

How does the United Kingdom compare?

Key Findings

- The United Kingdom population continues to enjoy good access to care, especially at the primary care level, although both human and financial resources are restricted.
- 9.8% of the United Kingdom's GDP was spent on health in 2015, which is close to the EU weighted average of 9.9%, but less than Germany, Sweden and France which all allocated 11% or more of their GDP to health spending in 2015.
- The United Kingdom has made some progress in improving the efficiency in the health sector through such measures as use of generics and day surgery, but further efforts are needed to improve quality in the area of cancer care and other key areas.

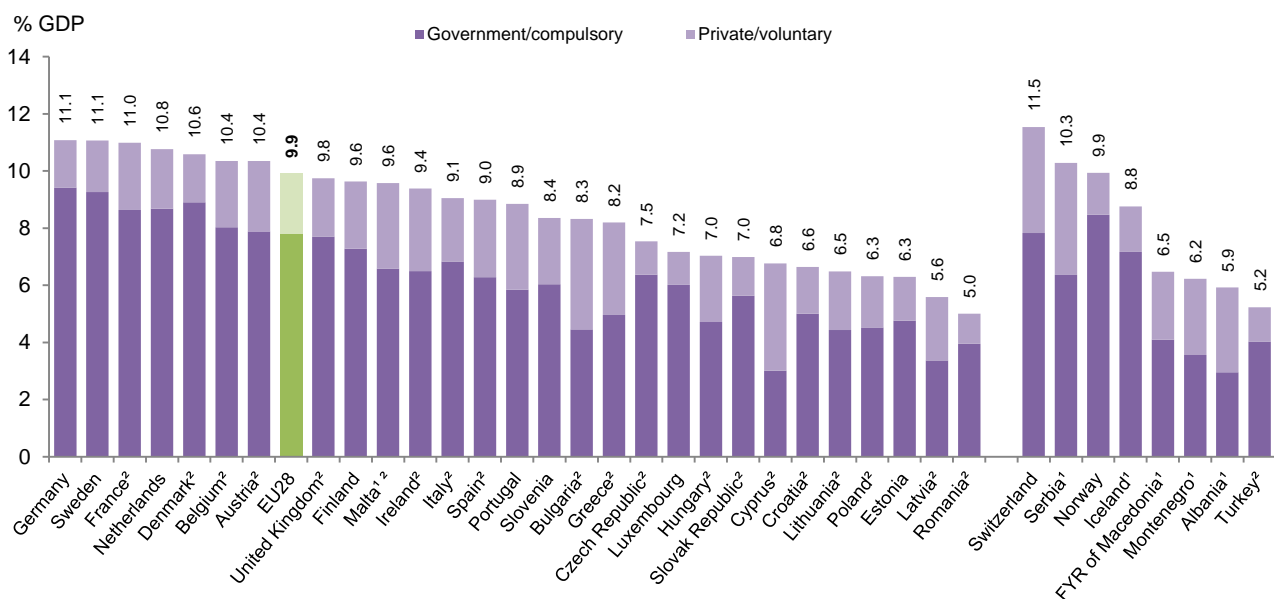
While access to primary care services is generally good, resources in the health sector remain constrained ...

Access to primary care in the United Kingdom health system compares favourably with other EU countries. Unmet care needs for medical examinations are low and comfortably below the EU average. Coverage of vaccinations, for example influenza vaccinations for the over 65s, is also good and has been improving. Although physician numbers remain below the EU average, there were 50% more doctors in 2014 compared with 2000.

... with the NHS under strain and spending growth static since the global financial crisis

Tight budget constraints have characterised the NHS in England in recent years, with close to zero growth in health spending per person in real terms between 2009 and 2015. Health spending was estimated to have accounted for 9.8% of GDP in the United Kingdom in 2015, close to the EU weighted average of 9.9%, but somewhat lower than in France (11.0%), Sweden (11.1%) and Germany (11.1%). More than three-quarters (79%) of health spending in the United Kingdom is publicly-funded - the same as the EU average.

