2022

Your Health • Your Choice • Choose Well



Attribution requirements: page 15

© Copyright Health Compare © www.healthcompare.co.uk

[Get Started >](#)



# Contents

03 Introduction

---

05 Hospital Choice

---

08 Referrals

---

10 Waiting Times

---

12 Travelling For Treatment

---

14 Supporting A Loved One

---

15 About Health Compare

---





## Introduction

Since its introduction in 2009, the NHS Constitution for England has provided a core set of principles and values that establish rights for patients and pledges that the NHS is committed to achieving, so that it operates fairly and effectively.

One of these principles is that the NHS works across a wide range of organisational boundaries to ensure public access to health services that deliver improvements in health and wellbeing. To deliver on this principle, the NHS pledges to inform patients about available healthcare services locally and nationally, and most people living in England have the right to access certain services within maximum waiting times, or the right to access a range of suitable alternatives if this is not possible.

The mechanism for achieving this principle involves the 'money' – NHS funding – for a consultation and specialist treatment with a hospital doctor following the patient,



rather than being tied to any one organisation or area of the country. In practice, and alongside the patient right to choice, this means that in most circumstances you can choose to go to any hospital offering NHS-funded treatment, locally or nationally, for your first elective (non-emergency) care outpatient appointment with a specialist.

In early 2020, we surveyed the public to understand their level of knowledge of this right to choose and followed this up with a repeat survey in Spring 2022\*. Adults across England were asked about their experience and knowledge of patient choice and about what mattered to them when choosing a hospital. The 2022 results are outlined in this report, together with some key comparisons from the 2020 survey.

\*One Poll Survey of 2,000 adults conducted February 2020 and end of April 2022.



Our 2022 survey reveals a persistent and significant lack of awareness of people's legal right to choose a hospital, and their right to choose from hospitals across England, including private hospitals that offer NHS treatment.

This last point is important because waiting times at private hospitals in England are often lower and the majority now offer NHS-funded treatment at no extra cost to the patient. But this isn't widely known or talked about.

In this year's survey, over two thirds of adults from households with an annual income of up to £35,000 were unaware that they can ask for non-emergency treatment at a private hospital, funded by the NHS, rather than necessarily just an NHS hospital.

The new survey also revealed a sharp decline since our 2020 survey in the number of people who said they had been offered a choice of hospital during their most recent hospital referral by their GP, including the choice of either an NHS or private hospital.

Waiting time was cited as the top 'very important' reason for choosing a hospital by respondents - more important than a GP's recommendation, user ratings and travel time. In fact, 61% of people said they would travel an average of 86 miles further than their local hospital if they were offered NHS treatment elsewhere sooner.

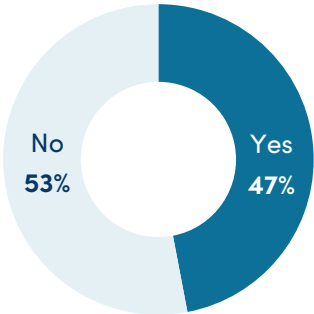
Our key takeaway from this research, at a time when millions remain on NHS waiting lists and waiting times vary significantly across the country, is that many people are willing to travel further to be treated faster, but they don't know that this is an option and have limited access to information on alternative providers.

We believe this report and the Health Compare platform can help to support future conversations about patient choice and enable people across the country to compare and choose health services based on what's right for them.

Andrew Burgess **Chief Executive**

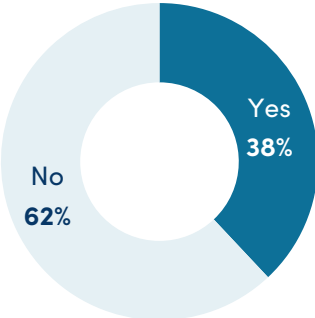


# Hospital Choice



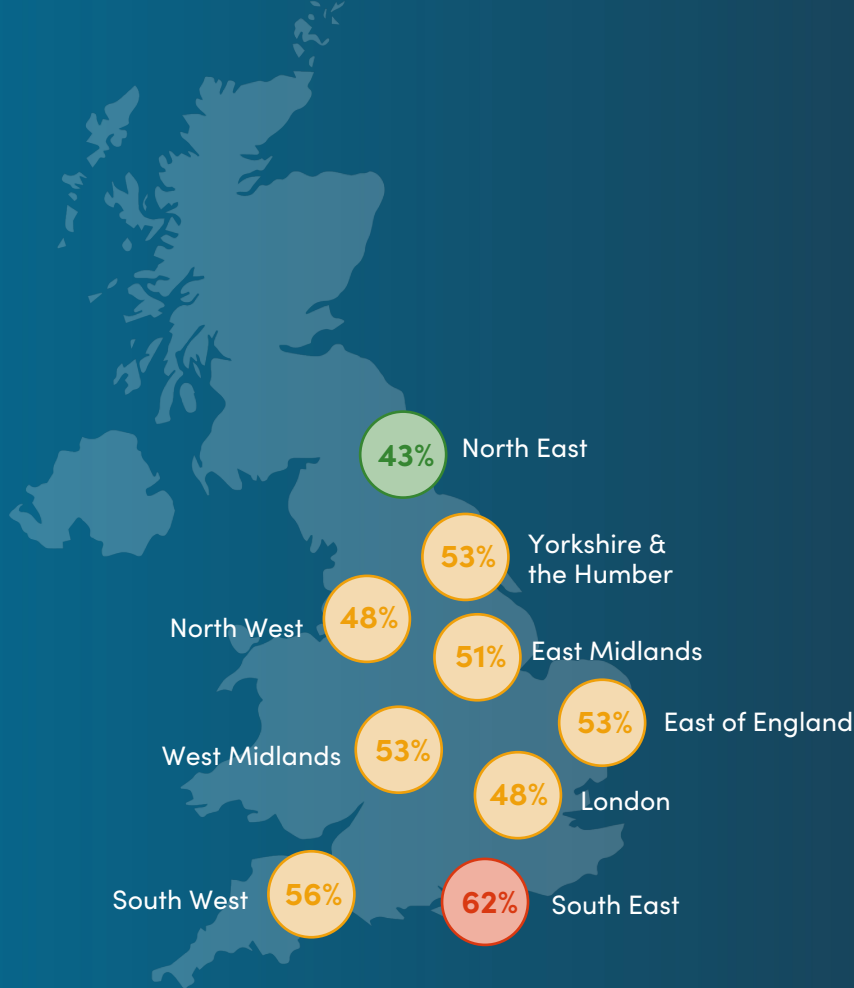
Q. Before taking this survey, did you know that you have the legal **right to choose** which hospital to have your NHS (non-emergency) treatment at?

