

ESTIMATING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON GYNAECOLOGY TREATMENT IN ENGLAND

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Summary

- + The largest proportional increase since the Covid-19 pandemic in the number of patients waiting for elective treatment in England is for gynaecology
- + It is likely there are many patients with chronic conditions who did not join the waiting list as would have been expected in the absence of the pandemic. This “hidden need” is likely to result in an almost doubling in the number of patients waiting for gynaecology treatment
- + The impact on patients varies geographically which will impact established health inequalities
- + Policies aiming to redress the increased backlog should be proportionate and targeted to ensure efforts do not worsen inequalities further

Background

- The Covid-19 pandemic had a large and lasting impact on healthcare systems.
- This impact has been felt unequally by geography and speciality
- Redeployment of NHS professionals to support COVID-19 patients has further impacted the delay in elective care
- Qualitative research by RCOG identified that many gynaecologists and patients believed inaccurate perceptions of the severity and impact of symptoms in gynaecology has contributed to the unequal impact on waiting lists for¹
- We aimed to:
 - characterise the overall gynaecology waiting list by geography,
 - estimate the number of additional patients who would have sought care had the pandemic not occurred (‘hidden referrals’) and
 - identify how hospital care for gynaecological conditions has changed since the pandemic

Methods

- We used publicly available National Health Service data to:
 - estimate the number of known patients on the gynaecology waiting lists at small geographical level from April 2018 to January 2022 across England and
 - estimate the number hidden referrals between March 2020 and November 2021 by calculating the number of fewer referrals to treatment during the pandemic compared to 2019
- Hidden referrals were estimated by subtracting new monthly referrals in a baseline year (2019) prior to the pandemic from new referrals in the respective month during the pandemic
- We used NHS admission and outpatient data to identify the trends in admissions pre and post pandemic by condition

Results

- The gynaecology waiting list has increased at the fastest rate of all specialities (Figure 1) in England (**90% increase** since April 2018 and a 60% increase since February 2020)
- This number of patients has increased to nearly **460,000** as of 31 January 2022
- We estimated a further 400,000 hidden referrals are still to join the waiting list as at November 2021
- There were significant geographical disparities (Figure 3), with the largest number of waits in North West England. (over 1,000 per 100,000 population)
- Urogynaecological conditions appeared to be most impacted by the pandemic with a 60% reduction in admissions for prolapse or incontinence compared to 55% or less for other gynaecological conditions

