

# Aide-Mémoire

**Health New Zealand**  
Te Whatu Ora

## Echocardiogram and Angiogram Wait Lists and Wait Times

<b>Due to MO:</b>	26 March 2025	<b>Reference</b>	HNZ00082905
<b>To:</b>	Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Health		
<b>From:</b>	Jason Power, Acting National Director, Planning, Funding and Outcomes		
<b>Copy to:</b>	N/A		
<b>Security level:</b>	In Confidence	<b>Priority</b>	Routine
<b>Consulted</b>	N/A		

### Contact for further discussion (if required)

Name	Position	Phone	1st contact
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## Purpose

1. You requested advice on echocardiogram and angiogram wait lists, as well as the work under way to address these wait lists.

## Summary

2. Echocardiograms and angiograms are cardiac diagnostic tests. As at 28 February 2025, 1,345 people nationally were waiting for coronary angiography and/or catheterisation, with 26% waiting longer than 120 days. As at mid-March, 28,865 people nationally were waiting for an echocardiogram.
3. There has been media attention on long waits for these services at Waikato and Capital & Coast. While Capital & Coast has seen improvement in its waitlist, Waikato's continues to grow.
4. These, and all, districts face similar pressures delivering cardio imaging services, specifically growing demand, increased acute cases that delay elective cases, and significant workforce and training pressures.
5. All districts, including Waikato and Capital & Coast, have work under way to improve performance. The National Cardiac Clinical Network is supporting this work.
6. More action is needed to make substantial improvements to access to cardio imaging services. As requested, advice on this will be provided to you as part of a full briefing on improving access to all diagnostic services in May 2025.

## Background

7. An angiogram is a test to evaluate cardiac blood supply. Invasive coronary angiograms are performed in a cardiac catheter laboratory, and non-invasive coronary angiograms can be performed by dedicated cardiac CT scanners. Most patients require an invasive coronary angiogram after a heart attack. At the time of invasive angiogram, revascularisation can be performed if appropriate (e.g., stenting). Patients who present with chest pain may be referred for a CT coronary angiogram to rule out (or in) obstructive coronary disease. People with obstructive disease then require an invasive angiogram (plus or minus stenting) for diagnostic confirmation and treatment.
8. An echocardiogram is a cardiac ultrasound, and a fundamental test used to assess cardiac structure and function. They are required to identify cardiac disease. A large percentage of patients referred to a cardiology clinic will require an echocardiogram. Echocardiograms are also used in other settings including monitoring patients receiving cancer treatment and to risk-stratify patients for non-cardiac surgery. Echocardiograms are performed by cardiac sonographers and reported by imaging cardiologists.
9. The National Cardiovascular Clinical Network has identified inconsistent measures for prioritisation and performance bands across the country, and that this will be raised through Network to establish consistency.

## Current echocardiogram and angiogram wait lists

### Angiogram waiting list

10. At the end of February 2025, 1,345 people are waiting for coronary angiography and/or catheterisation nationally, with 352 patients (26 percent) waiting longer than 120 days. Information by district is provided in Tables 1 and 2 below.

**Table 1: Coronary angiography and/or catheterisation wait list, by district\***

District	February 2024	February 2025	Net Change	% Change
Auckland	94	183	89	94.7%
Bay of Plenty	44	34	-10	-22.7%
Canterbury	111	128	17	15.3%
Capital and Coast	150	129	-21	-14.0%
Counties Manukau	62	68	6	9.7%
Hawke's Bay	53	23	-30	-56.6%
MidCentral	44	19	-25	-56.8%
Nelson Marlborough	29	47	18	62.1%
Northland	26	21	-5	-19.2%
Southern	45	49	4	8.9%
Taranaki	25	39	14	56.0%
Waikato	194	453	259	133.5%
Waitemata	125	152	27	21.6%
<b>National</b>	<b>1002</b>	<b>1,345</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>34.2%</b>

\*Not all districts deliver angiography services. Patients in Whanganui flow to Capital & Coast or MidCentral, patients in West Coast flow to Canterbury, and Tairāwhiti patients flow to Waikato.

