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Re. **PQ 44673/22: To ask the Minister for Health the number of general practitioner referrals to rapid access clinics in each of the past ten years and to date in 2022, in tabular form.**

The number of electronic GP referrals sent to each of the rapid access clinics for 2019-2021 and 2022 (Jan – Aug) is as follows:

Healthlink e-Referrals	2019	2020	2021	2022 (Jan-Aug)
Symptomatic Breast Disease Clinics	35,120	40,394	47,402	31,689
Lung Rapid Access Clinics	1,722	1,572	1,648	1,532
Prostate Rapid Access Clinics	3,481	3,390	3,674	3,224

The referral data presented here represent referrals made electronically by GPs, using the Healthlink system. There are a number of important caveats to be noted in interpreting these data.

1. Patients can be referred to breast, lung and prostate cancer RACs by their GP via an electronic referral system. GPs are not obliged to refer electronically, but a high proportion now do (approximately >95% of GP referrals are electronic since March 2020). Because not all GPs refer electronically, the electronic referral data include only a subset of all GP referrals to RACs. This is especially the case for 2019 e-referral data where the Healthlink electronic GP referral system was not in use in all GP practices, with some GPs still reliant on manual referral by letter, fax or phone.
2. Not every referral to a RAC will be from a GP. This is particularly true for lung cancer, where a patient may be referred by a hospital doctor following attendance at the emergency department or out-patients clinic, or if a patient has an abnormal chest x-ray. Typically, around 50% of attendances at lung RACs are by GP referral.

3. Particularly at peaks of the pandemic, it is possible that some symptomatic lung patients were initially assessed via COVID respiratory pathways.
4. Data prior to 2019 is incomplete and is not available for comparison as the Healthlink GP e-referral system was not yet in use in a significant number of practices.

Yours sincerely



Professor Risteárd Ó Laoide
National Director
National Cancer Control Programme