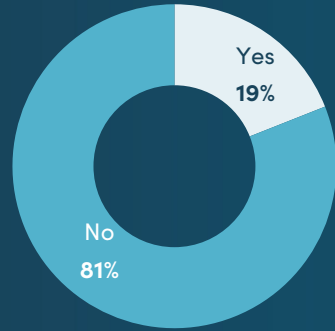
Q. Did you know you can **choose the hospital** to have your NHS treatment at **from hospitals across England**?



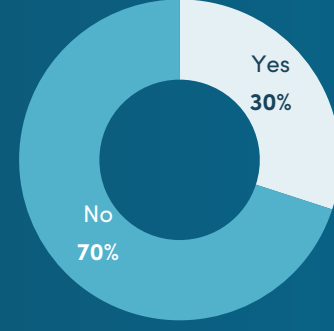
# Regional awareness of the right to choose a hospital

This map shows the % of adults who were **not aware of their right to choose** a hospital for NHS treatment. Highest lack of awareness (62%) in the south-east; lowest (43%) in the north-east of England





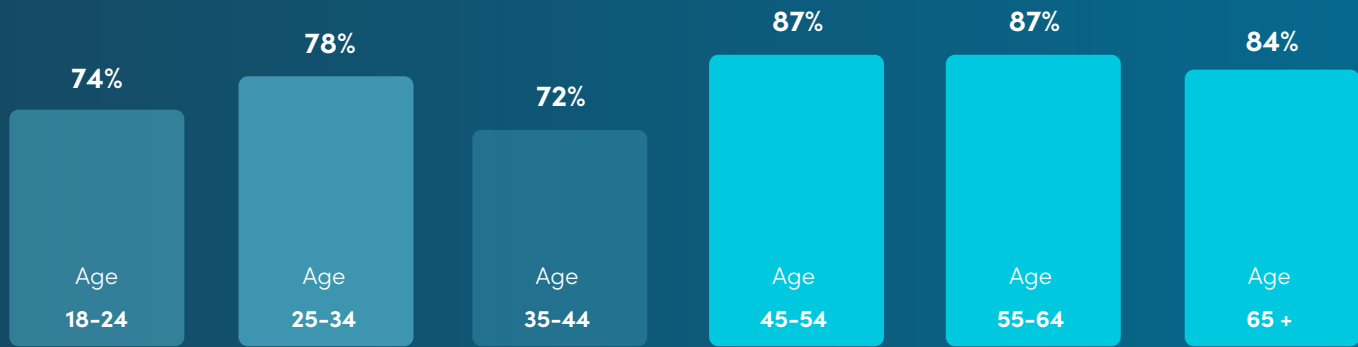
Q. Did you know that after you've chosen where to have your NHS treatment, you have the legal right **to change hospitals** if you have been waiting for **more than 18 weeks** for your treatment to begin?



Q. Did you know that your legal right to **choose a hospital** includes private hospitals that offer NHS treatment at no extra cost to the taxpayer?

## Lack of awareness, by age, of the right to change hospital after waiting 18 weeks

There is a high lack of awareness in all age groups, with the highest % in those aged 45+