**Table 2: waiting times (days) as of 28 February 2025, by district\***

District	<=30	31 - 60	61 - 90	91 - 120	121+	Total
Auckland	55	27	39	18	44	183
Bay of Plenty	25	4	2	1	2	34
Canterbury	35	33	25	22	13	128
Capital and Coast	43	30	21	22	13	129
Counties Manukau	32	21	12	1	2	68
Hawke's Bay	9	2	6	4	2	23
MidCentral		15	3		1	19
Nelson Marlborough	19	13	4	8	3	47
Northland	15	1	1		4	21
Southern	47	1	0		1	49
Taranaki	12	11	10	3	3	39
Waikato	99	46	32	36	c	453
Waitemata	64	25	22	17	24	152
<b>Total</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>1345</b>

\*Not all districts deliver angiography services. Patients in Whanganui flow to Capital & Coast or MidCentral, patients in West Coast flow to Canterbury, and Tairāwhiti patients flow to Waikato.

### Echocardiogram waiting list

11. As at 25 March, an estimated 28,865 people nationally are waiting for an echocardiogram. District wait lists are provided in Table 3.

**Table 3: Unvalidated Echocardiogram wait list as at 25 March 2025, by district**

District	Wait list as at 25 March 2025
Auckland	1,019
Counties Manukau	2,730
Northland	723
Waitemata	1,304
Capital and Coast	3,214
Hawke's Bay	1,224
Hutt Valley	647
MidCentral	1,479
Wairarapa	150
Whanganui	347
Bay of Plenty	2,502
Lakes	329
Tairāwhiti	267
Taranaki	840
Waikato	7,536
Canterbury	1,617
Nelson Marlborough	1,539
South Canterbury	287
Southern	1,080
West Coast	31
<b>National</b>	<b>28,865</b>

12. The echocardiogram data above should be reviewed with caution. Unlike angiogram data, this data is not collected nationally. It is held by individual districts in various sources and using different business rules to count and classify their lists.
13. As a result, we do not have consistent national data on how long people are waiting for echocardiograms. Where this data is available (80 percent of the estimated total wait list), an estimated 80.15% of people have been waiting for less than a year.
14. National collection of echocardiogram data is on our Data and Reporting Improvement work programme, and more information on this will be provided in the forthcoming advice on improving diagnostic access.

### There has been media coverage on Waikato and Capital & Coast

15. In March, there has been media focus on wait lists in Waikato and Capital & Coast. In Waikato:
- at the end of February, 453 people were waiting for a coronary angiography and/or catheterisation. Compared to the same period last year, this is an increase of 259 cases (133.5%).
  - 7,536 people are waiting for an echocardiogram as at mid-March.
16. And in Capital & Coast:

- a) at the end of February, 129 people are waiting for a coronary angiography and/or catheterisation. Compared to last year, this is a decrease of 21 cases (-14%).
  - b) 3,214 people are waiting for an echocardiogram as at mid-March.
17. Both districts (and all districts) are experiencing similar pressures impacting capacity:
- a) Increased demand for inpatient and outpatient cardio imaging services.
  - b) Increased demand for acute imaging, meaning longer waits for elective cases.
  - c) <sup>S9(2)(g)(i)</sup>
  - d)
18. In addition, Waikato is challenged by:
- a) <sup>S9(2)(g)(i)</sup>
  - b)

## Work is under way in these two districts to improve performance

### Waikato

19. A work programme to address cardio thoracic performance in Waikato was established in October 2024. Despite work under way, the waitlist for echocardiograms and angiograms has continued to grow.
20. To date, this work programme focused on improving cardiac patient flow and the processes required to support improved patient outcomes. Since the start of 2024 the elective acceptance rate for the coronary waitlist in Waikato has increased from an average of 58 patients per month to an average of 76 patients per month. Acute demand also increased, from an average of 265 per month (January to July 2024) to 327 per month (October to December 2024). However, the capacity available to deliver the services has remained the same.
21. As such, pivot is required to address the capacity issues created by increased demand in the monthly wait lists for elective and acute services. The actions under way to increase this capacity are outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3: Selected actions to improve echocardiogram and angiogram performance in Waikato**

