

## Your GP, Your Say

Report summarising responses to a survey from people in Lancashire about GP services.

July 2016



## **Introduction**

In January and February 2016, Healthwatch Lancashire engaged with residents in Lancashire to gather their views and experiences about access to GP services.

The remit of the survey was to engage with local residents across Lancashire with a short survey to find out whether people feel that their GP practice is convenient and to understand how people would like to access their GP appointments.

## **Context and introduction from Co-commissioning Management Group**

### **National Context**

General practice, with its registered list and everyone having access to a family doctor, is one of the great strengths of the NHS and the government has described an ambition to ensure that every patient has access to 7-day health services by 2020.

By improving access to primary care, pressure will be relieved on A&E and other emergency services within the NHS whilst ensuring that patients are receiving the right care in the right setting.

### **Local Context**

The Lancashire Primary Care Co-Commissioning Management Group has the responsibility for the strategic oversight of delivering transformational change in primary care, including supporting clinical commissioning groups to move towards place based commissioning.

One of the ambitions of the Primary Care Co-Commissioning Management Group is to build on the successes of the three 7 day access models being piloted in Lancashire under the Prime Minister's Challenge Fund programme to enable 7 day access to primary care services for the entire population of Lancashire within the next 12 months.

There is no expectation for every single surgery to be open in the evenings or at weekends and it is acknowledged that new models of access/ care should not be a one size fits all and requires a flexible and balanced approach.

Therefore to support clinical commissioning groups shape and develop models of access to meet the needs of each clinical commissioning group's population, the co-commissioning management group sought the support of Healthwatch Lancashire and designed a questionnaire to engage and secure patient views of primary care services.

## Methodology

This study was undertaken by Healthwatch Lancashire staff and volunteers through face-to-face discussions with members of the public across Lancashire.

These discussions took place in the following settings:

- Through Healthwatch Lancashire's engagement activities with members of the public in GP practices, hospitals and healthcare services across Lancashire.
- Through Healthwatch Lancashire's 'Care Circle' activities with a variety of established community groups in Lancashire.
- Through engagement with the public by Healthwatch Lancashire's cohort of dedicated volunteers.

The survey was also available for people to participate on the Healthwatch Lancashire website and was supported by communications activity.

The project received extensive coverage in regional newspapers, radio and social media.

The project was supported by the following communications activities:

- A social media advertising campaign using Facebook and Twitter which targeted members of the public in Lancashire.
- Email campaigns distributed to Healthwatch Lancashire's public database<sup>1</sup>.
- Distribution of information about the survey to health and social care, charity, volunteer and third sector organisations in Lancashire to encourage them to share the survey with their public contacts.



