

Health Systems in Action

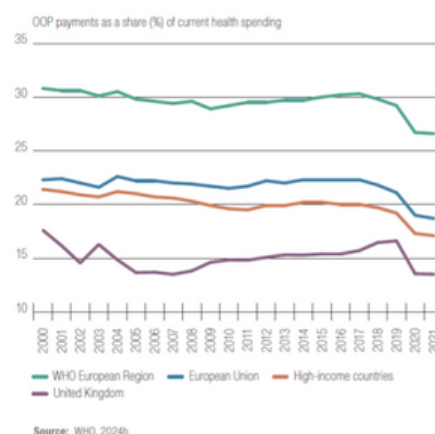
UNITED KINGDOM



- Universal health coverage is central to the National Health Service (NHS). It is primarily funded through general taxation and is based on the principle of access to comprehensive care dependent on need, not ability to pay.
- The United Kingdom comprises England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Each has devolved responsibilities for health and social care, and designs, delivers and regulates services differently.
- The COVID-19 pandemic pushed public spending on health up to 11% of GDP in 2022. However, a prolonged period of government funding restraint has limited investment in long-term priorities such as infrastructure, workforce and technology.
- The United Kingdom reports some of the lowest rates of out-of-pocket (OOP) and catastrophic health spending in Europe (Fig. 1).
- Access to planned hospital care is impeded by long waits, which grew steadily before the pandemic and then rapidly as services returned to normality. Access to primary care appointments has also worsened.
- The hospital sector takes up just over half of public spending on health, although bed numbers are relatively low, leaving little excess bed capacity to respond to surges in demand.

- There has been a longstanding focus on integration between health and social care in all four countries.
- The rates of doctors and nurses are relatively low compared to the EU, reflecting historic issues with planning and retention. Reliance on health professionals trained abroad is high.
- There are wide variations in health outcomes and infant and maternal mortality rates are above the EU averages, reflecting socioeconomic inequalities and increasing poverty rates.
- Noncommunicable diseases (cancer, ischaemic heart disease and dementia) are the leading causes of death. Tobacco use has fallen but is still a main risk factor and vaping is a growing problem. England has set an aim to be 'smokefree' by 2030.

Fig 1. The share of OOP spending is low



	United Kingdom	WHO European Region	European Region
Population in millions (2022)	67.5	929.1	512.7
GDP per capita PPP\$ (2021)	49 675	38 936	48 615
Life expectancy at birth	80.5 (2020)	78.2	79.9
Maternal mortality per 100,000 live births (2020)	9.8	12.6	6.4
Infant mortality per 1000 live births (2021)	3.7	6.3	3.2
Poverty rate (% of population)	18.6 (2017)	14.9 (2018)	17.0 (2018)

Sources are given in full in the Insight and include WHO, Eurostat and the World Bank

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