

## Life Expectancy

### Introduction

**“Life expectancy”** and **“healthy life expectancy”** are two important measures of the health status of a population. They show overall population health trends in a single measure, including ill-health and death.

**“Life expectancy at birth”** is a measure of estimated length of life in a population. It is the average number of years a person would be expected to live based on their age, sex, and the area in which they live.

**“Healthy life expectancy”** is a measure of the average number of years somebody would be expected to live in good health, rather than with a disability or in poor health. This adds a “quality of life” dimension.

Both measures are calculated on either a rolling 3-year average, or in single year periods for Upper Tier Local Authorities and above, and reported on an annual basis by Office of Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID). Our overall aim is for a healthy life and not just a long life. If healthy life expectancy increases more rapidly than life expectancy, then not only are people living longer, but they are also living a greater proportion of their lives free from health problems. This is important not only to the quality of life of Norfolk residents but also relates closely to the demand for health and social care. Increasing healthy life expectancy also increases the possibility that people are able to continue to work later in life.

Nationally, over the last 20 years, there have been two turning points in life expectancy trends. Up until 2011 there were steady improvements in life expectancy, however this has slowed afterwards. Then in 2020, the coronavirus pandemic led to a greater number of deaths. This was the largest drop in life expectancy in England since World War Two. The most recent data shows a reverse of this trend with small increases in both male and female life expectancy, although they remain below pre-pandemic levels.<sup>1</sup>

This briefing looks at the trends and inequalities in life expectancy. Where possible we have included information for Norfolk and Waveney; however, healthy life expectancy information is currently only available for Norfolk due to the way it is reported nationally.

### Headlines

- Norfolk and Waveney male life expectancy is 79.4 years, and female life expectancy is 83.2 years (2022)<sup>2</sup>. This is above the England average of 79.1 for males, and 83.1 for females, although not significantly different.
- For Norfolk (excluding Waveney), life expectancy is 79.6 years for males and 83.5 years for females (2021–2023). This is higher than the Norfolk and Waveney and England averages, although slightly lower than the East of England average for males and females in 2021–2023 (80.0 and 83.6 respectively).
- The life expectancy difference between males and females is 3.8 years in Norfolk and Waveney, which is the same difference as for Norfolk (excluding Waveney). This is similar to the overall difference in England of 3.9 years.
- There is variation in life expectancy between communities in Norfolk and Waveney, depending on their level of deprivation. Males in the 10% least deprived small areas live 9.4 years longer than those in the 10% most deprived areas, while females in the 10% least deprived small areas live 6.4 years longer than those in the 10% most deprived areas (2022–2024)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The Kings Fund (2024) [What Is Happening To Life Expectancy In England? | The King's Fund](#)

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics (2024) [Life expectancy for local areas of Great Britain - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>3</sup> Norfolk County Council (2025) Norfolk and Waveney Population Overview.

- Healthy life expectancy in Norfolk (excluding Waveney) is 62.5 years for males, and 62.9 years for females. This is higher than the England average of 61.5 for males and 61.9 for females.
- The 2021–2023 figure for life expectancy in England was the first increase since 2017–2019, following three consecutive decreases. Compared with the previous period (2020–2022), life expectancy at birth increased by 13 weeks for males and 11 weeks for females<sup>4</sup>.
- Life expectancy estimates are still below pre-pandemic levels in Norfolk. This is 26 weeks lower for males and 13 weeks lower for females, compared with 2017 to 2019 (the last complete period before the start of the pandemic).
- Females have a longer life expectancy than males but spend a longer time living in poor health, both in number of years and as a proportion of their life.

## Trends in Life Expectancy

National and local life expectancy rose steadily throughout the last few decades, driven by public health improvements (e.g. child immunisation programmes), advances in healthcare (e.g. cancer treatments), and positive behavioural change (e.g. improvements in diet and reduction in smoking rates). Widespread access to universal healthcare, improvements in housing, sanitation and hygiene also played key roles throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>5</sup>. This progress continued until around 2011, when increases began to slow. In 2020, life expectancy experienced a sharp decline due to the Covid-19 pandemic — the largest drop in England since World War Two<sup>6</sup>.

Figure 1 shows life expectancy at birth in Norfolk (excluding Waveney) since 2001. Norfolk has consistently recorded higher life expectancy than the England average. A noticeable decline in life expectancy can be seen starting from the 2018–2020 data point. This shows the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the impact that increased mortality rates had during this time. This downward trend continued through both the 2019–2021 and 2020–2022 periods. The latest period (2021 to 2023) shows the first increases in life expectancy for both males and females since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

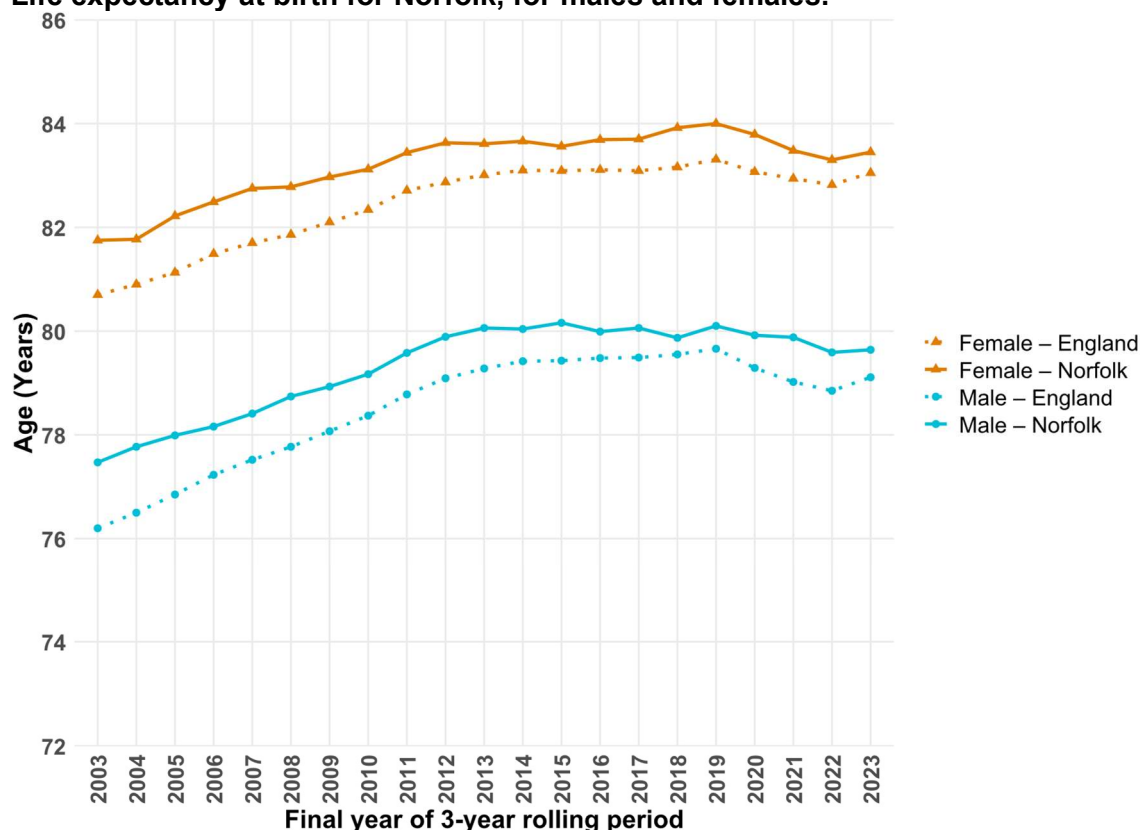
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<sup>4</sup> Office for National Statistics (2024) [National life tables – life expectancy in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>5</sup> The King's Fund (2024) [What Is Happening To Life Expectancy In England? | The King's Fund](#)

