



What is the impact of social care on patient flow and the elective and diagnostic backlog?

1

The elective waiting list has risen to a **record 7.07 million**, despite the best efforts of NHS organisations to tackle the elective backlog. The service is still short of activity targets surpassing 2019 that would allow it to make inroads.

2

The social care crisis is also a key part of the problem. In October, **just 39.9% patients were discharged** when they were ready to be, with an average of 13,613 beds a day occupied by those who are medically fit for discharge but are unable to be cared for at home. This leaves poorly patients waiting for a bed.

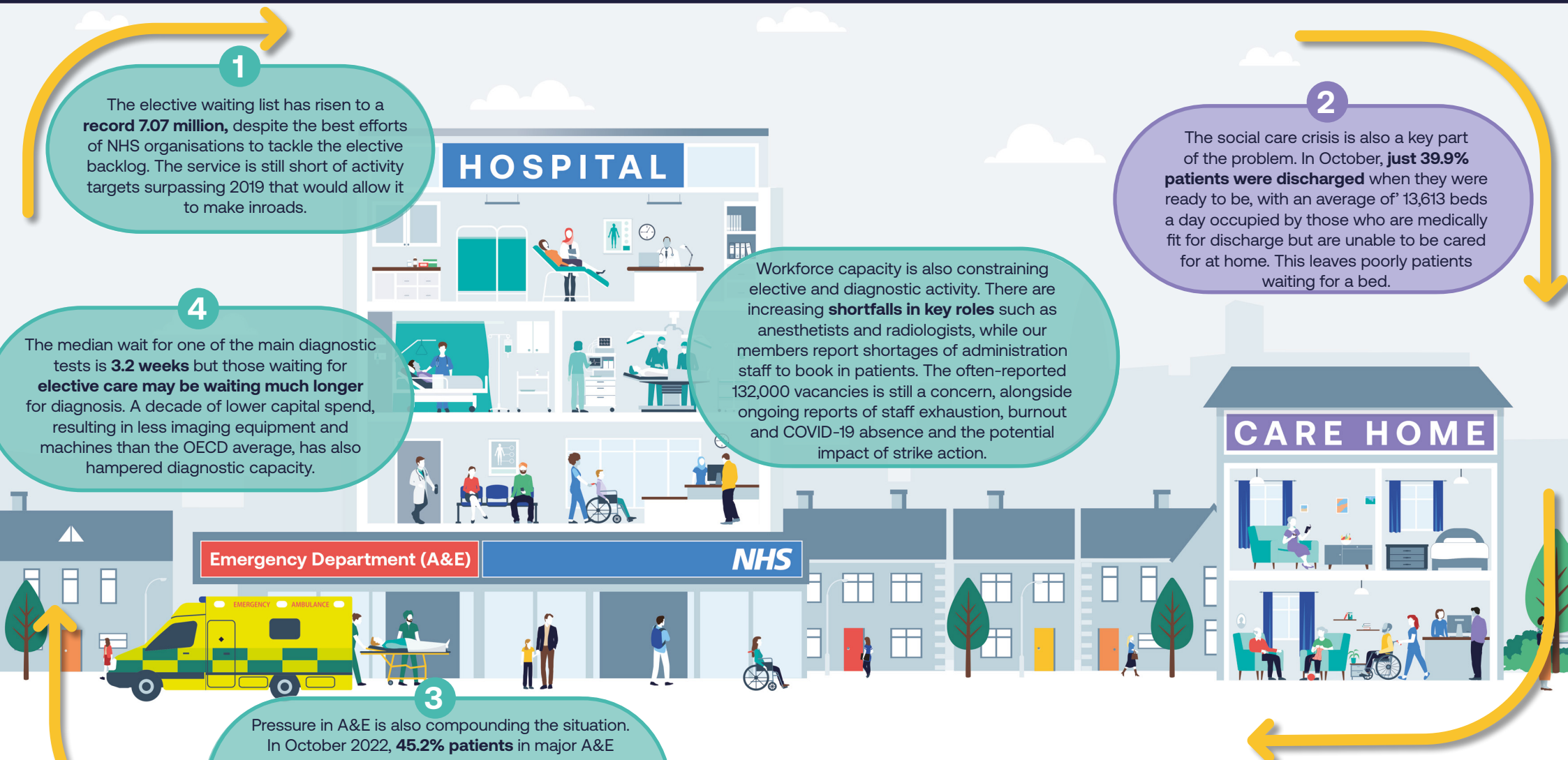
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The median wait for one of the main diagnostic tests is **3.2 weeks** but those waiting for **elective care may be waiting much longer** for diagnosis. A decade of lower capital spend, resulting in less imaging equipment and machines than the OECD average, has also hampered diagnostic capacity.

Workforce capacity is also constraining elective and diagnostic activity. There are increasing **shortfalls in key roles** such as anaesthetists and radiologists, while our members report shortages of administration staff to book in patients. The often-reported 132,000 vacancies is still a concern, alongside ongoing reports of staff exhaustion, burnout and COVID-19 absence and the potential impact of strike action.

3

Pressure in A&E is also compounding the situation. In October 2022, **45.2% patients** in major A&E departments experience attendances of **over four hours**, compared to 25.6% in October 2019 or 17% a year earlier. Resourcing will be further reduced for elective and diagnostic backlog when trusts need to increase bed capacity and staffing to handle winter pressures.



Ahead of a challenging winter, the NHS still faces a number of impediments to attempts to get through the elective backlog.