**Pictured above:** A volunteer gathers survey responses from a member of the public.



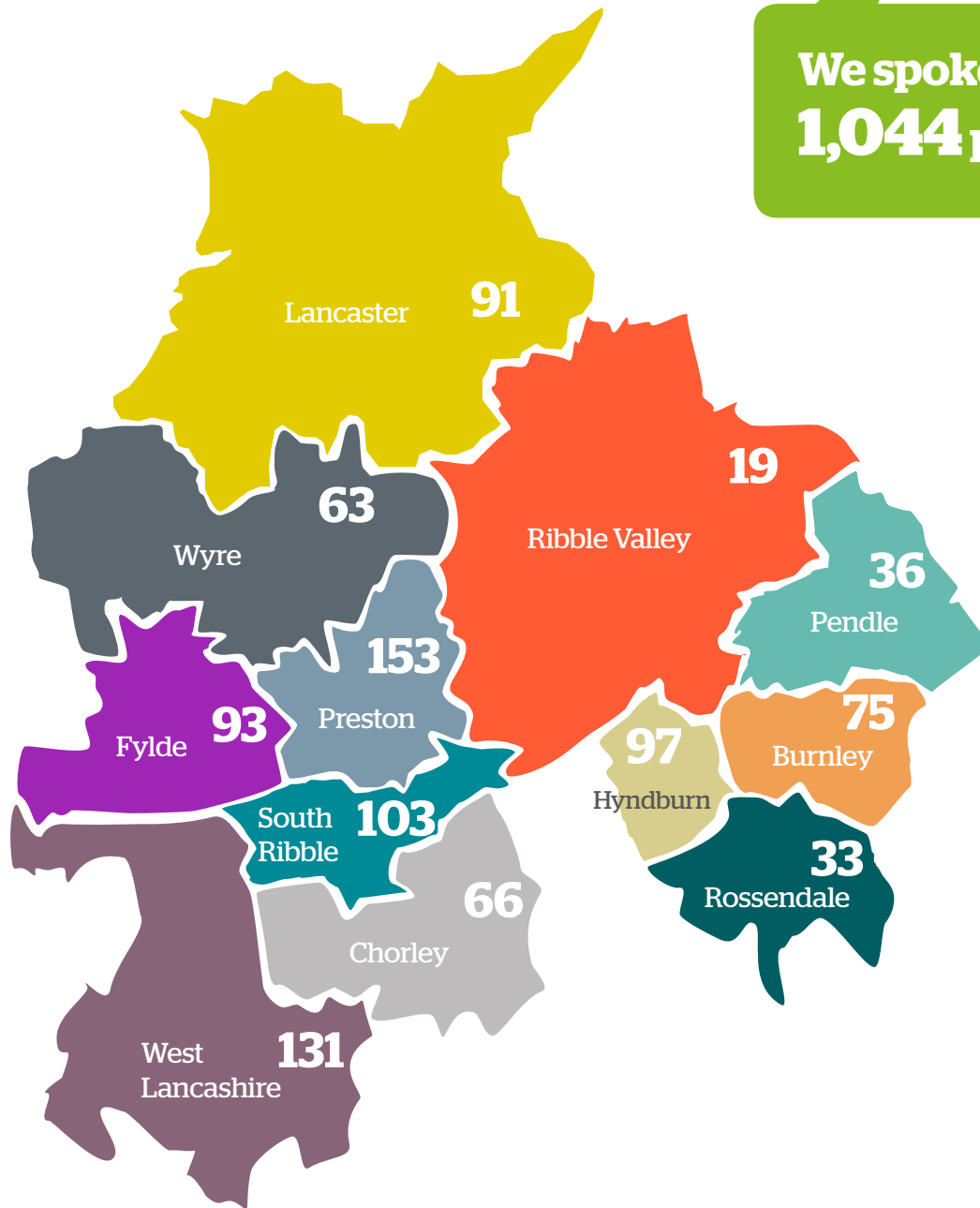
**Pictured above and below:** Healthwatch Lancashire gathered responses from people in Lancashire through community group activities.



1. In February 2015, Healthwatch Lancashire undertook a project to establish a database of members of the public who agreed to receive news and participate in surveys based on a representative sample of the population in Lancashire.

Responses by location

We spoke to  
**1,044** people



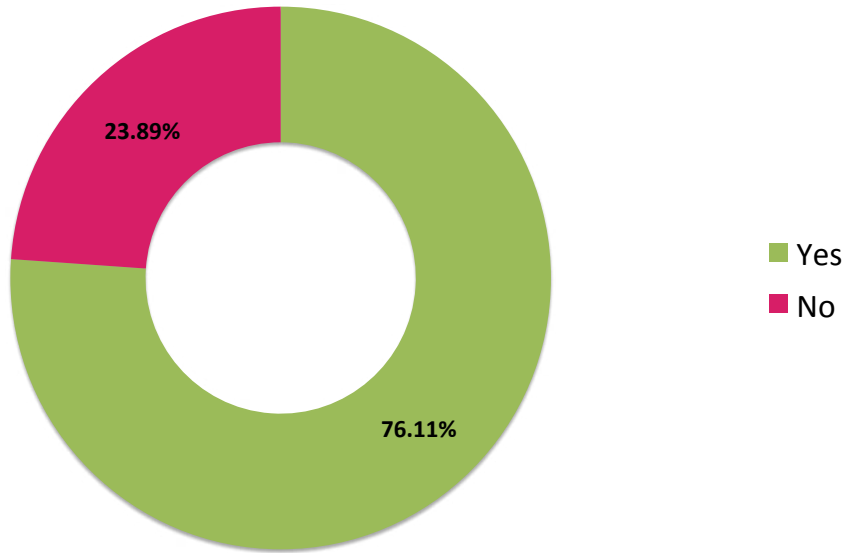
Region	Responses
Blackburn with Darwen	47
Blackpool	37
Burnley	75
Chorley	66
Fylde	93
Hyndburn	97
Lancaster	91
Pendle	36

