



LATEST ESTIMATES SHOW THAT 20 PEOPLE A DAY DIE IN UNRELIEVED PAIN ACROSS THE UK AT THE END OF THEIR LIVES

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KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- A previous OHE report in 2019 estimated that 378, 427 people in England needed palliative care a year. Our updates show that an estimated **436,022 people in England needed palliative care in 2023.**
- Across the UK, an estimated **7,329 people per year – or 20 people a day – dying with no pain relief in the last 3 months of their life**, even if the highest levels of hospice-level care are available to patients, using conservative assumptions that provide the lowest possible estimate.
- This is **a 15% increase** between 2019 to 2023 in the number of people dying in completely unrelieved pain, even at the highest standards of palliative care in England.
- Irrespective of the outcome of the upcoming decisions across the UK, investment into funding high quality end-of-life care should be a crucial component of the conversation around assisted dying in England and Wales.

Current levels of unrelieved pain in the last 3 months of life (VOICES 2015)

| Care setting* | % Pain not at all relieved | | | % Pain partially relieved | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|-----|---------------------------|--------------|------|
| | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL |
| Home | 7.6 | 8.2 | 8.8 | 42.6 | 43.6 | 44.6 |
| Hospital | 3.6 | 4.0 | 4.4 | 26.7 | 27.6 | 28.5 |
| Hospice | 0.8 | 1.4 | 2.0 | 10.4 | 12.0 | 13.5 |
| Care home / other | 1.8 | 2.2 | 2.6 | 23.0 | 24.2 | 25.4 |
| Total | 3.8 | 4.3 | 4.7 | 28.0 | 29.0 | 30.1 |

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Source: Zamora, B., Cookson, G. and Garau, M., 2019. *Unrelieved Pain in Palliative Care in England*. OHE Consulting Report, London: Office of Health Economics. Available at: <https://www.ohe.org/publications/unrelieved-pain-palliative-care-england>

Table 1: Current levels of unrelieved pain. Number of patients – 2019 (England)

| Care setting | No. Palliative Care Deaths (1) | Pain not at all relieved | | | Pain partially relieved | | | All Unrelieved pain | | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|--------|-------------------------|--------------|---------|---------------------|--------------|---------|
| | | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL |
| Home | 81,793 | 6,216 | 6,707 | 7,198 | 34,844 | 35,662 | 36,480 | 41,060 | 42,369 | 43,678 |
| Hospital | 173,763 | 6,255 | 6,951 | 7,646 | 46,395 | 47,959 | 49,522 | 52,650 | 54,909 | 57,168 |
| Hospice | 28,807 | 230 | 403 | 576 | 2,996 | 3,457 | 3,889 | 3,226 | 3,860 | 4,465 |
| Care home | 85,692 | 1,542 | 1,885 | 2,228 | 19,709 | 20,737 | 21,766 | 21,252 | 22,623 | 23,994 |
| Other | 8,372 | 151 | 184 | 218 | 1,925 | 2,026 | 2,126 | 2,076 | 2,210 | 2,344 |
| Total | 378,427 | 14,395 | 16,130 | 17,865 | 105,869 | 109,841 | 113,783 | 120,265 | 125,971 | 131,648 |

Notes: 1.Deaths under 19 years old represent a 0.83% of deaths registered in England and Wales (ONS, 2017). Therefore, if we were to consider only adults, the number of patients who experience no relief from their pain at all in the last three months of life would go from 16,130 to 15,996.

Table 2: Current levels of unrelieved pain. Number of patients – 2023 (England)

| Care setting | No. of Palliative care Deaths | Pain not at all relieved | | | Pain partially relieved | | | All Unrelieved pain | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------|-------------------------|--------------|---------|---------------------|--------------|---------|
| | | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL |
| Home | 125,138 | 9510 | 10,261 | 11,012 | 53,309 | 54,560 | 55,812 | 62,819 | 64,821 | 66,824 |
| Hospital | 189,234 | 6812 | 7,569 | 8,326 | 50,525 | 52,229 | 53,932 | 57,337 | 59,798 | 62,258 |
| Hospice | 20,493 | 164 | 287 | 410 | 2,131 | 2459 | 2,767 | 2,295 | 2,746 | 3,177 |
| Care home | 89,385 | 1609 | 1966 | 2,324 | 20,559 | 21,631 | 22,704 | 22,168 | 23,597 | 25,028 |
| Other | 11,337 | 204 | 249 | 295 | 2,608 | 2744 | 2,880 | 2,812 | 2,993 | 3,175 |
| Total | 436,022 | 16,569 | 18,749 | 20,493 | 122,086 | 126,446 | 131,243 | 138,655 | 145,195 | 151,736 |

Table 3: Projected number of palliative care patients dying with unrelieved pain – 2019 (England)

| Care setting | No. Palliative Care Deaths (1) | Pain not at all relieved | | | Pain partially relieved | | | Total unrelieved pain | | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|-------|-------------------------|--------------|--------|-----------------------|--------------|--------|
| | | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL |
| Home | 81,793 | 654 | 1,145 | 1,636 | 8,506 | 9,815 | 11,042 | 9,161 | 10,960 | 12,678 |
| Hospital | 173,763 | 1,390 | 2,433 | 3,475 | 18,071 | 20,852 | 23,458 | 19,461 | 23,284 | 26,933 |
| Hospice | 28,807 | 230 | 403 | 576 | 2,996 | 3,457 | 3,889 | 3,226 | 3,860 | 4,465 |
| Care home | 85,692 | 686 | 1,200 | 1,714 | 8,912 | 10,283 | 11,568 | 9,598 | 11,483 | 13,282 |
| Other | 8,372 | 67 | 117 | 167 | 871 | 1,005 | 1,130 | 938 | 1,122 | 1,298 |
| Total | 378,427 | 3,027 | 5,298 | 7,569 | 39,356 | 45,411 | 51,088 | 42,384 | 50,709 | 58,656 |