<sup>6</sup> The King's Fund (2024) [What Is Happening To Life Expectancy In England? | The King's Fund](#)

**Figure 1: Life expectancy at birth for Norfolk, for males and females.<sup>7</sup>**



**Note:** A drop in life expectancy can be seen with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. The 2021–2023 figures have shown an upward trend for the first time since Covid-19.

## Gender Inequality in life expectancy at birth

Historically, females have had a higher life expectancy than males. Looking at the data shown in Figure 1, females lived for an average of 3.9 years longer than males in England from 2001 to 2023. This is equivalent to 3 years and 11 months. This figure of 3.9 years is the same average difference for Norfolk.

The difference in life expectancy is due to multiple factors. For example, men in general are exposed to more risk factors than women, such as greater tobacco and alcohol consumption and less healthy diets<sup>8</sup>. Research has also shown that biological factors play a role, too. For example, women are less susceptible to heart disease. Clinical factors such as women being more likely to seek healthcare than men also have an influence.

In Norfolk and Waveney, between 2012 and 2022, the leading cause of death for males was heart disease followed by dementia and Alzheimer's. For females, the leading cause of death was dementia and Alzheimer's followed by heart disease<sup>9</sup>.

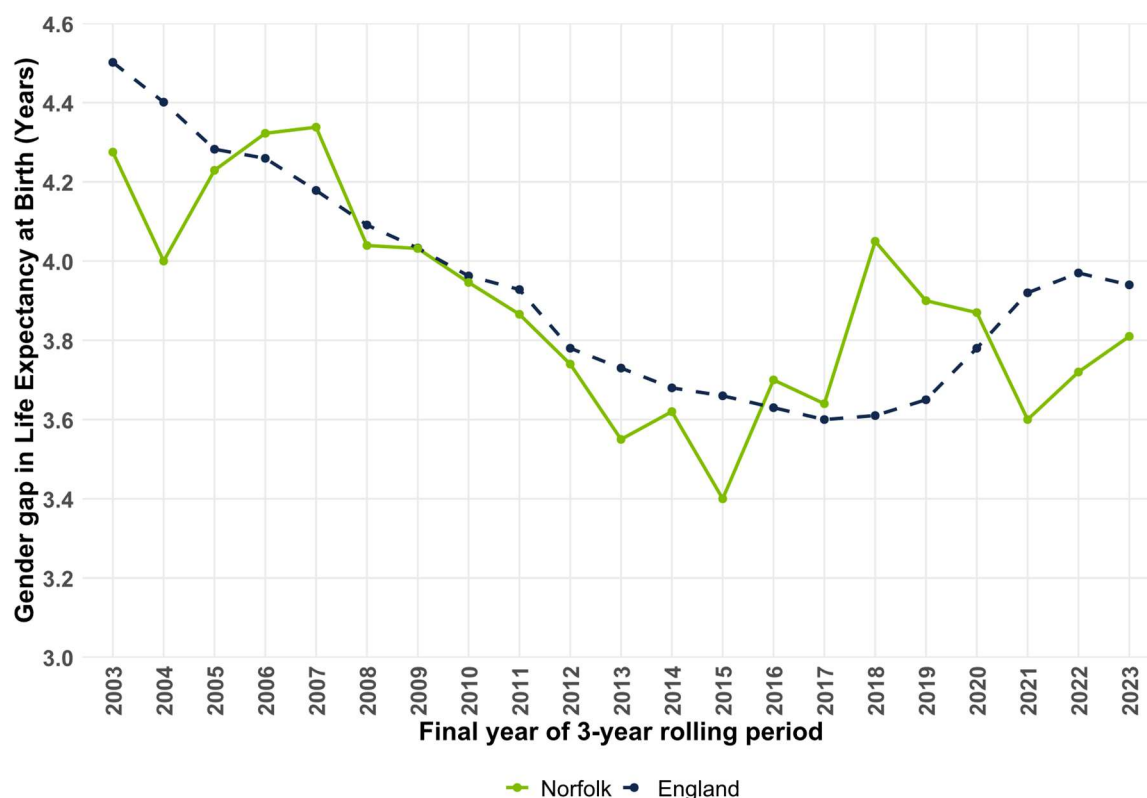
The graph below in Figure 2 shows the difference in life expectancy between males and females on a rolling 3-year basis. The difference in general has been reducing over time in Norfolk (excluding Waveney), with the lowest difference in life expectancy for Norfolk of 3.6 years seen in 2015 to 2017. The gap has widened again in more recent years, with 2021 to 2023 figures showing this gap is back up to the same level as seen in 2009 to 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) (2025) [Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care](#)

<sup>8</sup> OECD (2024) [Life expectancy | OECD](#)

<sup>9</sup> Norfolk and Waveney Population Overview (2023) [Population - JSNA - Norfolk Insight](#)

