

18 July 2022

9(2)(a)



**Official Information Act request WCD (West Coast District) 9702**

I refer to your email dated 25 May 2022 requesting the information under the Official Information Act from Te Tai o Poutini West Coast regarding Hospital wait times and ED delays. Specifically:

**Caveats to our responses to your data request:**

a). “Wait time from FSA to surgery”: Wait times between FSA and receipt of surgery cannot be construed or inferred as an indicator of any capacity or service constraints. First Specialist Assessment (FSA) is not always the trigger point for determining going to surgery, nor surgery being received – the particular pathway to treatment may often be determined well after FSA at follow-up appointments or delayed for multiple other reasons. Other delay reasons that occur between FSA and surgery being delivered may include, or be requiring of patients, trying other alternative interventions; patient choice to delay treatment; patients having other concurrent complications and comorbidities that need resolution first; complex individual needs requiring interventions and assessments across disciplines impacting on services to which dual or multi-referral is required; patients simply not showing up for surgery or being unfit for surgery on the day (presenting sick to theatre on the day, having eaten or failed to take pre-operative preparations prior to surgery making them an anaesthetic risk to proceeding with their operation) – but are kept on the waiting list regardless, as they still need and would benefit from getting it done at another subsequent date; among other matters pertinent to individual patients. Additionally, the ongoing impacts of Covid-19 since March 2020 has also influenced waiting times for a number of patient times, with clinicians and patients alike having to postpone appointments for being seen and for going on to treatment. Given these factors, we are reframing our response to your question as being average, shortest and longest wait times taken from the Decision To Treat (DTT) date on the surgical waiting lists, and receipt of treatment. We note that even in taking the DTT date as the ‘start point’, many of those former conditions and issues will still subsequently apply to individual patients and impact of the resultant calculations of wait times to surgery.

b). Data on “Longest Wait” times: We note that a number of your questions seek information on “longest wait” periods for individual patients. “Longest waits” for FSA or for surgery can be influenced any multitude of factors for individual patients, including many of the same reasons as outlined for caveat a) above. Consequently, while listed in our response, this data presented in itself is not meaningful without patient-specific context and cannot necessarily be construed in any way that long wait times for individuals are due to capacity or service constraint. As noted above, maximum patient waiting times in the data below may be skewed by just a couple of individuals. Te Tai o Poutini West Coast often offers a patient a First Specialist Appointment at an outpatient clinic that the patients then decline at their own request, for a range of personal reasons. These patients are not automatically removed from our waiting lists – but rather, their referral is retained as “waiting” on our system until the patient indicates that they are ready to accept an appointment. Delays to appointment may also occur due to patients with multiple referrals to various specialties needing to be respectively seen in turn for other complications or comorbidities as part of a wider context of care. These cases are also included in the data below.

Accordingly, the longest wait time apparent in the data cannot be considered a true reflection of actual waiting times that a person may have been left without having been offered an appointment but declined at their own request or deferred to another time better suited to their circumstances.

c). Waiting times since 2020: We note that the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic since March 2020 has had an influence on waiting times for patients; particularly where face-to-face assessments and testing of patients were required, and not otherwise able to be conducted via telehealth as an alternative. Delays have been variously caused by the Covid lockdowns and infection to clinicians and to patients and their families. In many instances, clinics and surgeries were not able to be booked, while at other times, cancellations and disruptions to services have come in at short notice due to Covid infection. Patients thus affected and delayed were booked to later clinics and surgical theatre lists, acquiring extended wait times in the process. Many patients across all Specialities have chosen also deferred review and treatment to later dates at their own request, citing Covid-19 vulnerability as the reasons for choosing to seek delays in their care. Patients in these circumstances are not removed from our waiting lists.

d). Data date ranges: Data provided is given by calendar year. Data for 'this year to date' for 2022 is given for the first four months to 30 April 2022; being the most complete month preceding your data request on 25 May 2022.

These caveats noted and applied to all of the data provided, the answers to your specific questions are as follows:

**1. *The average wait time to see an oncologist after a referral has been sent from the patient's GP, for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.***

2018 – 14 days  
2019 – 16.8 days  
2020 – 2 days  
2021 – 8.33 days  
2022 – 3 days

**2. *The longest and shortest wait time to see an oncologist after a referral has been sent from the patient's GP, for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.***

Noting the opening caveat that "longest wait" time is not relevant without context to the cases involved, the data is as follows:

2018 – Shortest wait time: 8 days; Longest wait time: 17 days.  
2019 – Shortest wait time: 6 days; Longest wait time: 36 days.  
2020 – Shortest wait time: 2 days; Longest wait time: 2 days.  
2021 – Shortest wait time: 1 day; Longest wait time: 13 days.  
2022 – Shortest wait time: 3 days; Longest wait time: 3 days.