Region	Responses
Preston	153
Ribble Valley	19
Rossendale	33
South Ribble	103
West Lancashire	131
Wyre	63
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,044</b>

## Survey Results

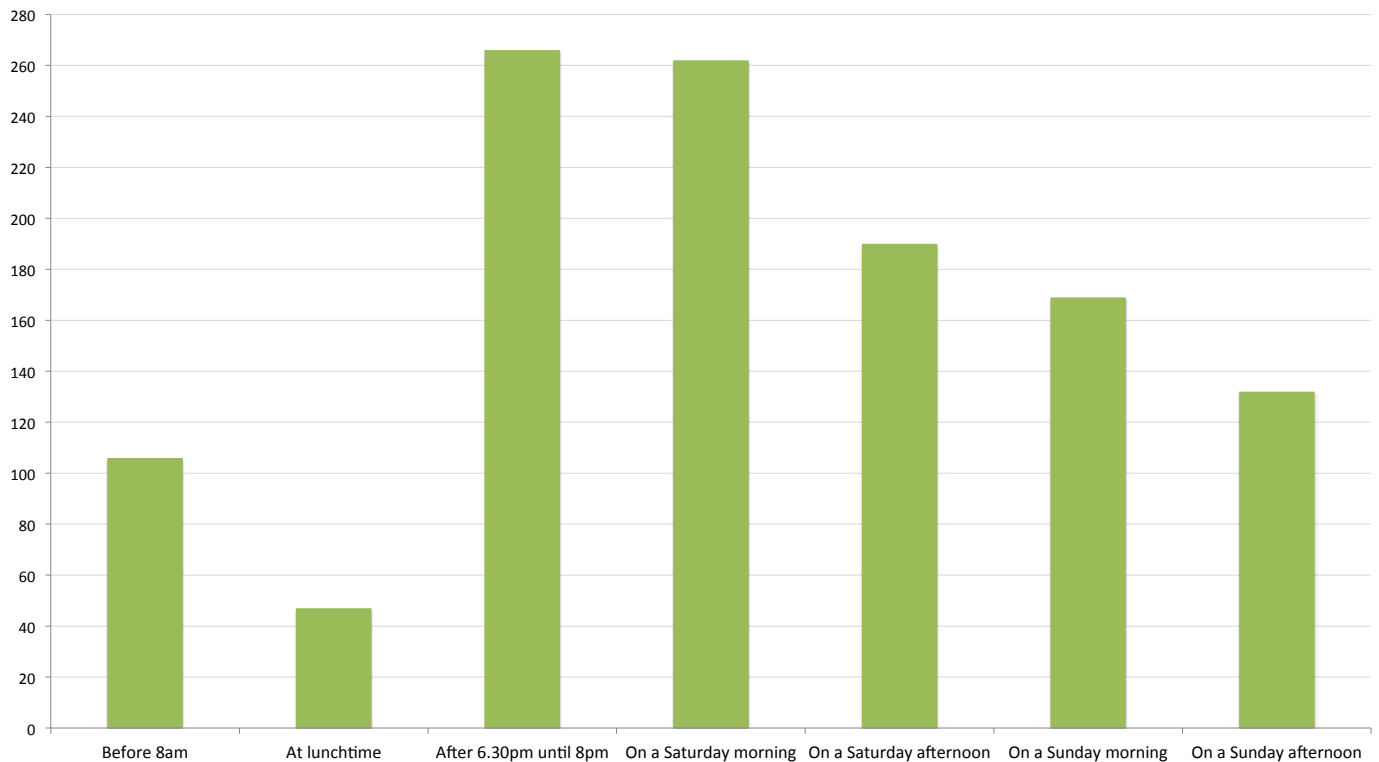
1. We asked participants “Is your GP practice currently open at times that are convenient to you?”

