

22 July 2026

The Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Cc: Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson DBE MP, Karin Smyth MP, James Frith MP, Alison McGovern MP

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Dear Secretary of State

National Lung Cancer Screening Programme

We are writing to welcome you to your new role and to highlight one of the NHS England's most significant recent achievements: the targeted lung cancer screening programme. It is no exaggeration to say that, in England, this initiative is transforming outcomes for the UK's biggest cancer killer, a rapidly fatal disease that still claims nearly 33,000 lives every year.¹ Across England, lung cancer screening is saving lives, reducing inequalities, and shifting diagnosis to earlier, curable stages.

Targeted screening has become one of the NHS England's real success stories. Lord Darzi has described it as the only initiative in recent years to improve early-stage diagnosis rates across all cancers.² The impact is clear. Since the Government approved the national roll-out for people aged 55–74 with a smoking history, over 11,500 lung cancers have already been identified³—more than 75% at an early, treatable stage, compared with less than 30% before screening existed.⁴ This is cancer prevention in action and one of the most important shifts in the NHS's 10-year plan.

Screening is, without doubt, the single biggest intervention in improving lung cancer survival. When the UK Lung Cancer Coalition (UKLCC) launched in 2005, five-year survival stood at around 8%, among the lowest in Europe.^{5,6} Today, with screening as a major driver, the UKLCC has set a new ambition: 35% of those people diagnosed still alive at five years by 2035 — a target once thought unthinkable, but now within reach.

To maintain this momentum, the screening programme needs stability and protection. The National Cancer Plan commits to reaching 100% coverage of the eligible population in England by 2030 (currently at 50%).⁷ Any slowdown risks reversing hard-won progress. Yet lung cancer screening remains the only national screening programme without guaranteed funding beyond 2030. Long-term, ring-fenced investment — on the same footing as breast, cervical and bowel screening — is essential.

There are also emerging threats to programme quality. Cost-cutting within Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) is causing concern, with reports of interference to high-performing screening teams and funds being diverted elsewhere. Clear national guidance is needed to ensure screening money is used *solely* for screening and that local restructuring does not undermine delivery.

The transition away from NHS England must also be managed carefully to avoid destabilising leadership, data systems, and clinical governance. Alongside this, workforce shortages across radiology, pathology, thoracic surgery and genomics pose a significant risk to sustaining the programme. Without expanded diagnostic and surgical capacity, curative opportunities will be missed.

Secretary of State, lung cancer screening is working and is a huge success story. It is saving lives now. With protected funding, a strong workforce and UK-wide implementation (NB: Wales begins roll out next year, but little progress has been made Scotland and Northern Ireland), the programme can continue to deliver the transformation already underway. **We kindly urge you to not let it lose momentum.**

Yours sincerely,

Dr David Gilligan: Chair, UK Lung Cancer Coalition; Consultant Oncologist & Affiliated Assistant Professor, University of Cambridge

Professor Robert Rintoul: Clinical Lead, UK Lung Cancer Coalition; Professor of Thoracic Oncology, Department of Oncology, University of Cambridge

Cathy Brokenshire: UKLCC Director and Lung Cancer Campaigner - widow of Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP

Professor Mick Peake OBE: UKLCC Director and Founder

Professor Neal Navani: Professor of Respiratory Medicine, UCLH; Clinical Lead, National Lung Cancer Audit, UKLCC Director

Dr Daryl Freeman: Associate Clinical Director in Primary Care, Clinical Adviser, respiratory, Norfolk & Waveney ICB, UKLCC Director

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About the UKLCC:

The UK Lung Cancer Coalition (UKLCC) is the UK's largest multi-interest group in lung cancer. It was launched in Westminster in 2005 with the founding ambition of tackling poor lung cancer survival outcomes and, specifically, to double five-year survival by 2015, which was effectively achieved (in England). A subsequent ambition of 25 percent of people alive at five years by 2025 has driven the lung cancer community to work towards driving quality improvement, reducing variation and ensuring people with lung cancer have access to optimal treatment, care and services - whoever they are and wherever they live. It announced its latest survival challenge, 35% five-year survival by 2035 at its 20th anniversary conference in November 2025. The UKLCC's membership includes leading lung cancer experts, senior NHS professionals, charities, and healthcare companies with an interest in fighting lung cancer. It has published over 20 milestone reports.

www.uklcc.org.uk

References:

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