Health expenditure as a share of GDP, 2015



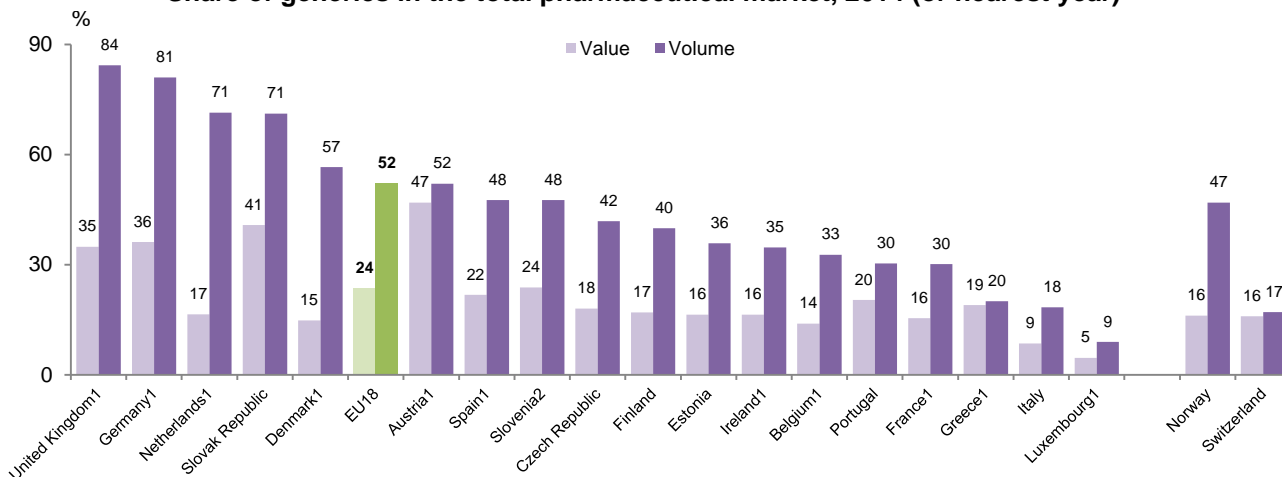
Source: OECD Health Statistics 2016; Eurostat Database; WHO, Global Health Expenditure Database.

A number of measures have been implemented to enhance efficiency

The lower growth in government health spending in the United Kingdom in recent years has been managed through the introduction of various measures across all sectors of the health care system, including pharmaceuticals. The development of generic markets has provided a good opportunity to increase efficiency in pharmaceutical spending. In 2014, generics accounted for 84% of the volume of

pharmaceuticals sold in the United Kingdom - the highest among EU countries - and up from 72% in 2008. This represents around a third of the market value, indicating a large price gap between generics and brand-name drugs and the substantial savings achieved through generic substitution. The United Kingdom has also seen a rapid rise in the use of day surgery (e.g. for cataracts and tonsillectomies) since 2000. The use of day surgery can reduce spending per intervention and allow an increase in volumes.

Share of generics in the total pharmaceutical market, 2014 (or nearest year)



1. Reimbursed pharmaceutical market.
2. Community pharmacy market.
Source: OECD Health Statistics 2016.

Although pioneering the measurement of quality of services, actual performance across the health system remains rather patchy

As highlighted in the recently released OECD Review of Health Care Quality¹, the United Kingdom as a whole puts more effort into quality improvement initiatives in the health care sector than many other countries in Europe, and as a result has many innovative policies of international repute. Despite this, the quality of health care in the UK remains variable. For example, while admission rates for congestive heart failure are around a third of the EU average and point to effective treatment at the primary care level, the same is not the case for asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), where hospital admissions in 2013 were well above the average. Similarly, survival for breast and cervical cancer in the United Kingdom still remain below the EU average, although there were improvements between 2008 and 2013.

On the other hand, the United Kingdom has also seen significant improvement in the mortality rate after strokes, pointing towards more timely transportation, specialised facilities and improved medical interventions. Between 2008 and 2014, there has been a reduction in the 30-day mortality rate from 17% of patients admitted for stroke to less than 11%, bringing the United Kingdom below the average of a group of 15 EU countries.

More information on *Health at a Glance: Europe 2016 – State of Health in the EU cycle* is available at <http://www.oecd.org/health/health-at-a-glance-europe-23056088.htm>. *Health at a Glance: Europe 2016* is the first step in new joint work between the OECD and the EC under the Commission's new *State of Health in the EU cycle*. This publication will be followed by the preparation of more in-depth country health profiles, expected to be released in November 2017.

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/els/health-systems/oecd-reviews-of-health-care-quality-united-kingdom-2016-9789264239487-en.htm>