**3. *The average wait time for cancer surgery after a patient's First Specialist Appointment (FSA), for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.***

Te Tai o Poutini West Coast does not code patients on our waiting list for surgery to specific cancer tumour streams. Te Tai o Poutini West Coast surgical waiting lists for outpatient FSA includes anaesthesiology, general surgery, gynaecology, urology, ENT, orthopaedic, dental, paediatric surgery, ophthalmology, and plastic surgery surgical; while our medical waiting lists include general medicine, paediatric medicine, cardiology, dermatology, gastroenterology, haematology, nephrology, oncology, respiratory and rheumatology. Any one of these specialties may potentially encounter suspected cancers that are referred in, or make incidental discovery of a cancer, as part of their clinical review of patients who present at the time of their face-to-face assessment at clinic. From there, a determination would be made as to treatment pathway, which may or may not include surgery as an outcome. Moreover – not all cancer cases are found as a result of a referral from a GP. Many are detected as incidental findings to other presentations to health services. We would only be able to derive the data from 2018 onward that you have requested by extensive manual search and cross-referencing of appointments for each discipline to subsequent treatments of surgery as an outcome – most of which surgeries will be done at other DHB hospitals. We therefore decline to provide additional information that may or may not be held if we undertook manual research of each of individual patients' case notes under Section 18 (f) of the Official Information Act i.e. "... that the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research."

**4. The longest and shortest wait time for cancer surgery after a patient's First Specialist Appointment (FSA), for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Noting that we are providing data for the period from Decision To Treat (DTT) to surgery rather than from FSA for the reasons outlined in the opening caveat and the additional notes in answer to question 3 above that findings of cancers are not necessarily resultant from FSA - then using information taken from the national Faster Cancer Treatment dataset, the data for West Coast residents for those cases with confirmed cancer – wherever their surgery treatment may be delivered (i.e.: locally as well as at other hospital facilities around New Zealand) - is outlined below.

The data presented is for people who went to surgery only as treatment for cancer. It excludes cancer patients who went to other treatments after DTT, including those with treatment pathways of chemotherapy; radiation therapy; targeted therapy; clinical trials; those undergoing concurrent radiation; as well as those people who determined a path of non-intervention; those who subsequently refused treatment; those in palliative care; and those who died. These factors noted, the data is as follows:

2018 – Shortest wait time: 0 days; Longest wait time: 29 days. (average time DTT to surgery: 8.9 days)  
2019 – Shortest wait time: 0 days; Longest wait time: 27 days. (average time DTT to surgery: 14.0 days)  
2020 – Shortest wait time: 0 days; Longest wait time: 30 days. (average time DTT to surgery: 11.5 days)  
2021 – Shortest wait time: 0 days; Longest wait time: 31 days. (average time DTT to surgery: 13.3 days)  
2022 – Shortest wait time: 0 days; Longest wait time: 30 days. (average time DTT to surgery: 13.7 days)

**5. The average wait time to see a cardiologist after a referral has been sent from the patient's GP, for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

2018 – 61 days  
2019 – 68.9 days  
2020 – 72.8 days  
2021 – 64.8 days  
2022 – 127.4 days

The extended average wait time in the first four months of 2022 was influenced by several individual patients waiting over 120 days whose cardiology assessments were delayed due to other clinical complications and comorbidities having to be treated concurrently. Specialist cardiology clinic for first assessment and follow-up appointments were conducted each month in 2022, although the one in January was by telehealth consultation only. At the time of writing, the current average waiting time for the Specialist cardiologist service from initial GP referral is 53.1 days.

**6. The longest and shortest wait time to see a cardiologist after a referral has been sent from the patient's GP, for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Noting the opening caveat that “longest wait” time is not relevant without context to the cases involved, the data is as follows:

2018 – Shortest wait time: 28 days; Longest wait time: 84 days.  
2019 – Shortest wait time: 24 days; Longest wait time: 115 days.  
2020 – Shortest wait time: 16 days; Longest wait time: 145 days.  
2021 – Shortest wait time: 11 days; Longest wait time: 175 days.  
2022 – Shortest wait time: 4 days; Longest wait time: 187 days.

**7. The average wait time for heart surgery after a patient's First Specialist Appointment (FSA), for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Heart surgery is not undertaken on the West Coast and consequently, there is no local waiting time for this service.

**8. The longest and shortest wait time for heart surgery after a patient's First Specialist Appointment (FSA), for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Heart surgery is not undertaken on the West Coast and consequently, there is no local waiting time for this service.

**9. The average wait time to see an orthopaedic surgeon after a referral has been sent from the patient's GP, for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

2018 – 216.2 days  
2019 – 177.2 days  
2020 – 114.9 days  
2021 – 157.8 days  
2022 – 209.7 days

Prolonged waits for orthopaedic first specialist assessment are largely due to capacity constraints, with a shortfall of available visiting specialists to review patients against high referral demand.