Action	Status
Using cardiac catheter laboratory capacity at Tauranga Hospital to deliver angiograms for regional patients to reduce demand on Waikato labs.	Underway and continuing as lab capacity allows
Same day repatriation of regional patients following cardiac catheter laboratory procedure to reduce overnight beds and increase flow and access to labs.	Underway and ongoing

Action	Status
Additional evening and Saturday lists for echocardiography in Waikato.	Initiated in March and ongoing as capacity allows
Establishing additional echocardiography lists in Lakes for long-waiting Waikato patients	Will begin May 2025
Increasing resourcing from 4 to 5 teams to fully resource and operate the four Waikato cardiac catheter laboratories for five days per week with no requirement to stand down session for overnight call outs.	Business Case in preparation for sign off.
Administrative and clinical reviews of echocardiography waitlists. Requires dedicated resource to implement. Once complete will move to establish as an ongoing process.	Will begin April 2025
ISCV upgrade in play to enable sharing of echo images and reports to increase access and enable outsourcing. HeartLab software implementation to enable reading and reporting of echo images remotely across districts (Tairāwhiti and Waikato)	ISCV Upgrade: May 2025 HeartLab implementation in Tairāwhiti/Waikato: May 2025

## Capital & Coast

22. Capital & Coast has seen some improvement in angiogram wait lists and has the following actions under way to continue to improve performance.

**Table 4: Selected actions to improve echocardiogram and angiogram performance in Capital & Coast**

Action	Status
Improving triage processes to ensure echocardiogram referrals are appropriate	Complete; ongoing.
Increasing use of contract staff to increase echocardiogram capacity	In place, with costs offset by previous year cardiac sonographer vacancies.
Recruiting additional staff to increase Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit capacity	Recruitment under way, aiming to fill positions and complete required onboarding in June/July.
Outsourcing business case to increase angiogram capacity	In progress.
Collaborating across the region to increase angiogram capability and capacity in other districts including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>technical and nursing staff supporting Hawke's Bay and MidCentral.</li> <li>Interventionist and Cardiologist support in MidCentral.</li> </ul>	Complete; ongoing.

## The National Cardiovascular Clinical Network is also working to improve performance and reduce variation

23. While Waikato and Capital & Coast have been a recent focus, pressure is seen across the country and all regions have work under way to improve performance. For example, in the Northern region, Auckland and Counties Manukau are sharing echocardiogram cases to reduce regional variation in wait times. Auckland Hospital is also reporting up to 32 echocardiograms each week performed at Whangarei Hospital. Te Tai Tokerau is supporting Waitemātā with outpatient angiography, starting with 20 cases from the northern area of the district.

24. In addition to regional work, the National Cardiac Clinical Network is leading work to improve wait lists. For coronary angiography, the Network is:
- a) Re-establishing resourced regional networks to more effectively deliver cardiac care nationwide.
  - b) Completing regular reviews of ANZACS-QI key performance indicators ensure that coronary angiography is performed within 72 hours of presentation with Acute Coronary Syndrome.
  - c) Developing a reporting platform that allows districts and regions to monitor progress against KPIs in real-time.
  - d) Creating a nationwide map of cardiac services to identify centres capable of providing coronary angiography and other cardiac services.
25. For echocardiography, the Network is:
- a) Developing recommendations to set direction for echo sonography training and development.
  - b) Developing a dashboard to identify echocardiography resources across New Zealand, alongside the initial stages of creating a national waiting list for echocardiography.
  - c) Supporting the regional reporting platform in Te Manawa Taki (HeartLab; see Table 3).
26. Finally, there are research developments and existing innovations – such as point-of-care or shortened echocardiography, and AI-supported ECG – that need to be explored further to determine how they can help deliver improved and faster services to patients in this space. We will discuss these options in more detail in upcoming advice on diagnostic access.

## Next steps

27. At your request, in May Health NZ and the Ministry of Health will provide you with a briefing on options for improving access to diagnostics. Further advice on improving access to echocardiogram and angiogram services will be included in this paper.