

# Evidence-Based Early Diagnosis

## Are UK Private Health Providers Telling the Whole Story?

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### Introduction

Direct-to-consumer (DTC) and screening tests aimed at asymptomatic people in the UK have gained increasing traction. We investigated which specific tests are offered to these individuals by UK private healthcare providers, the readily available information about the potential downsides, regulatory bodies, consent process, cost range, and claims made about these tests. This study was conducted as part of a larger study investigating evidence-based early diagnosis.

### Methods

50 private healthcare providers that targeted UK citizens were selected via iterative searches of major health company websites and direct-to-consumer tests on Google, TikTok, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, and Facebook. Searching was conducted on incognito mode and included terms such as "private GP", "health test" and "health screening." Data were also extracted on companies identified by UK lay participants during interviews.

Private screening tests, offered to well, asymptomatic people and requiring no referral were included, while services offered to pregnant women, neonates or from out with the UK were excluded, resulting in the exclusion of one private health provider from our dataset.

Data on screening tests, including blood tests, stool samples, physiological tests and medical imaging, was extracted, including test type, cost range, sales organisation and personnel, claims and regulatory bodies. All websites accessed were archived and data was extracted independently, by two researchers, with differences resolved by a third person.

A narrative review of our data was synthesised.

### Will a health check

- Will a health check give me peace of mind
- Will a health check lead to better outcomes
- Will a health check get me an earlier diagnosis
- Will a health check give me insights to my health
- Will a health check help me live longer for my family
- Will a health check include tests not available on the NHS
- Will a health check tell me about my current health status

Is Consent Sought Prior to Purchasing Screening Tests from Private Healthcare Providers?

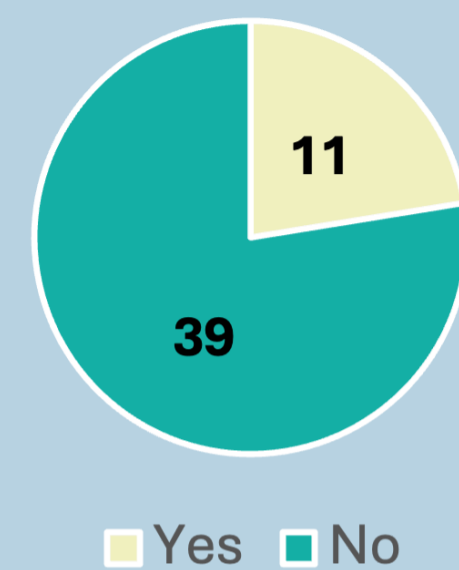


Figure 1. Quantity of sampled private healthcare providers obtaining consent prior to purchase of screening tests.

Information on Downsides of Screening Tests Offered by Private Healthcare Providers

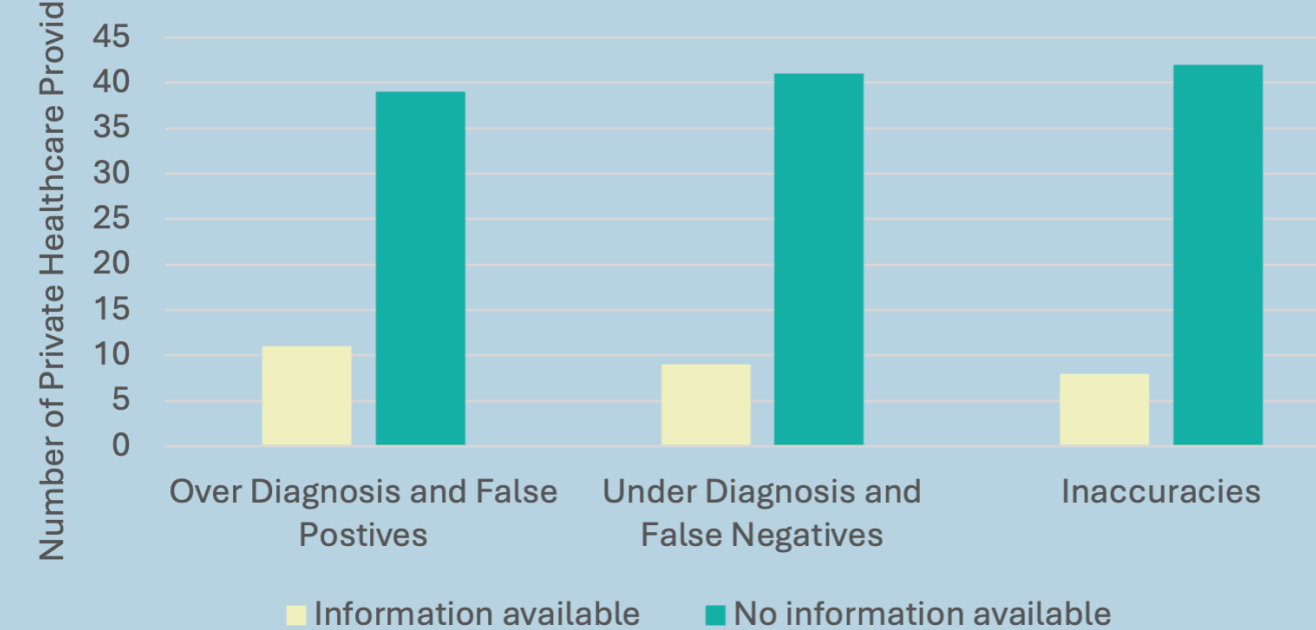


Figure 2. Quantity of sampled private healthcare providers providing information about possible downsides of screening tests.

### Findings

Key observations from the private healthcare providers sampled are:

- 78% of private providers failed to provide information about false positives
- 94% of private providers claimed their screening test would provide patients with better knowledge of their health and wellbeing
- 32% of private providers claimed their screening test makes patients live longer
- 46% of private providers failed to register all clinics with the CQC
- 64% of the private providers offering mammograms offered them to women under 50, against NHS recommendations

Many companies are selling screening tests to healthy people online. However, customers should know that information about false positives and negatives is usually missing. While the NHS makes sure that screening does more good than harm, this isn't always the same in the private sector, and we recommend that buyers should be beware.



### Conclusion

We have identified an intentional framing of screening tests offered by private healthcare providers to asymptomatic people. Many of these tests are not approved for use by the NHS due to potential downsides. However, claims made on private provider websites could lead a layman to believe such tests to be necessary.



### Further Work

These findings are based on screening tests offered by a sample of 50 private healthcare providers and may not reflect practices across the wider private health screening industry. Future research into the long-term impacts of private screening test use could elucidate how unevidenced claims have the potential to harm and highlight the need for stronger regulatory oversight.