**Figure 2: Difference in years between male and female life expectancy at birth for Norfolk and England.<sup>10</sup>**



**Note:** Females have a higher life expectancy, so a figure of 4.0 represents females living 4 years longer than males.

## Deprivation inequality in life expectancy at birth

There is significant variation in life expectancy across Norfolk and Waveney. Males born in Eaton have the highest life expectancy of 84.5 years, while males born in Heigham Grove and St. Augustines have the lowest life expectancy of 71.6 years. Females born in Wymondham West have the highest life expectancy of 86.9 years, while females born in Lowestoft Harbour & Kirkley have the lowest life expectancy of 76.2 years.<sup>11</sup>

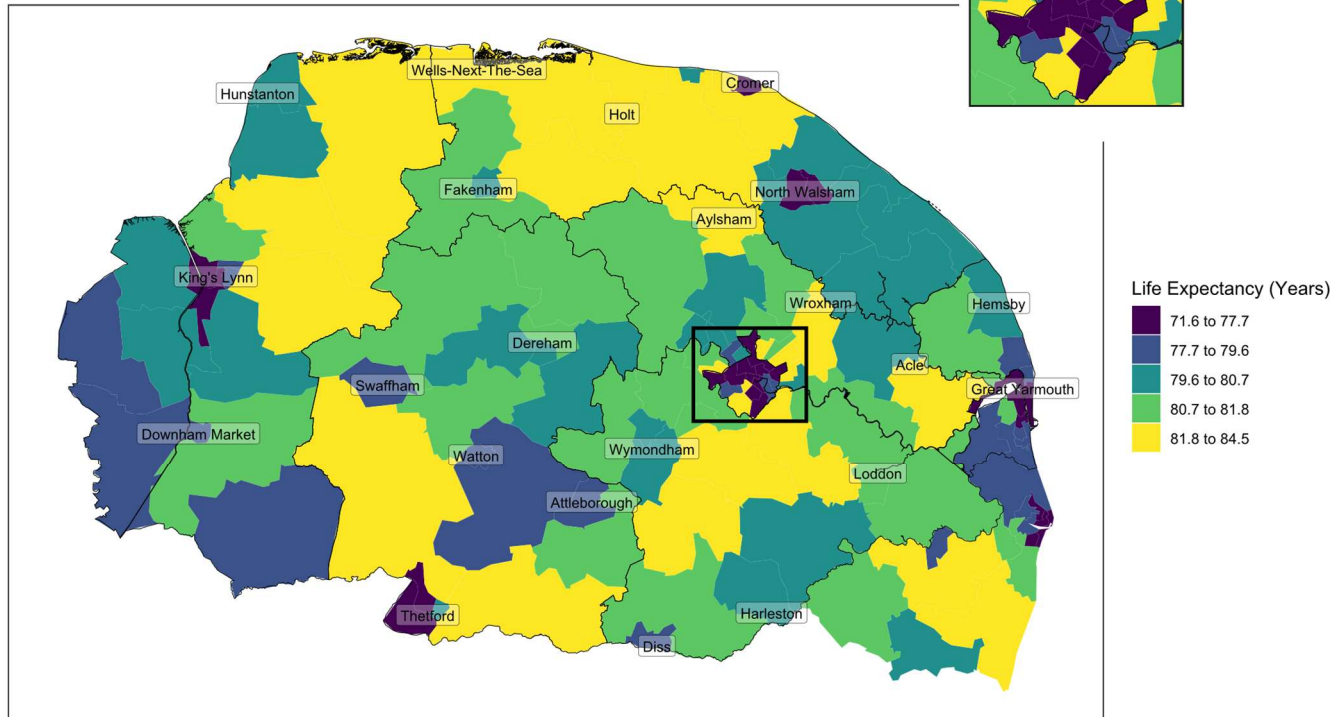
Figures 3 and 4 below show the geographical variation of life expectancy in Norfolk for males and females, respectively. These local community level maps were created using 5-year pooled data at MSOA level from 2019 to 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) (2025) [Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care](#)

<sup>11</sup> Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (2025) Data/Map via Local Insight [Map | Local Insight](#)

**Figure 3: Male life expectancy at birth by MSOA for Norfolk and Waveney, 2019 to 2023.**<sup>12</sup>

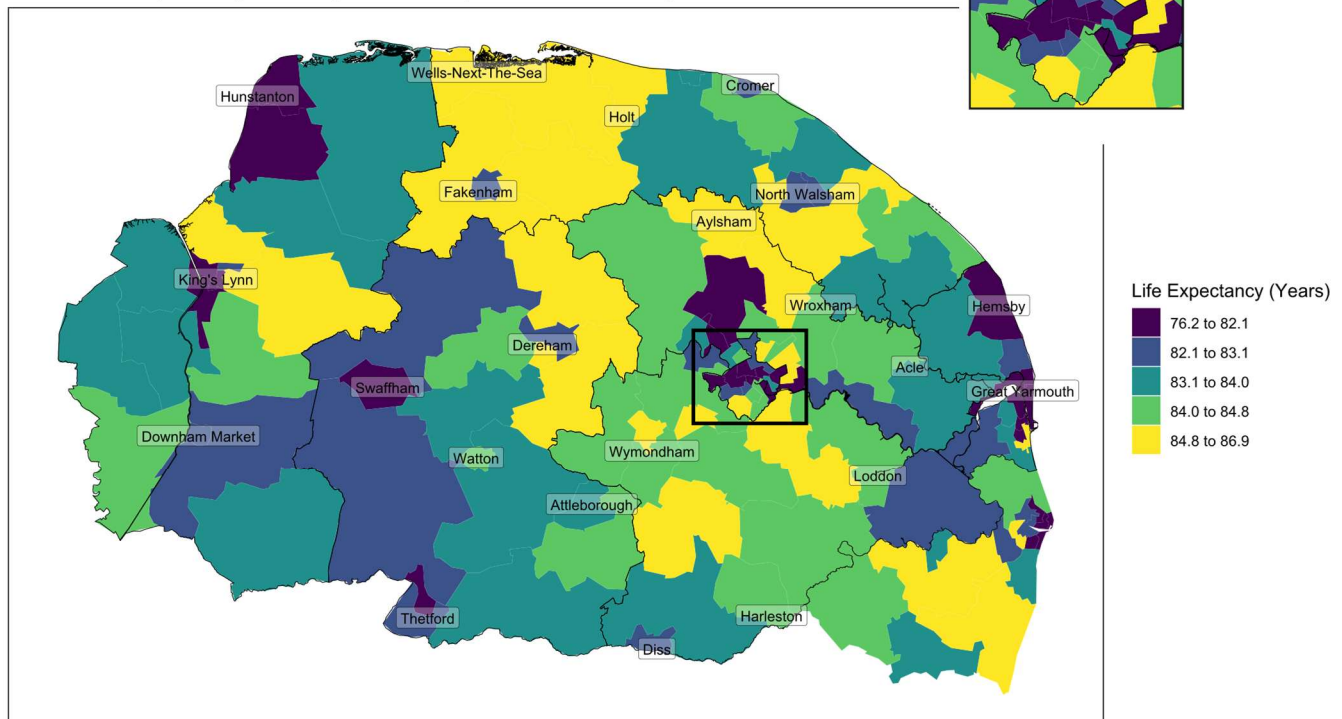
Male Life Expectancy at Birth (MSOA Level), Norfolk & Waveney



