

Life Expectancy Report

BACKGROUND / INTRODUCTION

Life expectancy at birth for an area is an estimate of the average number of years a new-born baby would survive if he or she experienced the particular area's age-specific mortality rate for that time period throughout his or her life. Life expectancy is not the number of years a baby born in the area could actually expect to live, both because the death rates of the area are likely to change in the future and because many of those born in the area will live elsewhere for at least some part of their lives.

Increasing life expectancy and narrowing the gap between those with lowest life expectancy and the rest of the population is a key national public health target. It should be noted that most of the national health improvement targets contribute towards the achievement of this target, e.g. decreasing mortality rates from coronary heart disease and cancer.

This Life Expectancy Report summarises the most recently available data for life expectancy across Wirral and the Wirral PCTs, and presents comparisons with other PCTs, Local Authorities and England, including how the gap between Wirral and England is changing.

TARGETS

National Target

- Starting with health authorities, by 2010 to reduce by at least 10 per cent the gap between the fifth of areas with the lowest life expectancy at birth and the population as a whole, from the baseline of 1995-1997.

Wirral Targets

Wirral is one of the fifth of areas with the lowest life expectancy as detailed in the national target above. Consequently, there are local targets for the improvement of life expectancy to ensure Wirral contributes to the national target. These are:

- To reduce by 10% the gap in life expectancy at birth (for both males and females) between Wirral local authority and England by 2010, from the baseline of 1995-1997.
- To reduce by 10% the gap in life expectancy in Wirral between the most deprived quintile of areas and the population as a whole by 2010, from the baseline of 1995-1997.

DATA

Introduction

Life expectancy data are obtained from the Clinical and Health Outcomes Knowledge Base Compendium (<http://nww.nchod.nhs.uk>). Available life expectancy data includes number of years of life expectancy and rank of life expectancy between organisations. The lowest level of data available is PCT

level as it is not advisable to calculate life expectancy on populations less than 100,000 as the data can become unreliable due to the small numbers involved. Data are reported as 3-year rolling and updated annually, although there is not a set schedule for when these updates occur. Until 2006, the Government Actuaries Department calculated life expectancy tables, but this responsibility has now transferred to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Life Expectancy for Wirral

Males

In 2003-2005 the life expectancy at birth for males in Wirral was 75.5 years. This has risen fairly steadily from 72.4 years in 1991-1993 and 73.1 years in 1995-1997 which is the baseline figure compared to England's 74.6 years. As can be seen from Figure 1, Wirral has been consistently below England's life expectancy for males, but consistently above the North West trend for life expectancy (data not shown). Whilst life expectancy has been rising steadily both locally and nationally from 1995-1997 up to 2003-2005, the gap between England and Wirral for male life expectancy had decreased from 1.5 years to 1.2 years in 2002-2004. However, that gap has widened again to 1.4 years in 2003-2005.