**10. The longest and shortest wait time to see an orthopaedic surgeon after a referral has been sent from the patient's GP, for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Noting the opening caveat that “longest wait” time is not relevant without context to the cases involved, the data is as follows:

2018 – Shortest wait time: 0 days; Longest wait time: 597 days.  
2019 – Shortest wait time: 0 days; Longest wait time: 477 days.  
2020 – Shortest wait time: 0 days; Longest wait time: 280 days.  
2021 – Shortest wait time: 0 days; Longest wait time: 323 days.  
2022 – Shortest wait time: 2 days; Longest wait time: 379 days.

As noted above, prolonged waits for patients to access visiting specialist orthopaedic services for initial assessment are largely due to capacity constraints.

**11. The average wait time for orthopaedic surgery after a patient's First Specialist Appointment (FSA), for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Noting that we are providing data for the period from DTT to surgery rather than from FSA for the reasons outlined in the opening caveat, the data is as follows:

2018 – 43.1 days  
2019 – 97.1 days  
2020 – 146.5 days  
2021 – 151.0 days  
2022 – 185.7 days

Prolonged waits for patients to access visiting specialist orthopaedic surgery services after DTT are due to capacity constraints and have been complicated since 2020 by the impact of Covid-19 on both clinicians and patients.

**12. The longest and shortest wait time for orthopaedic surgery after a patient's First Specialist Appointment (FSA), for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Noting the opening caveat that “longest wait” time is not relevant without context to the cases involved, and that we are providing data for the period from DTT to surgery rather than from FSA for the reasons outlined in the caveat, the data is as follows:

2018 – Shortest wait time: 0.5 days; Longest wait time: 184.6 days.  
2019 – Shortest wait time: 0.7 days; Longest wait time: 441.6 days.  
2020 – Shortest wait time: 4.5 days; Longest wait time: 349.7 days.  
2021 – Shortest wait time: 3.7 days; Longest wait time: 379.5 days.  
2022 – Shortest wait time: 2.6 days; Longest wait time: 420.4 days.

As noted above, prolonged waits for patients to access visiting specialist orthopaedic surgery services after DTT are due to capacity constraints and have been complicated since 2020 by the impact of Covid-19 on both clinicians and patients.

**13. The average wait time for a gynaecologist appointment after a referral has been sent from the patient's GP for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

2018 – 50.9 days  
2019 – 72.6 days  
2020 – 107.3 days  
2021 – 63.0 days  
2022 – 72.2 days

**14. The longest and shortest wait time for a gynaecologist appointment after a referral has been sent from the patient's GP for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Noting the opening caveat that “longest wait” time is not relevant without context to the cases involved, the data is as follows:

2018 – Shortest wait time: 0 days; Longest wait time: 165 days.  
2019 – Shortest wait time: 4 days; Longest wait time: 235 days.  
2020 – Shortest wait time: 3 days; Longest wait time: 313 days.  
2021 – Shortest wait time: 3 days; Longest wait time: 173 days.  
2022 – Shortest wait time: 4 days; Longest wait time: 158 days.

**15. The average wait time for gynaecological surgery after a patient's First Specialist Appointment (FSA), for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Noting that we are providing data for the period from DTT to surgery rather than from FSA for the reasons outlined in the opening caveat, the data is as follows:

2018 – 49.0 days  
2019 – 47.0 days  
2020 – 53.8 days  
2021 – 53.9 days  
2022 – 67.8 days

**16. The longest and shortest wait time for gynaecological surgery after a patient's First Specialist Appointment (FSA), for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Noting the opening caveat that “longest wait” time is not relevant without context to the cases involved, and that we are providing data for the period from DTT to surgery rather than from FSA for the reasons outlined in the caveat, the data is as follows:

2018 – Shortest wait time: 0.7 days; Longest wait time: 173.5 days.  
2019 – Shortest wait time: 1.5 days; Longest wait time: 167.6 days.  
2020 – Shortest wait time: 6.4 days; Longest wait time: 371.4 days.  
2021 – Shortest wait time: 7.4 days; Longest wait time: 226.4 days.  
2022 – Shortest wait time: 2.4 days; Longest wait time: 153.6 days.



**17. The average wait time for a urologist appointment after a referral has been sent from the patient's GP for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

2018 – 89.7 days  
2019 – 89.8 days  
2020 – 88.5 days  
2021 – 103.9 days  
2022 – 130.4 days

**18. The longest and shortest wait time for a urologist appointment after a referral has been sent from the patient's GP for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Noting the opening caveat that “longest wait” time is not relevant without context to the cases involved, the data is as follows:

2018 – Shortest wait time: 1 day; Longest wait time: 195 days.  
2019 – Shortest wait time: 0 days; Longest wait time: 243 days.  
2020 – Shortest wait time: 1 day; Longest wait time: 202 days.  
2021 – Shortest wait time: 0 days; Longest wait time: 224 days.  
2022 – Shortest wait time: 6 days; Longest wait time: 212 days.