Note: In both maps MSOA areas highlighted in yellow show a lower life expectancy, while areas in purple show a higher life expectancy.

**Figure 4: Female life expectancy at birth for Norfolk and Waveney, 2019 to 2023.**<sup>13</sup>

Female Life Expectancy at Birth (MSOA Level), Norfolk & Waveney



<sup>12</sup> Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (2025) Data/Map via Local Insight [Map | Local Insight](#)

<sup>13</sup> Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (2025) Data/Map via Local Insight [Map | Local Insight](#)

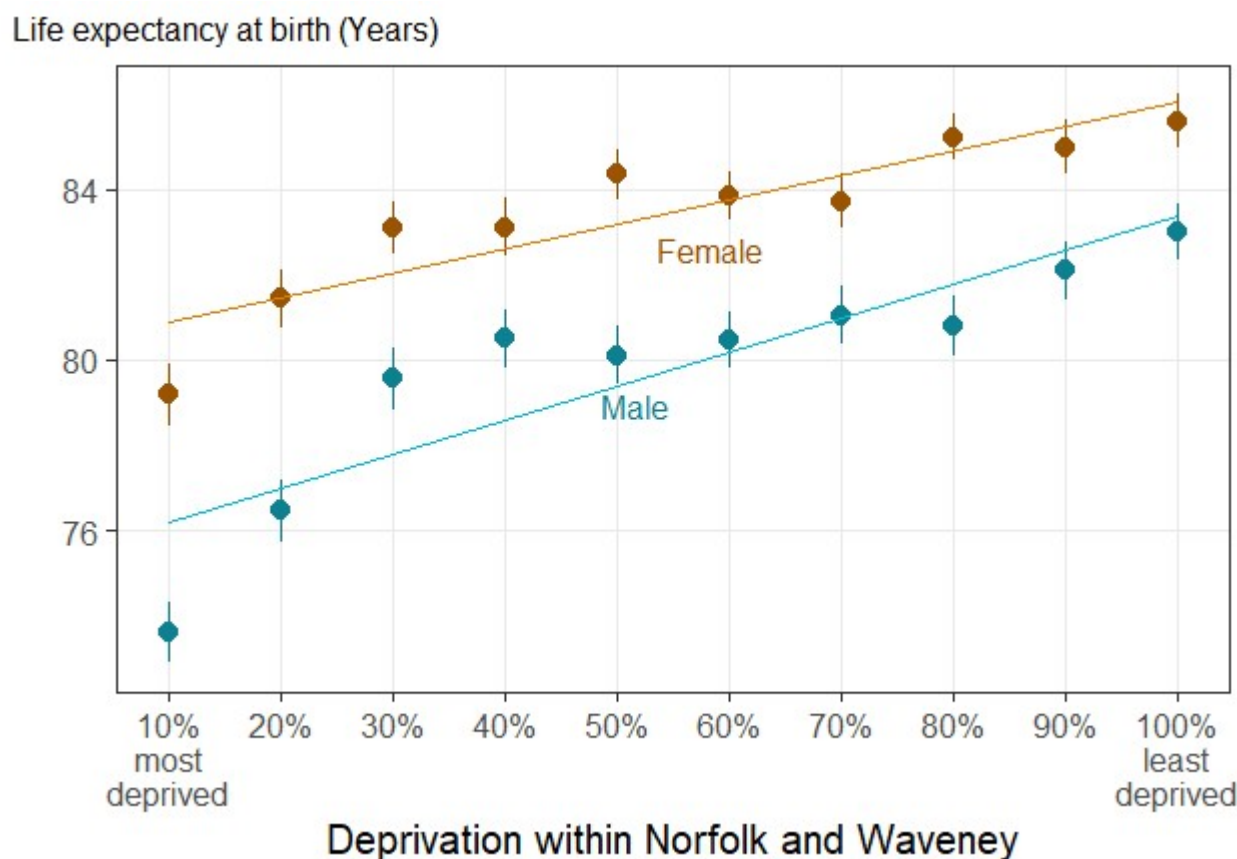


It has been established that people living in less deprived areas tend to live longer than those in areas of higher deprivation. Yarmouth Parade, which is the most deprived area in Norfolk and Waveney, also has one of the lowest life expectancies at 72.1 years for males and 78.2 years for females. Other more deprived areas such as North Lynn, Lowestoft Central and Bowthorpe & West Earlham also have life expectancies significantly lower than the England average.

Deprivation levels in England are calculated at LSOA level. Each LSOA in England is assigned an Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score, based on various factors such as income, employment, health, education, environment, and more. The higher the IMD score, the more deprived the LSOA is considered to be. LSOAs are then sorted into deciles of deprivation ranging from 1 to 10, with 1 being the 10% most deprived LSOAs in England, and 10 being the 10% least deprived.

Figure 5 highlights inequality in life expectancy depending on deprivation levels found at LSOA level in Norfolk (2022–2024). The steepness of the slope represents the inequality in life expectancy that relates to deprivation in Norfolk and Waveney between 2022 and 2024. When looking at the most deprived deciles, there is a clear gradient showing a reduction in life expectancy the more deprived an area is — particularly between the lowest four deciles. When comparing the 10% least deprived LSOAs to the 10% most deprived LSOAs, males live a total of 9.4 years longer, and females live a total of 6.4 years longer.