Figure 1: Life Expectancy in Wirral Males, 1996-2004

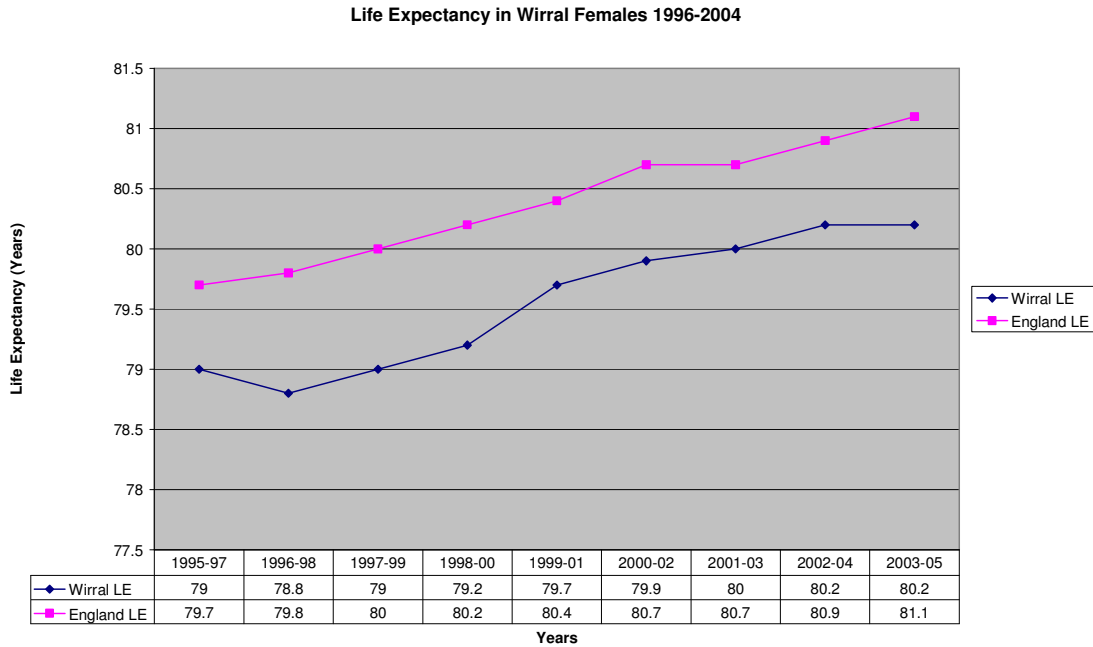


Females

In 2003-2005 the life expectancy at birth for females was 80.2 years. Again this has risen from 78.3 years in 1991-1993 and 79.0 in 1995-1997. As can be seen from Figure 2, Wirral has been consistently below England's life expectancy for females, but consistently above the North West trend for life expectancy (data not shown). Whilst life expectancy has been rising steadily both locally and nationally from 1995-1997 up to 2002-2004, the gap between England and Wirral

for female life expectancy has varied between 0.7 years and 1.0 years. In 2003-2005, the gap stood at 0.9 years, the largest since 1998-2000.

Figure 2: Life Expectancy in Wirral Females, 1996-2004



Life Expectancy for Wirral Compared with Other Local Authorities

The life expectancy for the populations of all 352 local authorities in England can be compared and ranked¹.

Males

Life expectancy for Wirral males is ranked near to the bottom of all local authorities and this rank has fallen again in 2003-05. Although the life expectancy has increased from 75.2 years in 2001-03 to 75.5 years in 2003-05 (approximately 3½ months increase) the rank has fallen from 274 to 291 out of 352. This places Wirral in the bottom quintile (20%) nationally. See table 1.

Table 1: Life Expectancy in Wirral Comparison with Other Local Authorities (Males)

	2001-03	2002-04	2003-05
Life expectancy (years)	75.2	75.4	75.5
Rank (out of 352)	274	284	291
Quintile	4	5	5

Females

Life expectancy for Wirral females is also ranked low nationally. Although the life expectancy has increased from 80.0 years in 2001-03 to 80.2 years in 2003-05

¹ The lower the number, the higher the life expectancy – i.e. rank 1 is the highest life expectancy and rank 352 the lowest.

(approximately 2½ months increase) the rank has fallen from 270 to 283 out of 352. This places Wirral in the bottom quintile (20%) nationally whereas previously it was in the fourth quintile. See table 2.

Table 2: Life Expectancy in Wirral Comparison with Other Local Authorities (Females)

	2001-03	2002-04	2003-05
Life expectancy (years)	80.0	80.2	80.2
Rank (out of 352)	270	269	283
Quintile	4	4	5

Life Expectancy for Wirral Wards

It is commonly recognised that life expectancy data should not be calculated on populations less than 100,000 as the data can become unreliable due to the small numbers involved. However, the Department of Health has published experimental statistics for life expectancy at ward level using 5-year rolling data from 2001 (1999-2003).