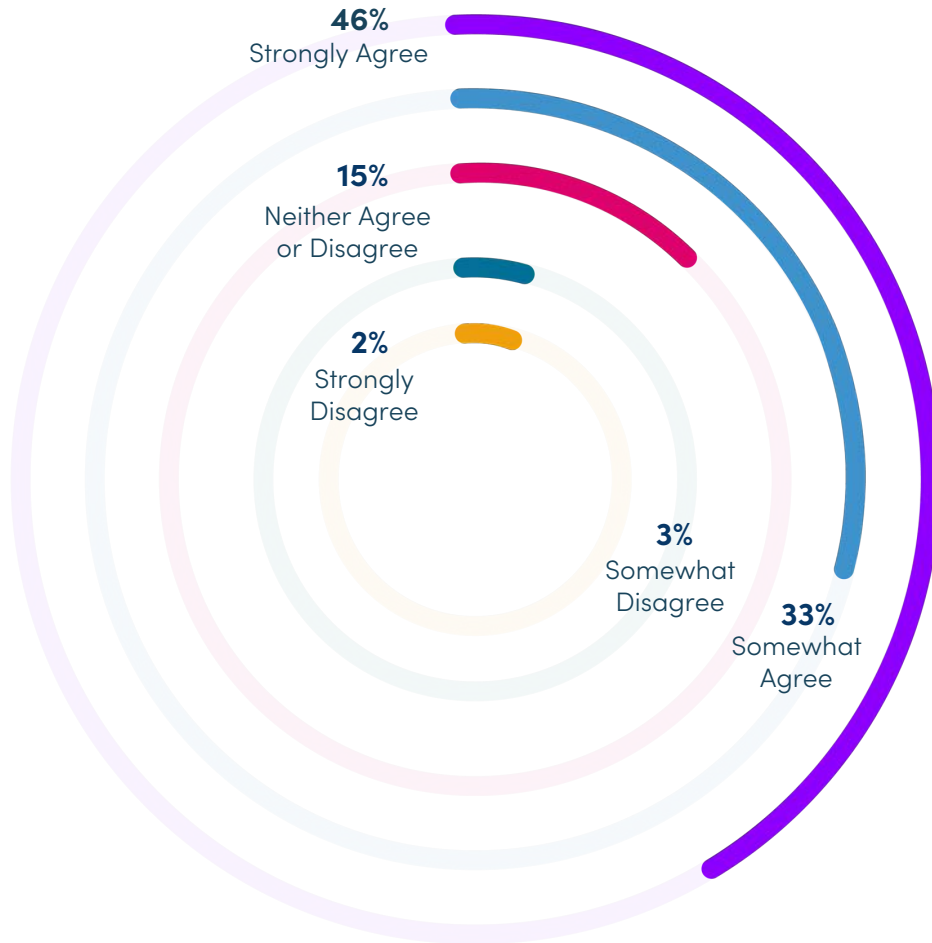


74% aged under 45

86% aged over 45

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

'I think it's a **good thing** that patients have a **legal right to choose** to have their NHS treatment at either an NHS or private hospital **at no extra cost** to the taxpayer'



79% Agree

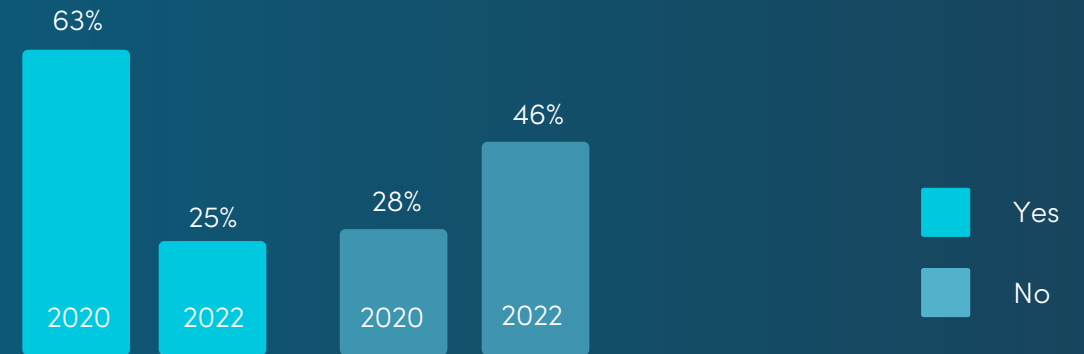




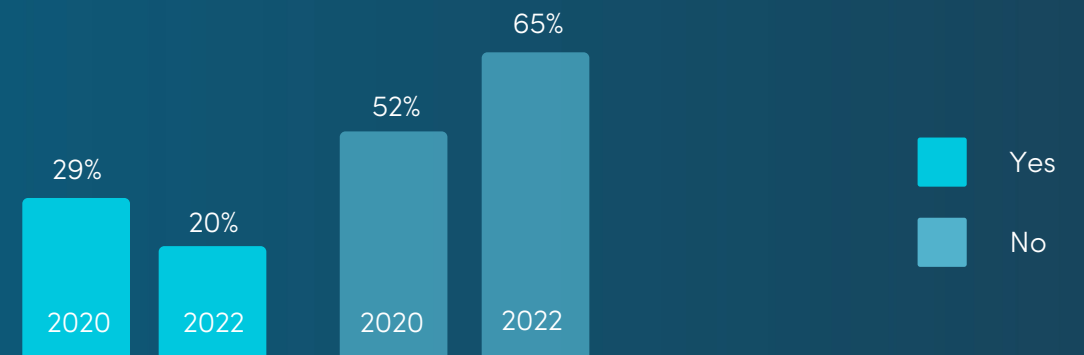


# Referrals

Q. If you have been previously referred for hospital treatment, did your GP tell you **how long** you would likely need to wait for your treatment?