**Figure 5: Slope index of inequality, for average life expectancy by deprivation decile.<sup>14</sup>**



**Note:** A steeper gradient between points signifies a higher level of inequality. Small area deprivation scores based on IMD 2025.

The average difference in life expectancy between each decile in Norfolk and Waveney for males is 12.5 months, and for females is 8.5 months. Considering only the three most deprived deciles, the average difference in life expectancy between each decile for males is 36 months, and for females 23.4 months. Considering only the three least deprived deciles, male life expectancy increased by an average of 13.2 months for each step up to a less deprived decile, whereas for females there was an increase of 2.4 months on average.

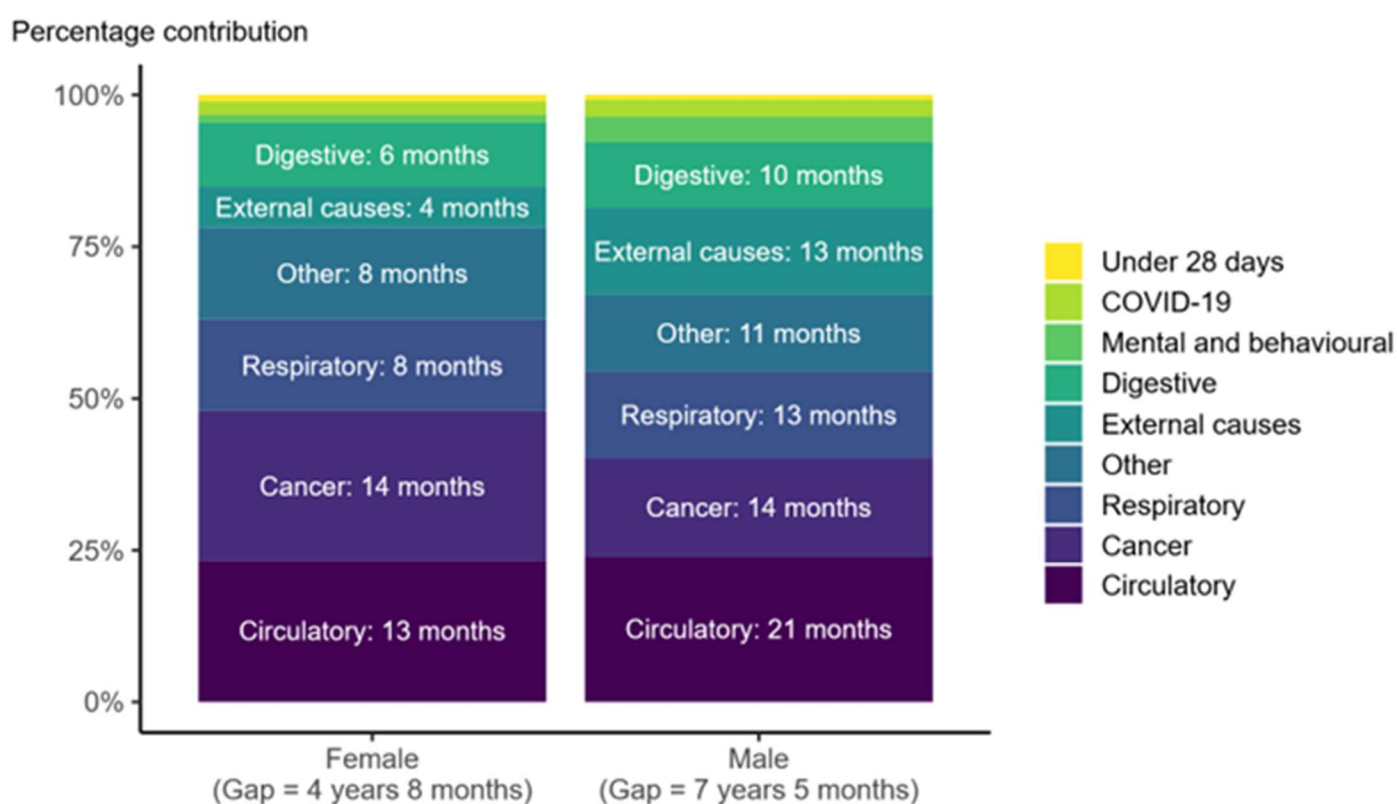
<sup>14</sup> NHS Digital Civil Registrations Database (2022–24) and ONS mid-year 2022 population estimates

## Contributors to inequalities in life expectancy

There are some causes of death that drive inequalities in life expectancy more than others. Targeting these causes would have the biggest impact on reducing inequalities. The largest contributors towards the life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived populations in Norfolk and Waveney are circulatory diseases, cancer, and respiratory diseases (Figure 6).

Circulatory disease deaths contribute to around a quarter of the gap in life expectancy in both males and females (Figure 6). If the death rate from circulatory disease was the same in the 20% most deprived areas as in the 20% least deprived the difference in life expectancy between these groups would be reduced by around 24% for males and females.

**Figure 6: Contribution to life expectancy gap between most and least deprived areas by broad cause of death, in Norfolk and Waveney between 2022–2024<sup>15</sup>**

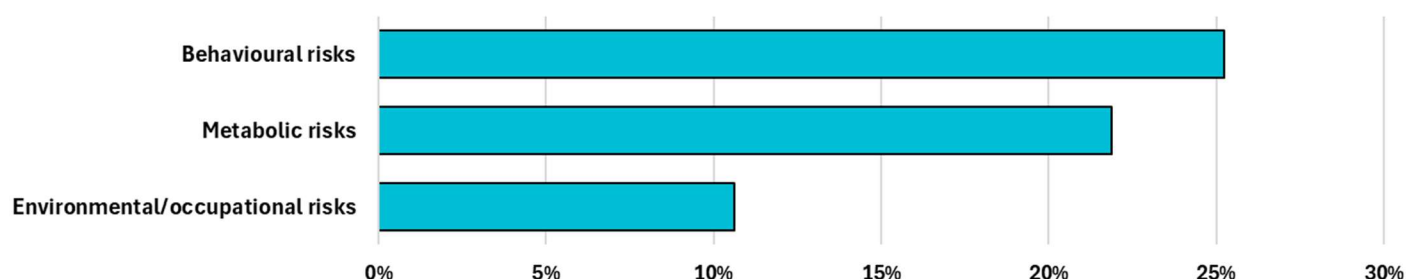


It is important to look at how different inequalities and exposure to risk factors may impact life expectancy. Figures 7 and 8 show the main categories of risk factors affecting males and females in Norfolk. The main category of risk factors affecting males is behavioural risks such as smoking habits, diet, and alcohol use. The main category of risk factors affecting females is metabolic risks, which include high blood pressure, cholesterol and high body-mass index.<sup>16</sup>