Table 3 shows life expectancy at birth and the corresponding quintile for each of the Wirral wards for all persons, and the life expectancy for males and females separately.

Table 3: Life Expectancy for Wirral Wards for All Persons

Ward	LE - Persons (Years)	LE Quintile	LE – Males (Years)	LE – Females (Years)
Bebington	81.1	2	77.2	84.9
Bidston	73.4	5	68.5	77.9
Birkenhead	71.9	5	68.3	75.3
Bromborough	76.4	5	73.8	78.7
Clatterbridge	79.0	3	77.4	80.6
Claughton	76.0	5	72.8	79.0
Eastham	78.4	3	75.7	80.8
Egerton	74.7	5	72.8	76.5
Heswall	82.4	1	79.9	84.4
Hoylake	79.3	3	77.7	80.4
Leasowe	76.3	5	72.1	80.7
Liscard	75.6	5	73.4	77.6
Moreton	79.0	3	76.0	81.9
New Brighton	75.3	5	72.9	77.6
Oxton	76.3	5	73.8	78.6
Prenton	79.2	3	76.3	81.6
Royden	81.5	1	79.6	83.2
Seacombe	75.3	5	72.1	78.6
Thurstaston	81.2	1	77.8	84.4
Tranmere	73.0	5	69.6	76.5
Upton	76.5	5	74.1	78.7
Wallasey	81.2	1	78.9	83.1

It can be seen from Table 3 that 12 of Wirral's 22 wards are in the fifth quintile for life expectancy (i.e. lowest life expectancy) whilst four are in the first quintile (i.e. highest life expectancy). This demonstrates the large variation in life expectancy across the area.

Gap in Life Expectancy between Wirral and England

The national target requires us to reduce the gap in life expectancy by 10% for men and women, between England and Wirral, by 2010 from a baseline in 1995-97.

Males

The life expectancy for men has been rising steadily in both England and Wirral and the gap between the areas is decreasing. The reduction in the gap fluctuates from year to year but the target has already been achieved. Obviously a rising life expectancy in Wirral contributes to a rising life expectancy in England so to reduce this gap Wirral has to improve more quickly than England.

Table 4 shows that the gap in life expectancy between Wirral and England for males had narrowed by 0.3 years (approximately 3½ months) from 1995-1997 to 2002-2004, but in 2003-2005 stood at just 0.1 years (approximately 1 month). This gap is subject to fluctuations. This represents a reduction in the gap of just 7%, which means that the life expectancy target for men is not being met.

Table 4: The Gap in Life Expectancy between England and Wirral (Males)

	1995 -97	1996 -98	1997 -99	1998 -00	1999 -01	2000 -02	2001 -03	2002 -04	2003 -05
England LE (Years)	74.6	74.8	75.1	75.4	75.7	76.0	76.2	76.6	76.9
Wirral LE (Years)	73.1	73.5	73.8	73.9	74.3	74.9	75.2	75.4	75.5
Difference ² (Years)	1.5	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.1	1.0	1.2	1.4
Percentage difference ³	N/A	-13%	-13%	0%	-7%	-27%	-33%	-20%	-7%

The main contributing factors to the gap in life expectancy between Wirral and England and Wales for males are identified in Figure 3.

² Difference refers to the gap in years between life expectancy for England and life expectancy for Wirral for each given time period (i.e. 3-year rolling).

³ Percentage difference refers to the percentage difference between life expectancy for England and life expectancy for Wirral from the 1996 (1995-1997) baseline for each given time period (i.e. 3 year rolling).