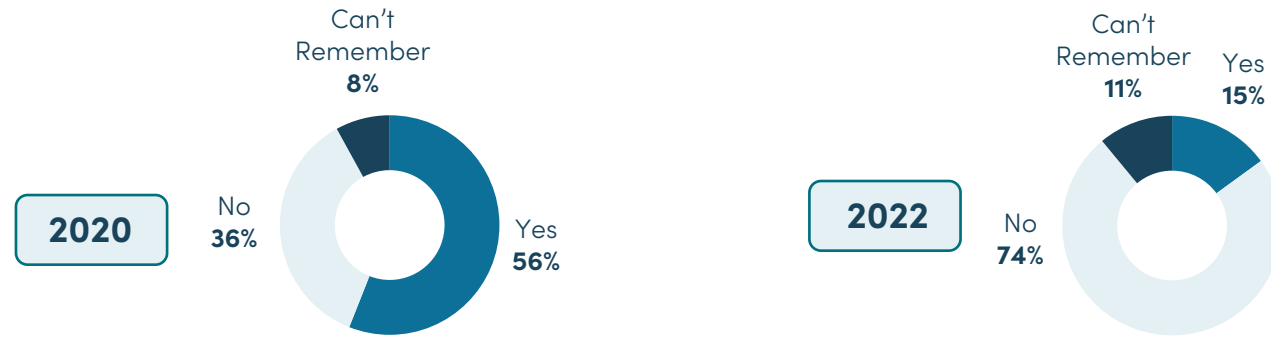
Q. Thinking about the most recent time you were referred by your GP for hospital treatment, were you offered a **choice of hospital**?



*Percentages exclude people who responded 'N/A' to being referred for hospital treatment.*

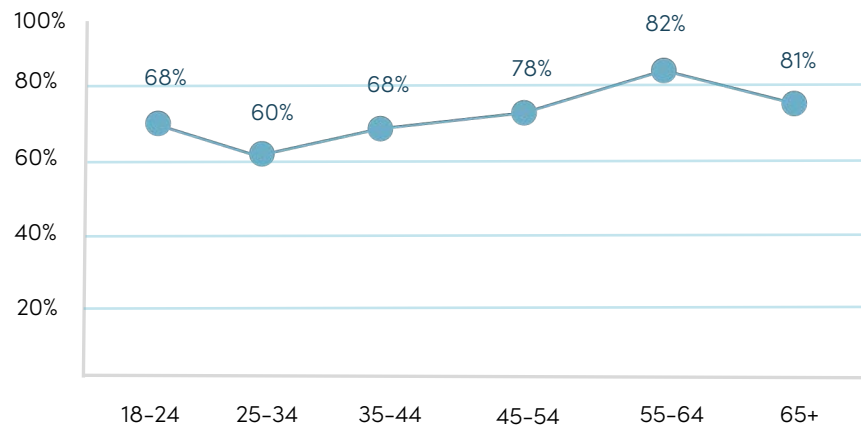


Q. Did your GP tell you that your choice of hospital could include a private hospital that offers NHS treatment as well as an NHS hospital?



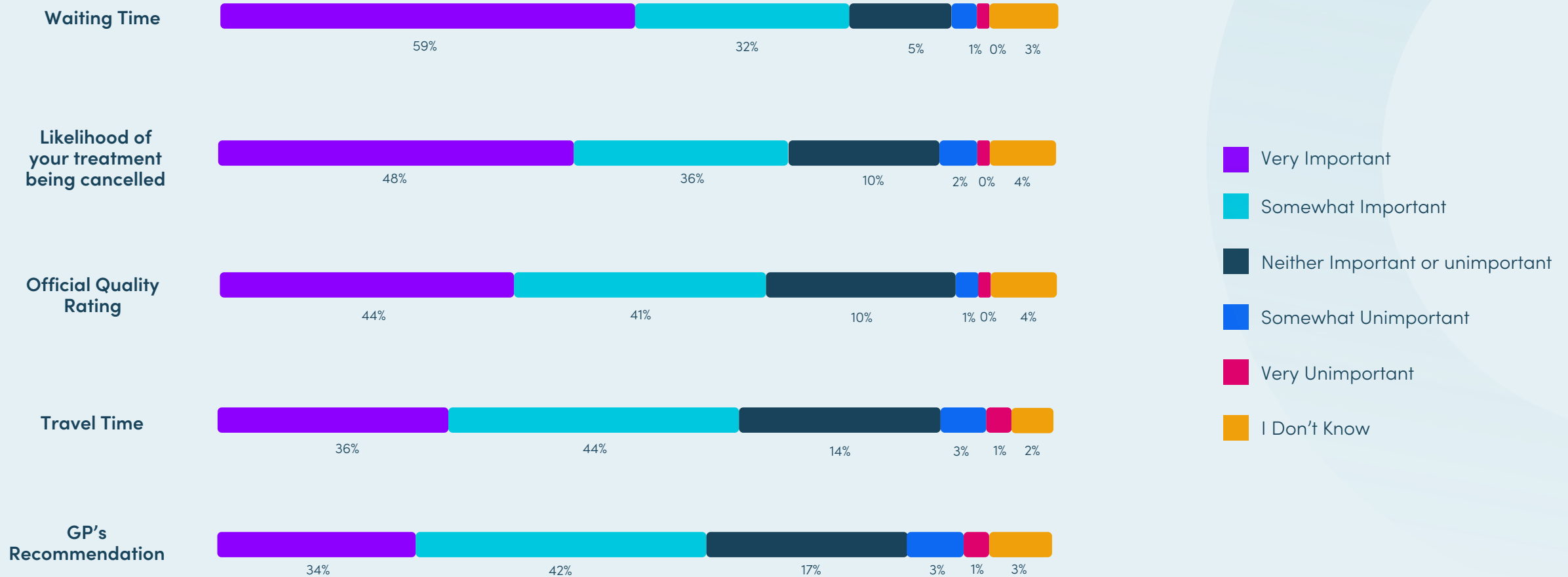
### Not offered a choice of private hospital that offers NHS treatment