There are regional and local waitlist inequalities in England

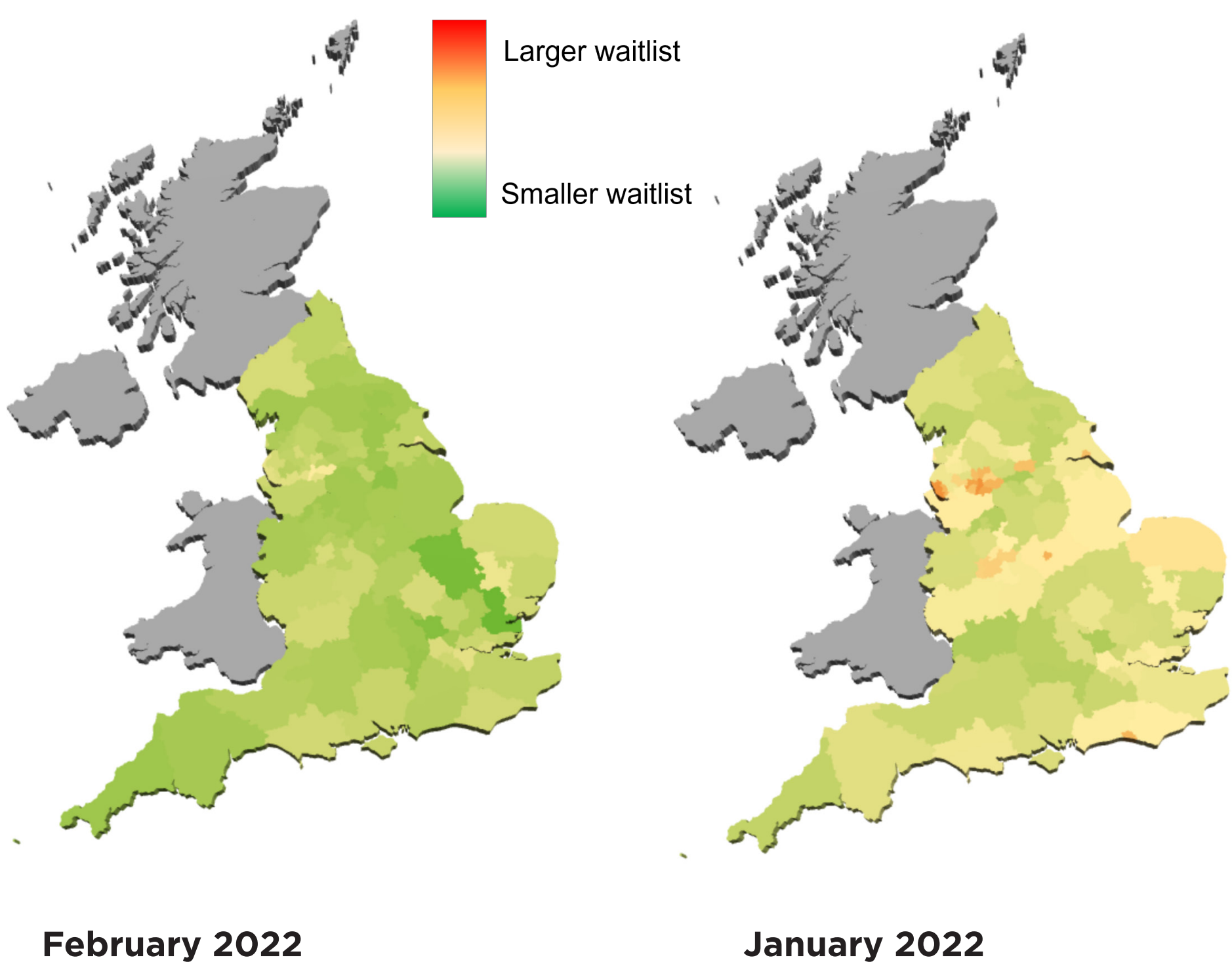


Figure 3. Total on the gynaecology wait list per 100,000 people by CCG pre-Covid-19 (February 2020) and currently (January 2022)

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the LCP
waiting list
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see more



Gynaecology waiting lists have increased at the fastest rate since the pandemic and April 2018

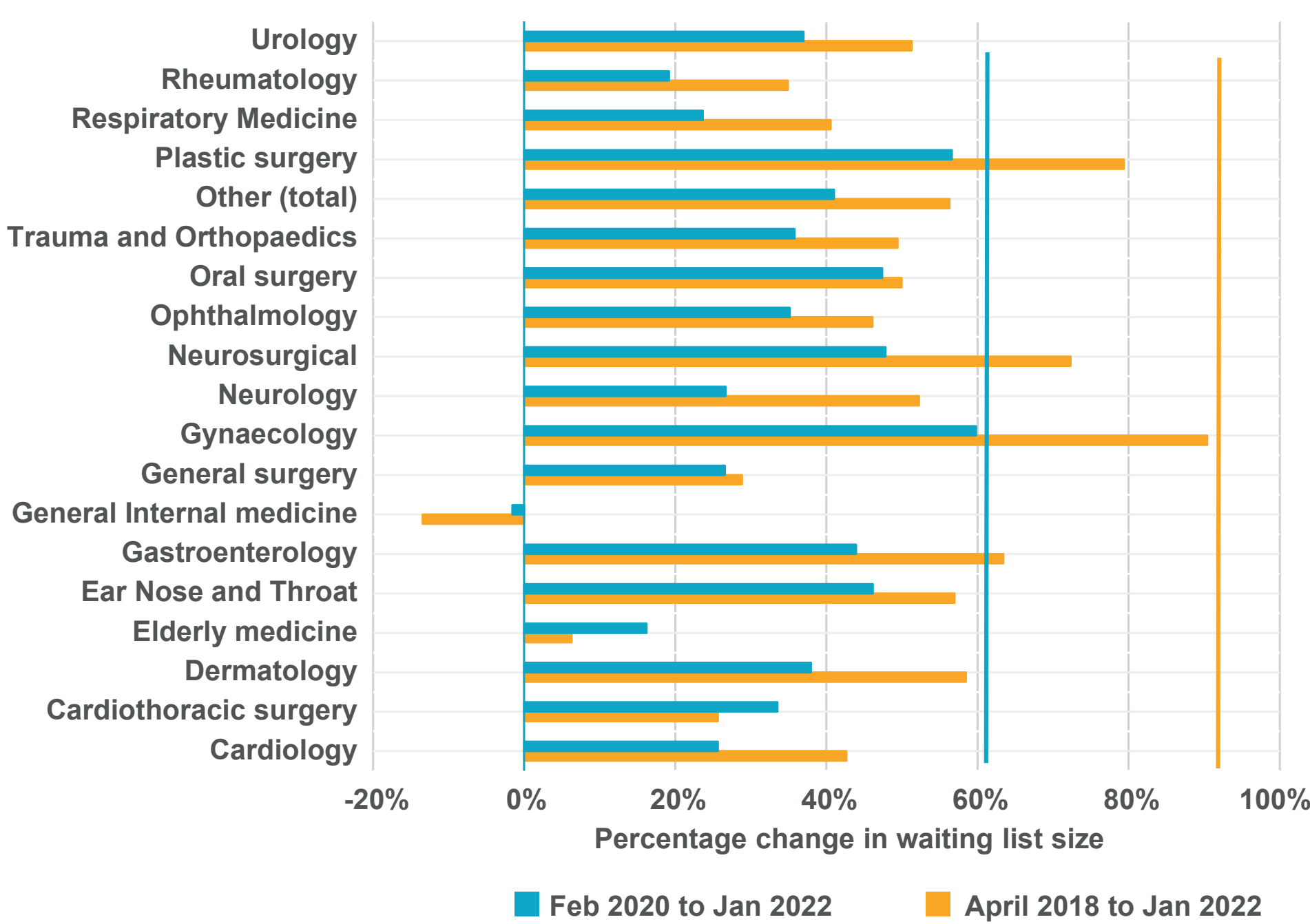


Figure 1. Percentage change of waiting lists by speciality since April 2018 to January 2022 and February 2020 to January 2022