The chart below shows the response to the question.



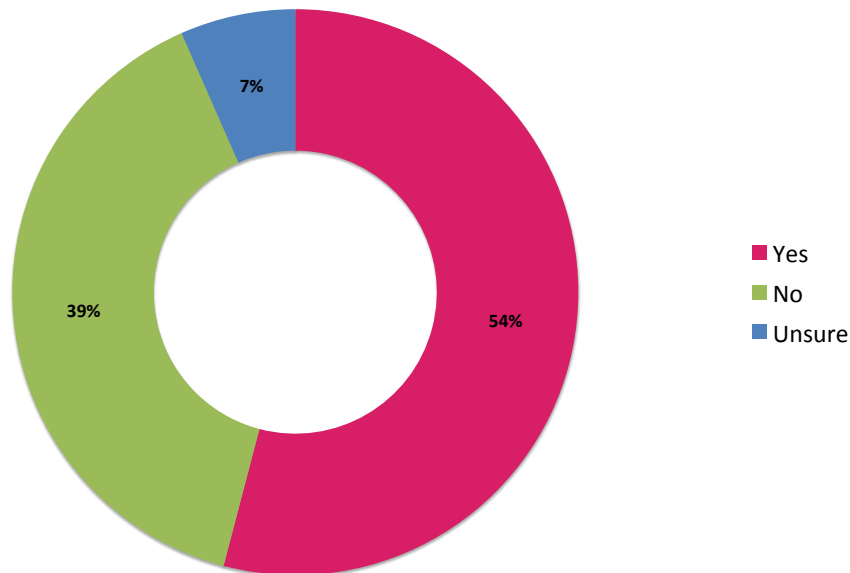
2. We asked participants “Which of the following additional opening hours would make it easier for you to see or speak to someone?”

The chart below shows the response to the question.



3. We asked participants “Do you have difficulty getting an appointment at your GP practice for urgent/ same day appointments?”

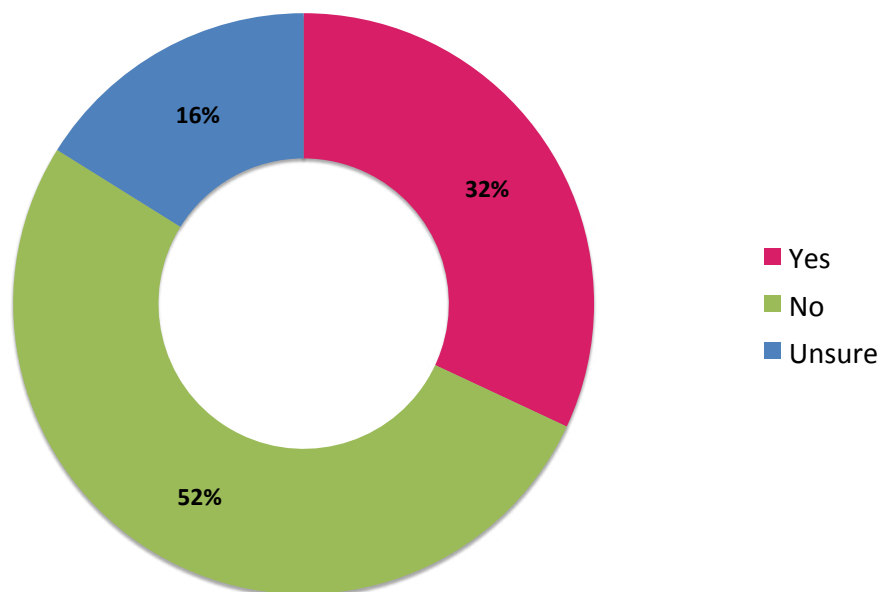
The chart below shows the response to the question.



**54% of people said that they find it difficult to get an urgent or same day appointment.**

4. We asked participants “Do you have difficulty getting an appointment at your GP practice for routine appointments i.e. for a long term condition?”