**19. The average wait time for urology surgery after a patient's First Specialist Appointment (FSA), for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Noting that we are providing data for the period from DTT to surgery rather than from FSA for the reasons outlined in the opening caveat, the data is as follows:

2018 – 52.7 days  
2019 – 79.4 days  
2020 – 98.2 days  
2021 – 85.9 days  
2022 – 98.6 days

**20. The longest and shortest wait time for urology surgery after a patient's First Specialist Appointment (FSA), for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Noting the opening caveat that “longest wait” time is not relevant without context to the cases involved, and that we are providing data for the period from DTT to surgery rather than from FSA for the reasons outlined in the caveat, the data is as follows:

2018 – Shortest wait time: 6 days; Longest wait time: 184.3 days.  
2019 – Shortest wait time: 12.4 days; Longest wait time: 190.6 days.  
2020 – Shortest wait time: 6.5 days; Longest wait time: 216.4 days.  
2021 – Shortest wait time: 7.4 day; Longest wait time: 250.5 days.  
2022 – Shortest wait time: 33.3 days; Longest wait time: 223.7 days.

**21. The average wait time for a respiratory specialist appointment/ or general medicine specialist for respiratory problems after a referral from a GP, for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

2018 – 117.1 days  
2019 – 126.6 days  
2020 – 99.5 days  
2021 – 129.5 days  
2022 – 171.7 days

**22. The longest and shortest wait time for a respiratory specialist appointment/ or general medicine specialist for respiratory problems after a referral from a GP, for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Noting the opening caveat that “longest wait” time is not relevant without context to the cases involved, the data is as follows:

2018 – Shortest wait time: 3 days; Longest wait time: 162 days.

2019 – Shortest wait time: 1 day; Longest wait time: 196 days.

2020 – Shortest wait time: 12 days; Longest wait time: 268 days.

2021 – Shortest wait time: 29 days; Longest wait time: 224 days.

2022 – Shortest wait time: 52 days; Longest wait time: 343 days.

**23. The average wait time for respiratory surgery after a First Specialist Appointment (FSA), for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Respiratory surgery is not undertaken on the West Coast and consequently, there is no local waiting time for this service.

**24. The longest and shortest wait time for a respiratory surgery after a First Specialist Appointment (FSA), for the last five years between 2018 to this year to date.**

Respiratory surgery is not undertaken on the West Coast and consequently, there is no local waiting time for this service.

**25. The average wait time for a patient visiting the emergency department, for the last five years from 2018 to this year to date.**

2018 – 38.9 minutes

2019 – 36.0 minutes

2020 – 33.2 minutes

2021 – 41.7 minutes

2022 – 83.4 minutes

**26. The longest and shortest wait time for a patient visiting the emergency department for the last five years from 2018 to this year to date.**

2018 – Shortest wait time: 0 minutes; Longest wait time for an individual (Triage level 5): 9.4 hours

2019 – Shortest wait time: 0 minutes; Longest wait time for an individual (Triage level 5): 8.6 hours

2020 – Shortest wait time: 0 minutes; Longest wait time for an individual (Triage level 5): 6.7 hours

2021 – Shortest wait time: 0 minutes; Longest wait time for an individual (Triage level 5): 12.7 hours

2022 – Shortest wait time: 0 minutes; Longest wait time for an individual (Triage level 5): 13.3 hours

We note that wait times include low triage level ambulatory presentations to our Emergency Department.

**27. All reports discussing hospital wait times and emergency department delays, dated between Jan 2021 to date, held by the DHB.**

Reports discussing wait times for our services have been made through our reports to our Board Advisory Committees. All Advisory Committee meeting papers made since January 2021 are publicly available on the Te Tai o Poutini West Coast website, and these may be located at the following website link:

<https://www.wcdhb.health.nz/?s=advisory+committee>

***28. All reports discussing increasing patient transfers between hospitals under the new Health New Zealand model, between Jan 2021 to date, held by the DHB.***

No such reports have been compiled by nor received by Te Tai o Poutini West Coast. This question would be best directed to Health New Zealand who are developing the new health system model.

I trust that this satisfies your interest in this matter.

You may, under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act, seek a review of our decision to withhold information by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz); or Freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, or an edited version of this response, may be published on the Te Tai o Poutini West Coast website after your receipt of this response.

Ngā mihi / Yours sincerely,



Ralph La Salle  
**Senior Manager, OIAs**  
**Waitaha Canterbury / Te Tai o Poutini West Coast.**