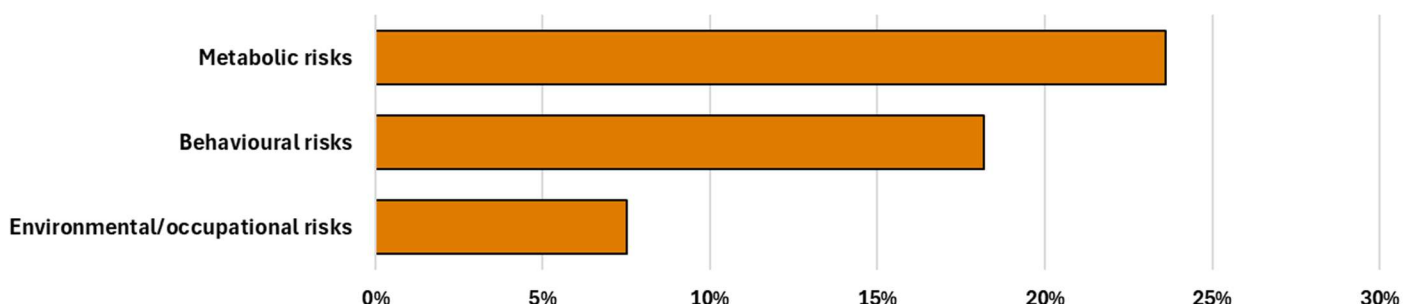
<sup>15</sup> NHS Digital Civil Registrations Database (2022-24) and ONS mid-year 2022 population estimates

<sup>16</sup> Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME). Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Compare [VizHub - GBD Compare](https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-compare/).

**Figure 7: The top 3 factors affecting male life expectancy in Norfolk (behavioural, metabolic, and environmental/occupational risks).<sup>17</sup>**



**Figure 8: A list of the top 3 factors affecting female life expectancy in Norfolk (behavioural, metabolic, and environmental/occupational risks).<sup>18</sup>**



Figures 9 and 10 look at each individual risk factor, which show the top 15 risk factors attributable to deaths in Norfolk <sup>19</sup>.

The largest risk factor contributing to male deaths in Norfolk, is smoking. Historically a declining smoking rate has had a positive impact on life expectancy, and there is still further room for this trend to continue. Occupational hazards (for example mesothelioma rates) also rank highly for male risk factors.

Smoking is still a prominent risk factor contributing towards female deaths in Norfolk, however other risk factors such as high blood pressure and high body-mass index top the list.

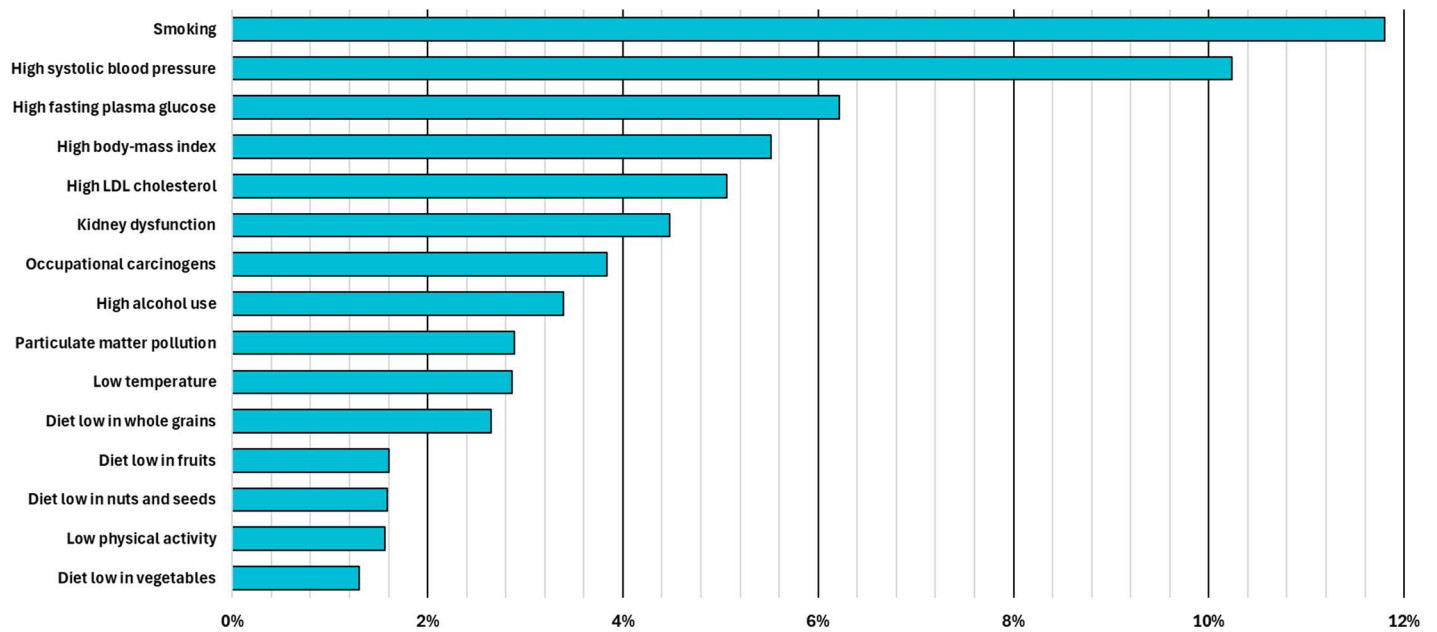
<sup>17</sup> Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>18</sup> Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. Used with permission. All rights reserved