Known waiting list and hidden referrals have increased to over 800,000 as at November 2021

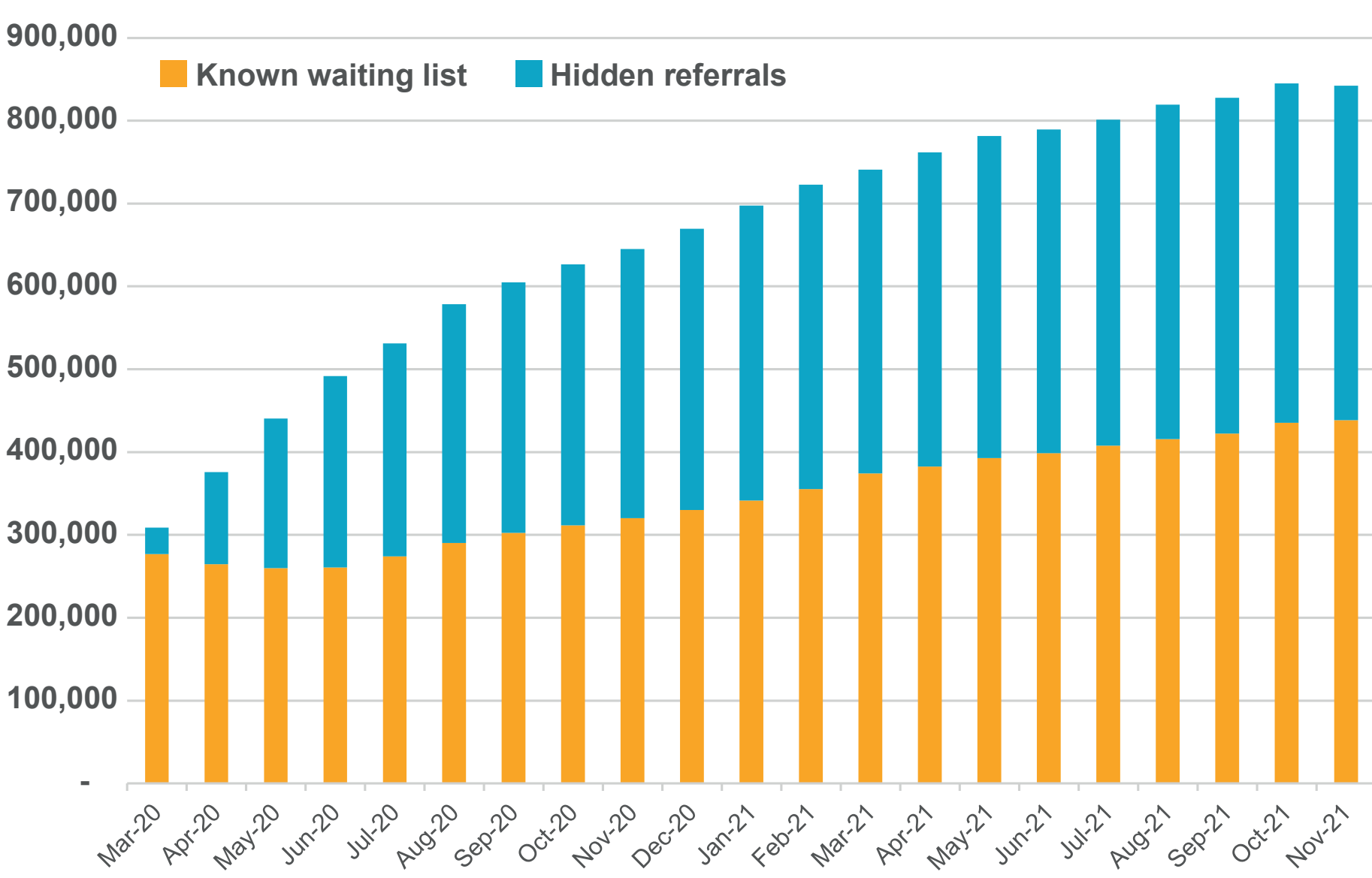


Figure 2. Number of patients on the known waiting list and number of additional estimated hidden referrals March 2020 to November 2021

Conclusions

- Gynaecology waiting lists have increased substantially across the UK, with large inequalities geographically
- Policy change is required to address geographical disparity and prioritise gynaecology as a speciality to limit the widening of these inequalities

1. Left for too long: understanding the scale and impact of gynaecology waiting lists, RCOG, London, 2022