% of people in 2022, by age, who said 'No' they were not offered this choice



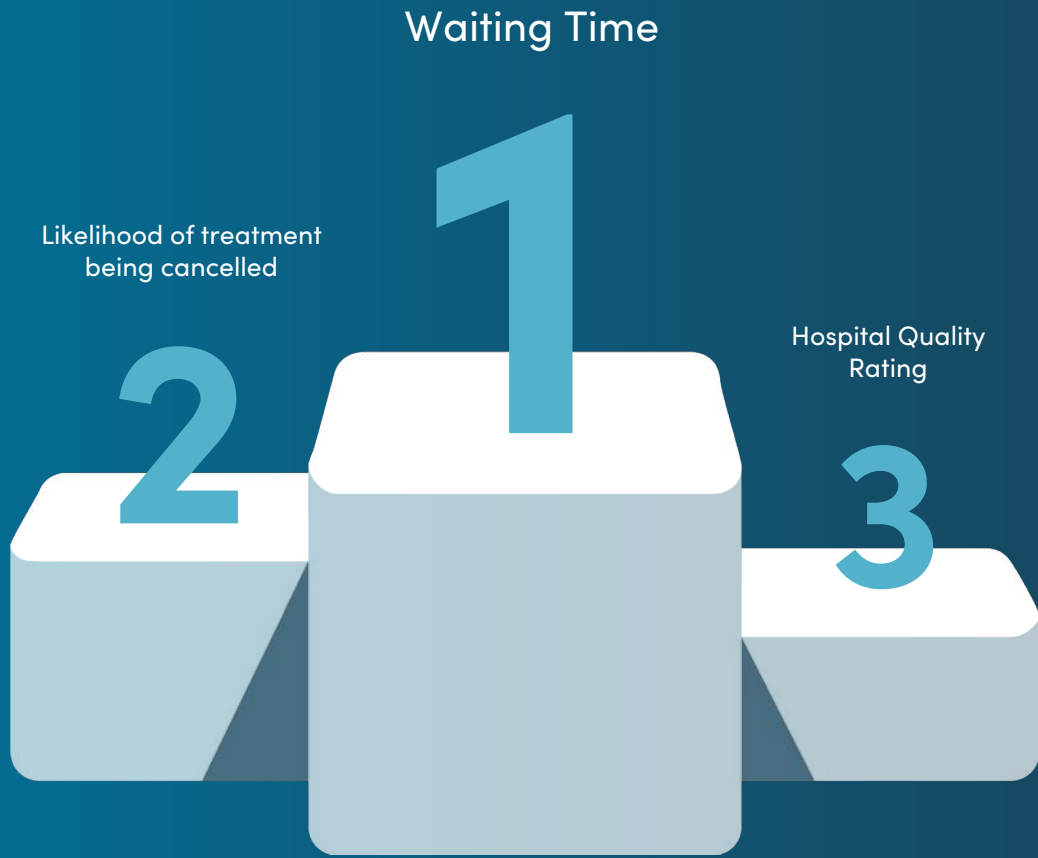
# Waiting Times

Q. How important would each of the following be if you were choosing a hospital to have treatment at?

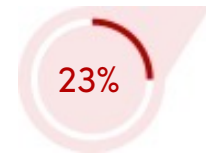
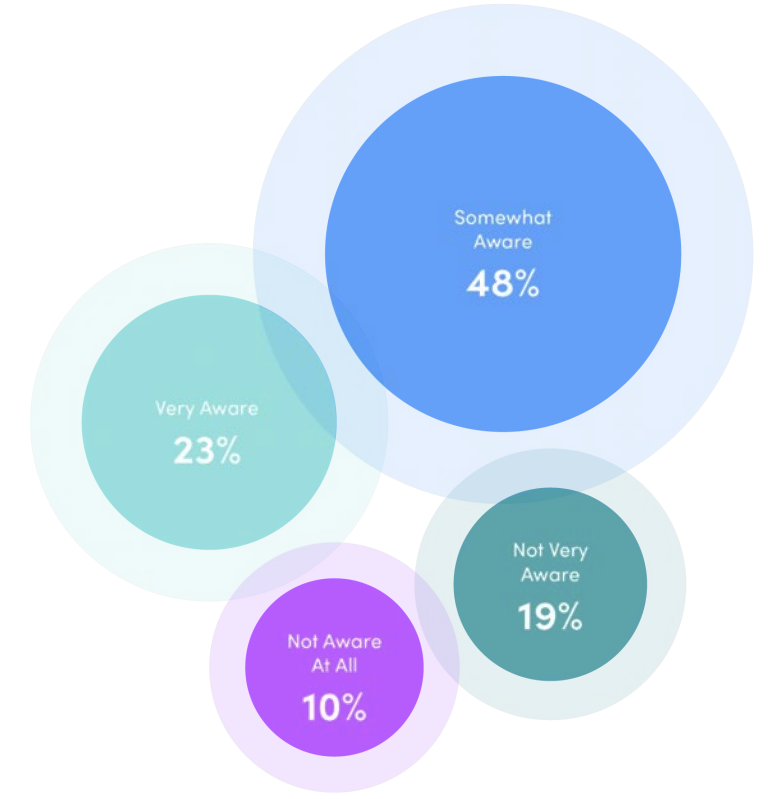