Figure 3: Causes of Gap in Life Expectancy between Wirral and England and Wales from 1995-97 to 2002-04 (Males)

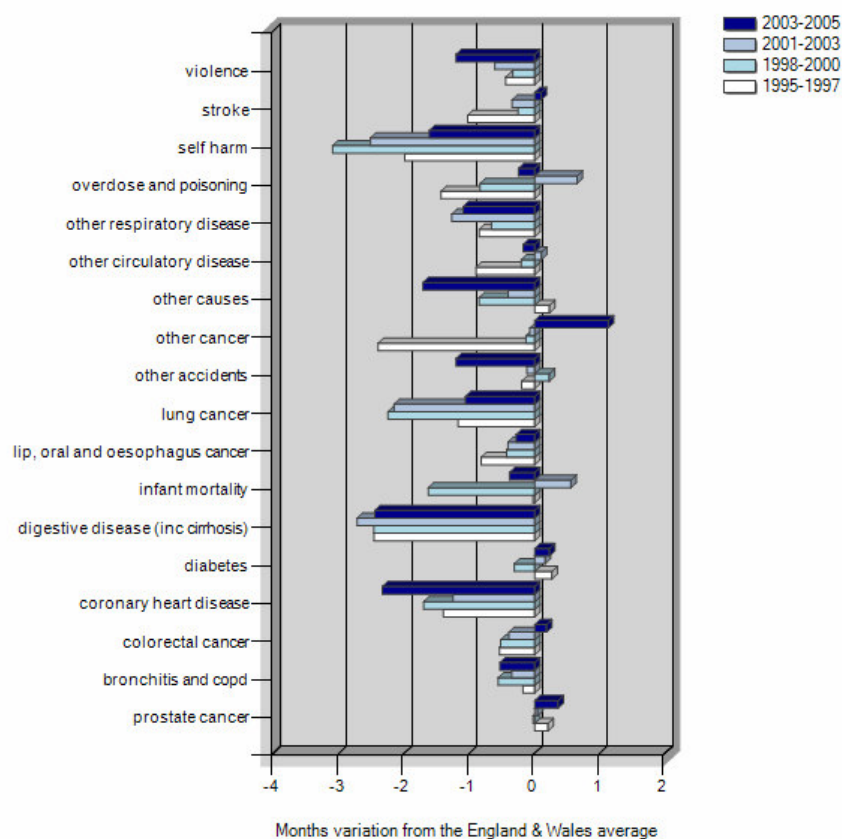


Figure 3 shows that the key contributors to the gap in life expectancy between Wirral and England and Wales for males in 2003-2005 are:

- Coronary heart disease
- Digestive diseases including cirrhosis
- Self harm
- Accidents
- Violence
- Lung cancer

Females

The life expectancy for women has also been rising in both England and Wirral. The gap was smaller than that for men in 1995-97 (0.7 years) and this gap has been widened. The rise in life expectancy for Wirral females needs to accelerate if the target is to be achieved.