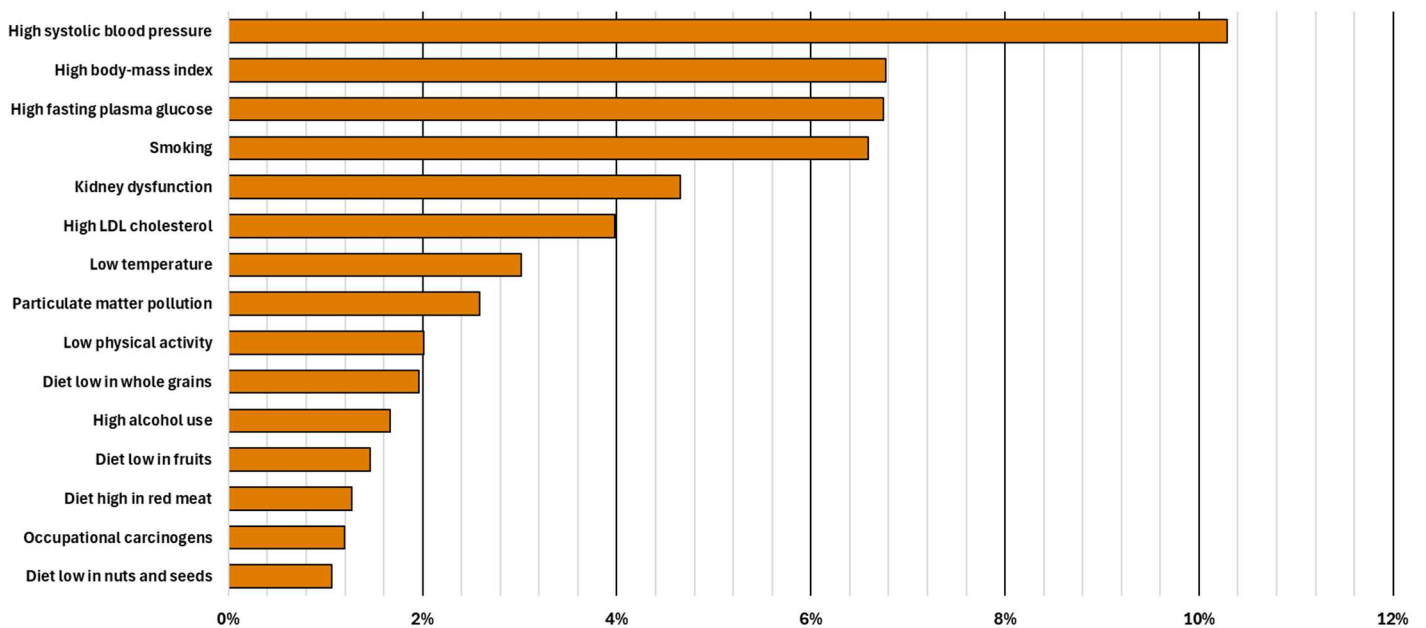
<sup>19</sup> Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME). Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Compare [VizHub - GBD Compare](https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-compare/).



**Figure 9: The top 15 risk factors attributable to male deaths in Norfolk in 2021.<sup>20</sup>**



**Figure 10: The top 15 risk factors attributable to female deaths in Norfolk in 2021.<sup>21</sup>**



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## Healthy Life expectancy in Norfolk

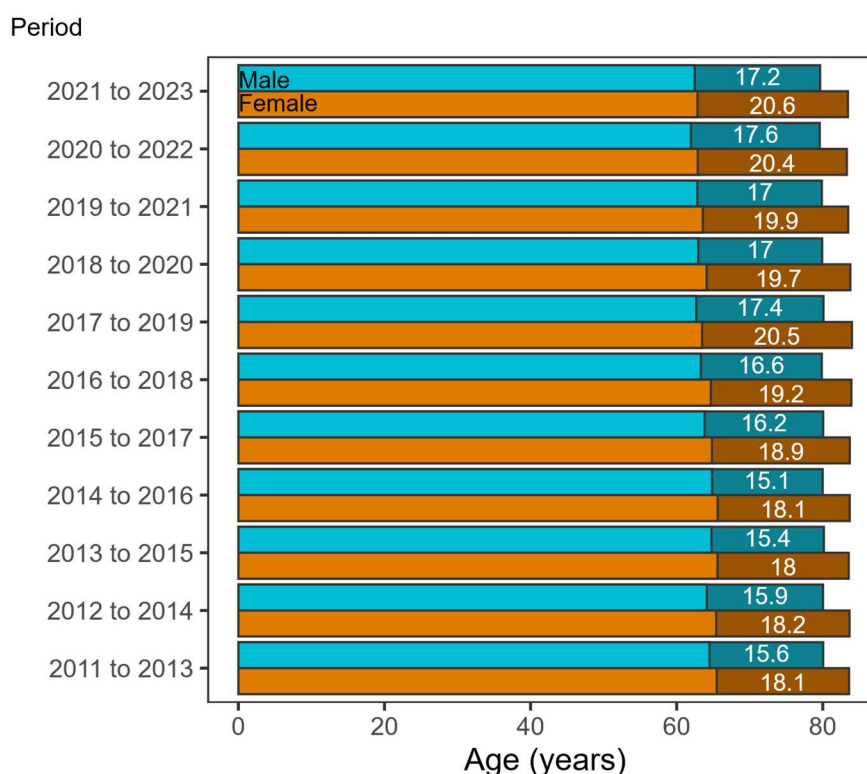
Healthy life expectancy adds a quality-of-life dimension to estimates of life expectancy and is intended to measure the average time an individual is expected to live in “very good” or “good” general health, based on how those individuals perceive their own general health.

Healthy life expectancy data is only available at the Norfolk level.

In the 2021 to 2023 period, females in Norfolk had a life expectancy of 83.5 years, and a healthy life expectancy of 62.9 years (75.3% of life in good health). In the same period, males in Norfolk had a life expectancy of 79.6 years, and a healthy life expectancy of 64.6 years (78.3% of life in good health).<sup>22</sup>

Although females live longer than males on average, a higher proportion of their life tends to be spent in poor health. This same trend is also seen in the England average, with females spending 74.5% of life in good health, and males spending 77.8% of life in good health. Figure 11 shows the portion of life spent in good and poor health<sup>23</sup>. The period that people spend in ill health in Norfolk has been getting longer over the last decade and is now around 17.2 years for males and 20.6 years for females.