2022

## Top three 'most important' criteria for choosing a hospital in 2020 and 2022



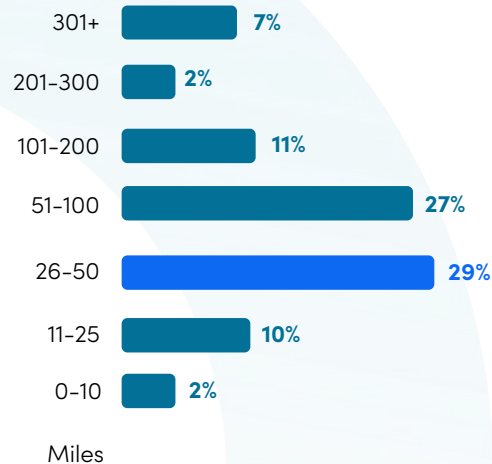
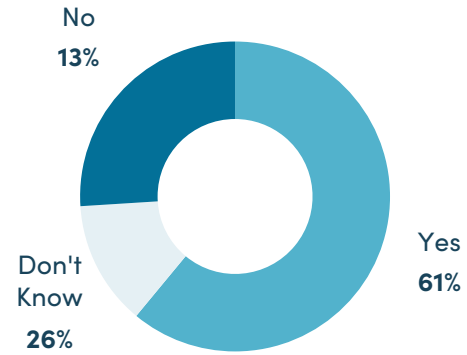
Q. How aware are you that depending upon the treatment, the **waiting times** for NHS treatment in hospitals across the country can **vary by up to 6 months**?



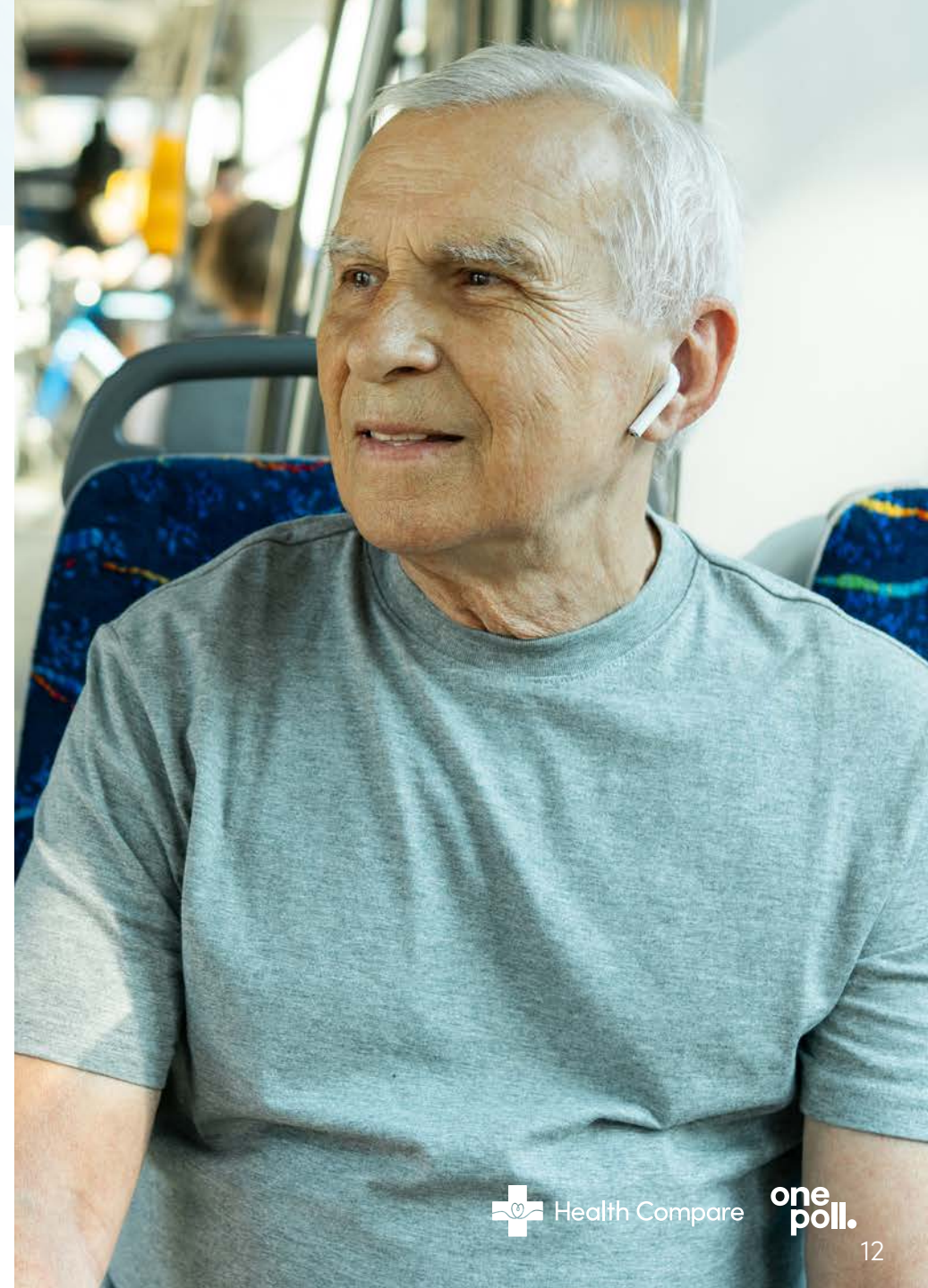
Under a quarter (23%) were very aware that waiting times for NHS treatment in hospitals across the country can vary by up to 6 months, depending upon the treatment.