Notes:

1.Deaths under 19 years old represent a 0.83% of deaths registered in England and Wales (ONS, 2017). Therefore, if we were to consider only adults, the projected number of patients who experience no relief from their pain at all in the last three months of life would go from 5,298 to 5,254.

Table 4: Projected number of palliative care patients dying with unrelieved pain – 2023 (England)

| Care setting | No. Palliative care Deaths | Pain not at all relieved | | | Pain partially relieved | | | All Unrelieved pain | | |
|--------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|-------|-------------------------|--------------|--------|---------------------|--------------|--------|
| | | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL |
| Home | 125,138 | 1,001 | 1,752 | 2,503 | 13,014 | 15,017 | 16,894 | 14,015 | 16,768 | 19,396 |
| Hospital | 189,234 | 1,514 | 2,649 | 3,785 | 19,680 | 22,708 | 25,547 | 21,194 | 25,357 | 29,331 |
| Hospice | 20,493 | 164 | 287 | 410 | 2,131 | 2,459 | 2,767 | 2,295 | 2,746 | 3,176 |
| Care home | 89,385 | 715 | 1,251 | 1,788 | 9,296 | 10,726 | 12,067 | 10,011 | 11,978 | 13,855 |
| Other | 11,337 | 91 | 159 | 227 | 1,179 | 1,360 | 1,530 | 1,270 | 1,519 | 1,757 |
| Total | 436,022 | 3,485 | 6,104 | 8,713 | 45,300 | 52,323 | 58,805 | 48,785 | 58,427 | 67,518 |

Table 5: Current levels of unrelieved pain in other UK nations in 2019

| | No. of Palliative care deaths | Pain not at all relieved | | | Pain partially relieved | | | Total unrelieved pain | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|-------|-------------------------|--------------|--------|-----------------------|--------------|--------|
| | | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL |
| Scotland | 42,211 | 1,606 | 1,799 | 1,993 | 11,809 | 12,252 | 12,692 | 13,415 | 14,051 | 14,684 |
| Wales | 24,587 | 935 | 1,048 | 1,161 | 6,879 | 7,137 | 7,393 | 7,814 | 8,185 | 8,554 |
| Northern Ireland | 11,508 | 438 | 491 | 543 | 3,219 | 3,340 | 3,460 | 3,657 | 3,831 | 4,003 |

Table 6: Current levels of unrelieved pain in other UK nations in 2023

| | No. of Palliative care Deaths | Pain not at all relieved | | | Pain partially relieved | | | All Unrelieved pain | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|-------|-------------------------|--------------|--------|---------------------|--------------|--------|
| | | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL |
| Wales | 27,041 | 1,027 | 1,163 | 1,271 | 7,571 | 7,842 | 8,138 | 8,598 | 9,005 | 9,409 |
| Scotland | 47,583 | 1,808 | 2,046 | 2,237 | 13,323 | 13,799 | 14,315 | 15,131 | 15,845 | 16,552 |
| Northern Ireland | 12,869 | 489 | 553 | 605 | 3,603 | 3,732 | 3,872 | 4,092 | 4,285 | 4,477 |

Table 7: Projected number of palliative care patients dying with unrelieved pain in other UK nations in 2019

| | No. of Palliative care deaths | Pain not at all relieved | | | Pain partially relieved | | | Total unrelieved pain | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-----|-------------------------|---------|-------|-----------------------|--------------|-------|
| | | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL |
| Scotland | 42,211 | 338 | 591 | 844 | 4,390 | 5,065 | 5,698 | 4,728 | 5,656 | 6,543 |
| Wales | 24,587 | 197 | 344 | 492 | 2,557 | 2,950 | 3,319 | 2,754 | 3,295 | 3,811 |
| Northern Ireland | 11,508 | 92 | 161 | 230 | 1,197 | 1,381 | 1,554 | 1,289 | 1,542 | 1,784 |

Table 8: Projected number of palliative care patients dying with unrelieved pain in other UK nations in 2023

| | No. of Palliative care Deaths | Pain not at all relieved | | | Pain partially relieved | | | All Unrelieved pain | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-----|-------------------------|--------------|-------|---------------------|--------------|-------|
| | | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL | LCL | Central Est. | UCL |
| Wales | 27,041 | 216 | 379 | 541 | 2,813 | 3,245 | 3,651 | 3,029 | 3,624 | 4,192 |
| Scotland | 47,583 | 318 | 666 | 952 | 4,950 | 5,710 | 6,424 | 5,331 | 6,376 | 7,375 |
| Northern Ireland | 12,869 | 103 | 180 | 257 | 1,338 | 1,544 | 1,737 | 1,441 | 1,724 | 1,994 |

**Note: Label changed to 'Care setting' from 'Place of death' on 17 Dec 2024.*

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