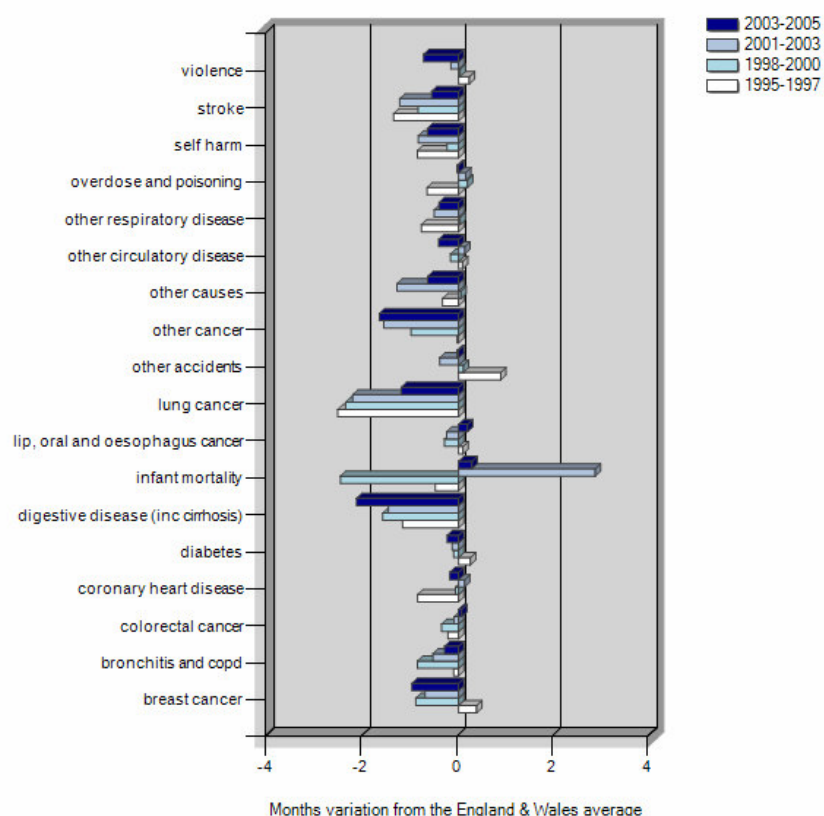
Table 5 shows that the gap in life expectancy between Wirral and England for females has increased from 0.7 years from 1995-1997 to 0.9 years in 2003-2005, although this gap is subject to fluctuations. This means that the gap in life expectancy is widening and not reducing, which means that life expectancy target for women is not being met.

Table 5: The Gap in Life Expectancy between England and Wirral (Females)

	1995 -97	1996 -98	1997 -99	1998 -00	1999 -01	2000 -02	2001 -03	2002 -04	2003 -05
England LE (Years)	79.7	79.8	80.0	80.2	80.4	80.7	80.7	80.9	81.1
Wirral LE (Years)	79.0	78.8	79.0	79.2	79.7	79.9	80.0	80.2	80.2
Difference ⁴ (Years)	0.7	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.9
Percentage difference ⁵	N/A	+43%	+43%	+43%	0%	+14%	0%	0%	+22%

The main contributing factors to the gap in life expectancy between Wirral and England and Wales for females are identified in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Causes of Gap in Life Expectancy between Wirral and England and Wales from 1995-97 to 2002-04 (Females)



⁴ Difference refers to the gap in years between life expectancy for England and life expectancy for Wirral for each given time period (i.e. 3-year rolling).

⁵ Percentage difference refers to the percentage difference between life expectancy for England and life expectancy for Wirral from the 1996 (1995-1997) baseline for each given time period (i.e. 3 year rolling).

Figure 4 shows that the following are the key contributors to the gap in life expectancy between Wirral and England and Wales for females:

- Digestive diseases including cirrhosis
- Other cancer
- Lung cancer
- Breast cancer
- Violence
- Self harm

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Caution is required when interpreting life expectancy data. As previously stated, life expectancy at birth for an area is an estimate of the average number of years a new-born baby would survive if he or she experienced the particular area's age-specific mortality rate for that time period throughout his or her life. It is not the number of years a baby born in the area could actually expect to live, both because the death rates of the area are likely to change in the future and because many of those born in the area will live elsewhere for at least some part of their lives.

It is also important, when interpreting life expectancy data, to interpret data of less than one year appropriately – e.g. 0.25 years = 3 months, 0.5 years = 6 months, etc.

Key messages:

- Life expectancy across Wirral is rising in both males and females..
- The ranking for life expectancy for Wirral males and females has fallen between 2001-03 to 2003-05 and has gone from the 4th quintile to the 5th quintile.
- The gap in life expectancy between Wirral and England and Wales has narrowed slightly for males from 1995-97 baseline but since increased for females.

The data show that whilst overall life expectancy is rising across Wirral that there is still much that needs to be done to ensure that Wirral improves ahead of the rest of England and Wales if the gap is to be reduced. In order to ensure that this happens, Wirral needs to focus on the issues contributing most to the gap in life expectancy as identified in Figures 3 and 4.