# Travelling for treatment

Q. Would you be willing to **travel further** to somewhere other than your local hospital if you were offered your **NHS treatment three months sooner**?



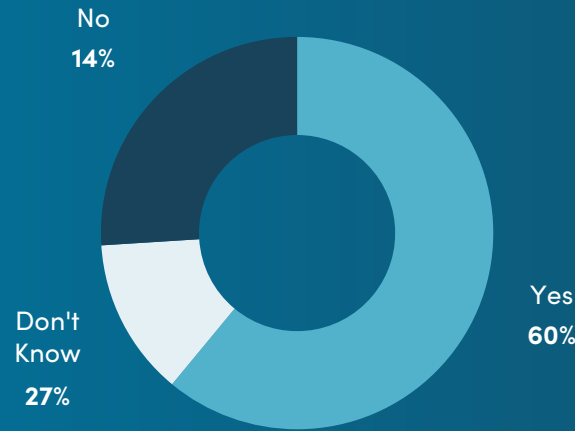
Q. What is the **maximum distance** you would be prepared to travel for your hospital treatment in order to be **treated sooner**?





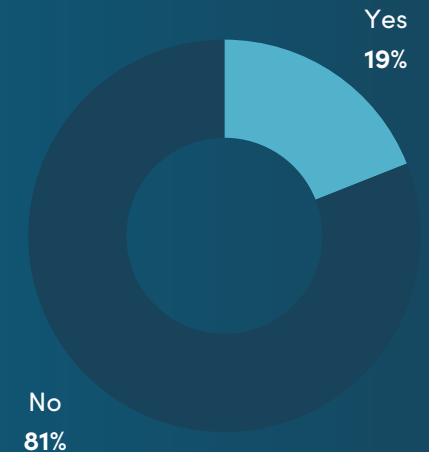


**60% of people** surveyed **are willing to travel further** to access treatment at a hospital with a **higher quality rating**, however **8 out of 10 people do not know** the quality rating of their local hospital



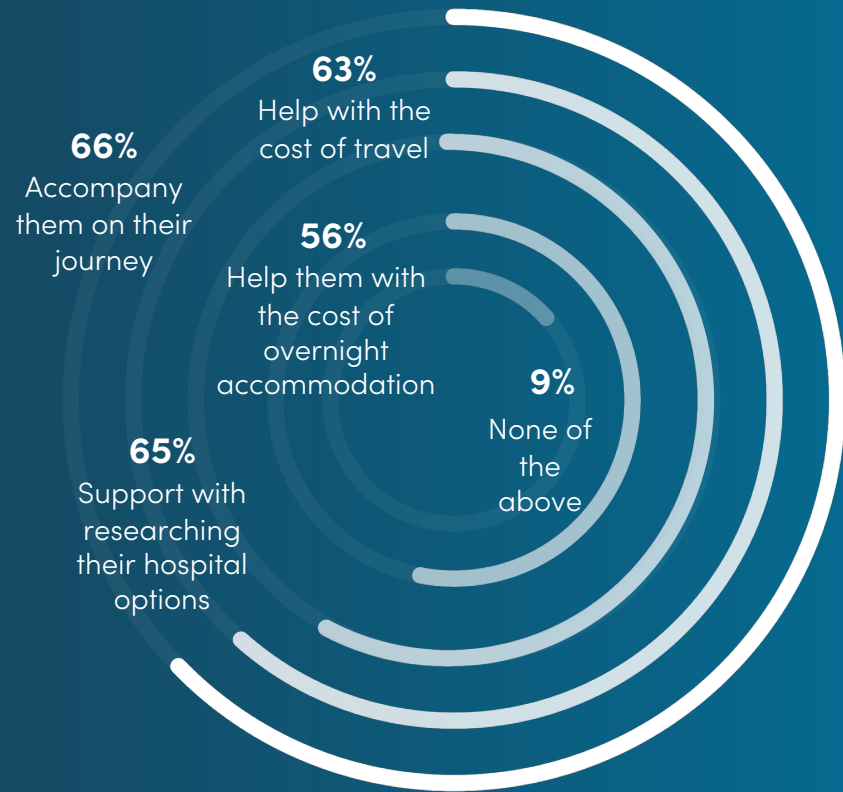
**Q.** Would you be willing to **travel further** to somewhere other than your local hospital if you were offered your NHS treatment at a hospital with a **higher quality rating**?