**Figure 11: Portion of life spent in good health in Norfolk between 2011 and 2023.<sup>24</sup>**



**Note:** The dark part of the bar shows years spent in poor health.

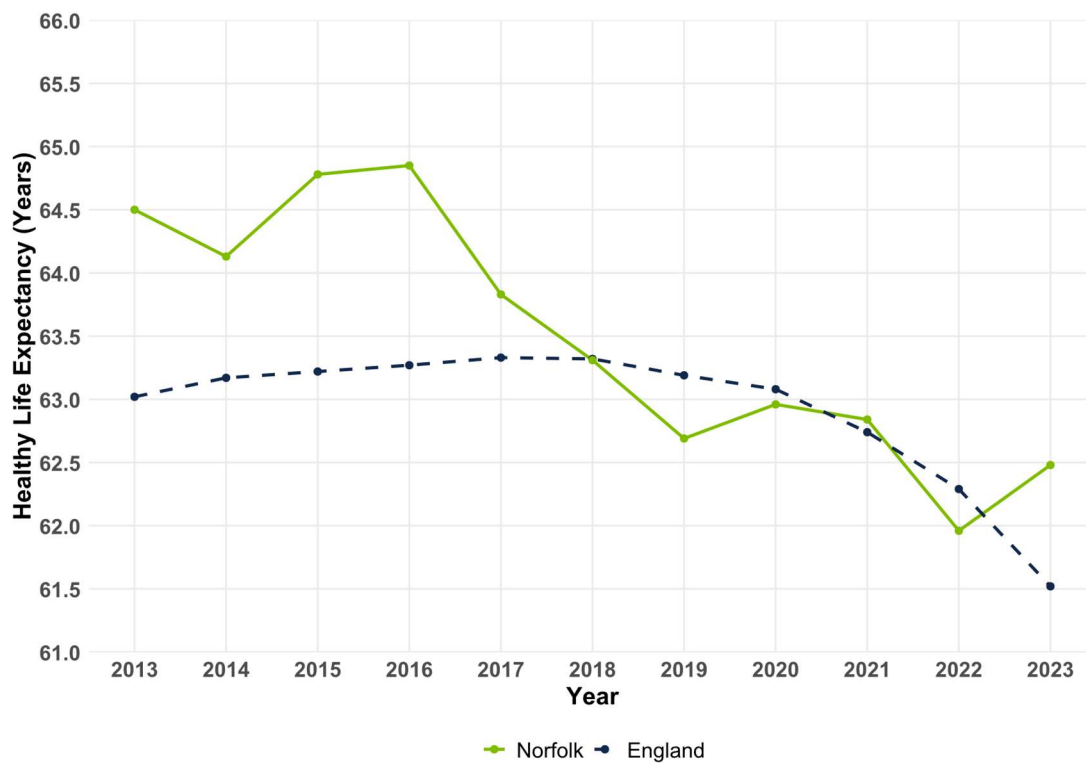
Figures 12 and 13 show that since 2011–2013, healthy life expectancies for both males and females have decreased in Norfolk and England. However, like with life expectancy, healthy life expectancy has also seen an increase in the latest 2021–2023 period.

<sup>22</sup> Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) [Office for Health Improvement and Disparities](https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/). Public health profiles.2025 <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/> © Crown copyright 2025

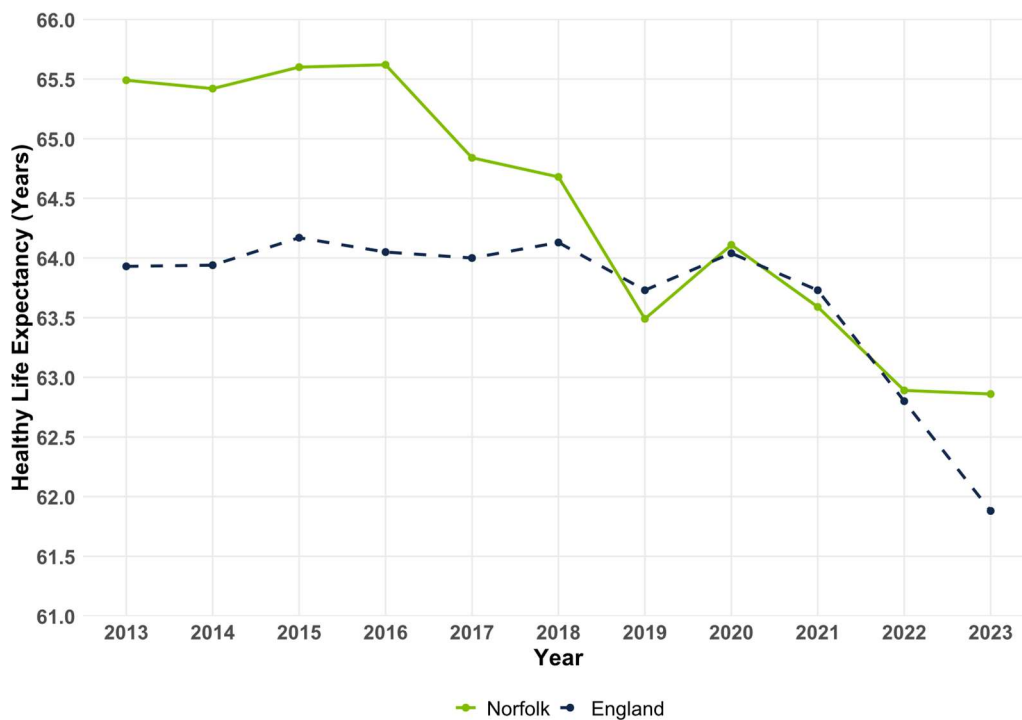
<sup>23</sup> Norfolk and Waveney Population Health Overview (2025)

<sup>24</sup> Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government

**Figure 12: Male healthy life expectancy, 3-year rolling averages starting from 2011–2013 to 2021–2023.**<sup>25</sup>



**Figure 13: Female healthy life expectancy, 3-year rolling averages starting from 2011–2013 to 2021–2023.**<sup>26</sup>



<sup>25</sup> Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) [Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Public health profiles.2025 https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/](https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/) © Crown copyright 2025

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## Author and key contacts

Online feedback:

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<http://www.norfolkinsight.org.uk/feedback>

Email: [JSNA@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:JSNA@norfolk.gov.uk)