**Q.** Do you know the current official quality rating of your local hospital? For example, it could be 'Outstanding', 'Good', 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate'



# Supporting A Loved One

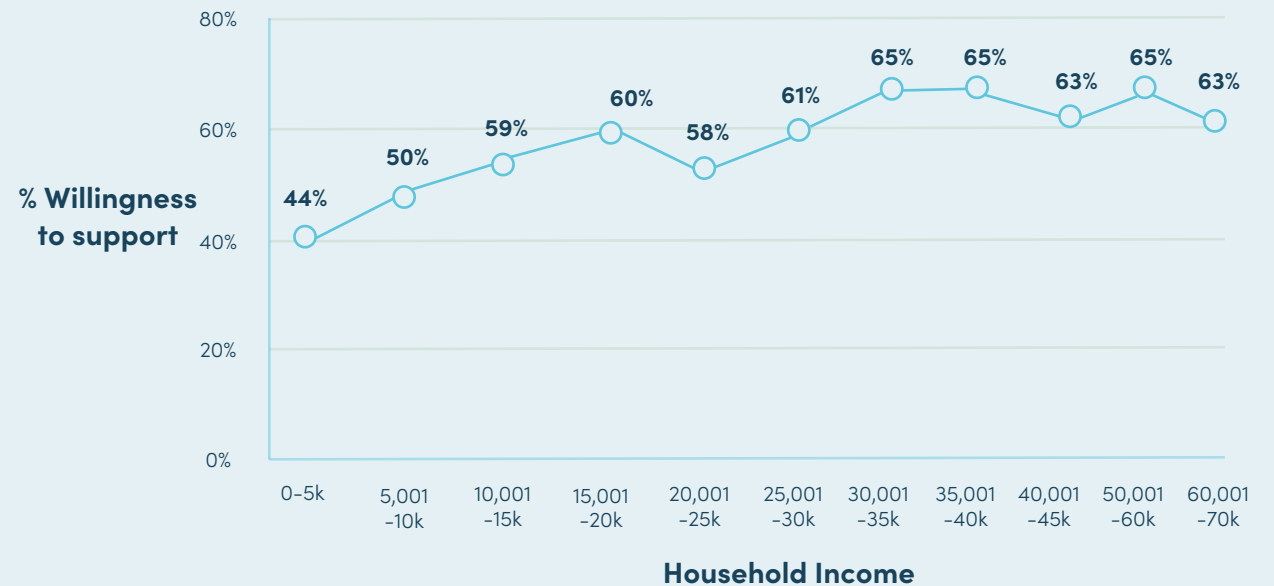
Q. Which of the following, if any, would you be willing to do for a loved one in order for them to **access faster** and /or **higher quality hospital treatment**?



On average, two thirds of people would be willing to support a loved one financially, to help them travel further to access faster and/ or higher quality treatment

Household income does **not** appear to be a **significant barrier** to people's willingness to support a loved one financially, to access faster and / or higher quality treatment.

Household Income & Willingness to Support



\*% Willingness to support is an average of the following 3 cost bearing options from 2022 Survey:

- Accompanying on their journey
- Help with the cost of travel
- Help with the cost of overnight accommodation

## About Health Compare

Health Compare is a health and care service comparison website that helps you to choose a hospital, GP or care service. It is the only platform that helps patients and families to compare all available options – paid for by the NHS, by you privately or covered by insurance – in one free and easy-to-use platform.

Search results show the latest available data on quality ratings, waiting times and % of cancelled operations at NHS hospitals and private hospitals that offer NHS treatment anywhere in England, with General Medical Council data on over 50,000 consultant doctors included within hospital listings.

Because we know that most people are prepared to travel further to access faster and /or higher quality rated hospital treatment, our unique algorithms automatically identify the 'next nearest' hospitals outside your search range, that offer the highest quality rating and/ or shortest available NHS wait times for a range of treatments.

We created Health Compare to help you:



Learn about the healthcare choices you and your family can make with your doctor to find the best place for your treatment.



Understand your NHS right to choose where you'd like to receive hospital treatment and the range of options available.



Search for hospitals with the shortest waits, to choose the hospital you would like to be referred to for NHS treatment or would like to switch your treatment to if you have waited over 18 weeks.



Clarify what 'going private' can mean – most private hospitals offer treatment paid for by the NHS and over half of NHS hospitals offer private treatment for self-pay and insured patients.



Compare health insurance cover and identify the hospitals where different policies can be used, including cover for pre-existing medical conditions

We're passionate about championing and empowering patient choice. That's why our platform is free to use and impartial – with no sponsored search results. Regardless of whether they display an NHS or private healthcare organisation, search results on Health Compare always appear in the same fair and impartial way.

We're keen to make the site as useful as possible and welcome any feedback and suggestions to [hello@healthcompare.co.uk](mailto:hello@healthcompare.co.uk).

**Attributions:** you are free to copy, publish, distribute and transmit the information contained in this report ("Information"), provided you acknowledge the source of the Information as the property of Health Compare © and where possible provide a link to [www.healthcompare.co.uk](http://www.healthcompare.co.uk). We suggest the following attribution notice: "Contains copyright information of Health Compare © visit [www.healthcompare.co.uk](http://www.healthcompare.co.uk) for more information"