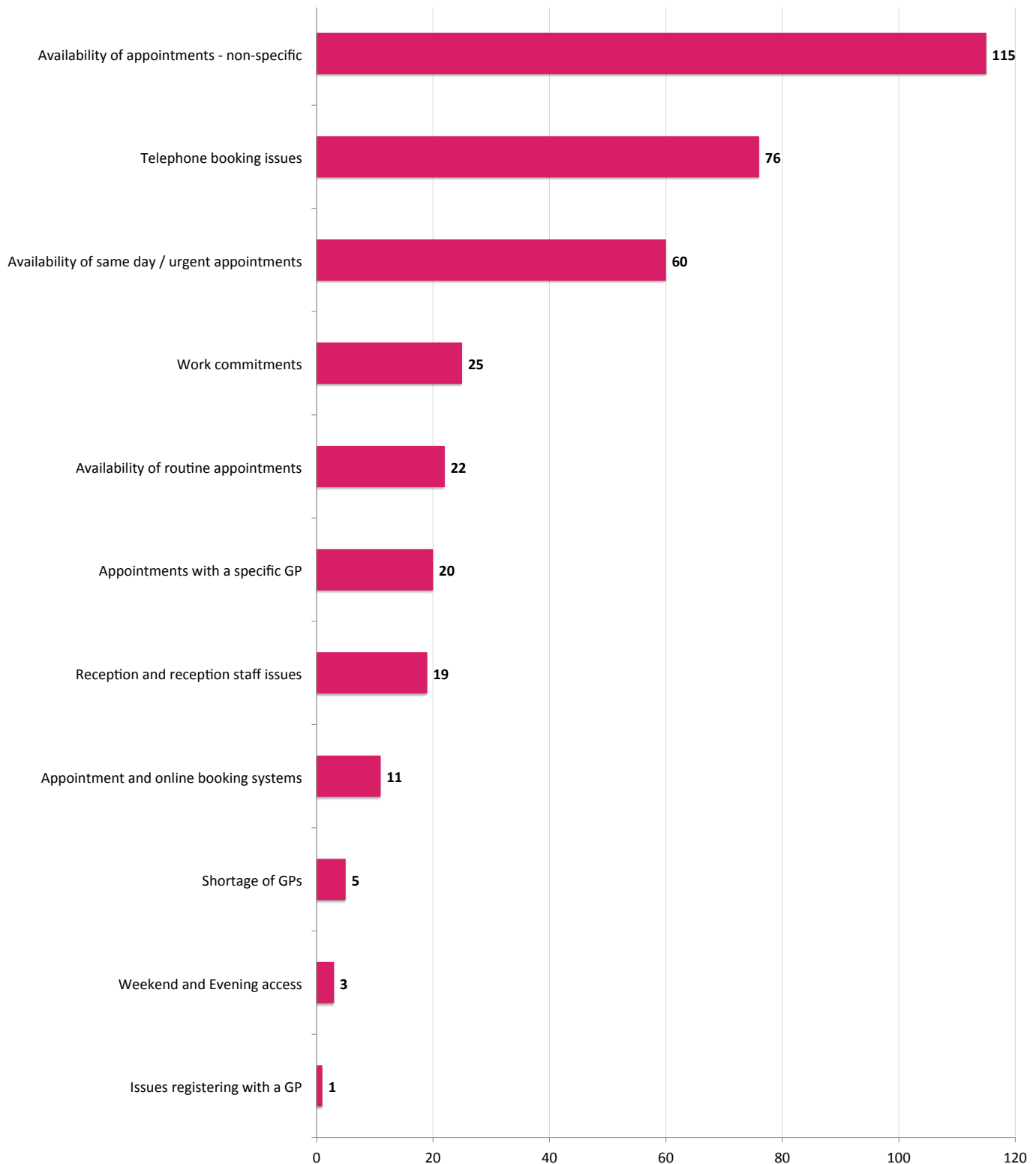
The chart below shows the response to the question.



**32% of people said that they find it difficult to get a routine appointment at their GP.**

**5. We asked participants, who answered 'Yes' to questions 3 or 4, "Why have you had difficulty getting an appointment at your GP practice?"**

Healthwatch Lancashire received 367 responses to this question which were analysed and segmented by theme. The chart below shows the number of comments received categorised by theme.



The table below shows a summary of the comments for why respondents had experienced difficulty getting appointments at their GP segmented by theme.

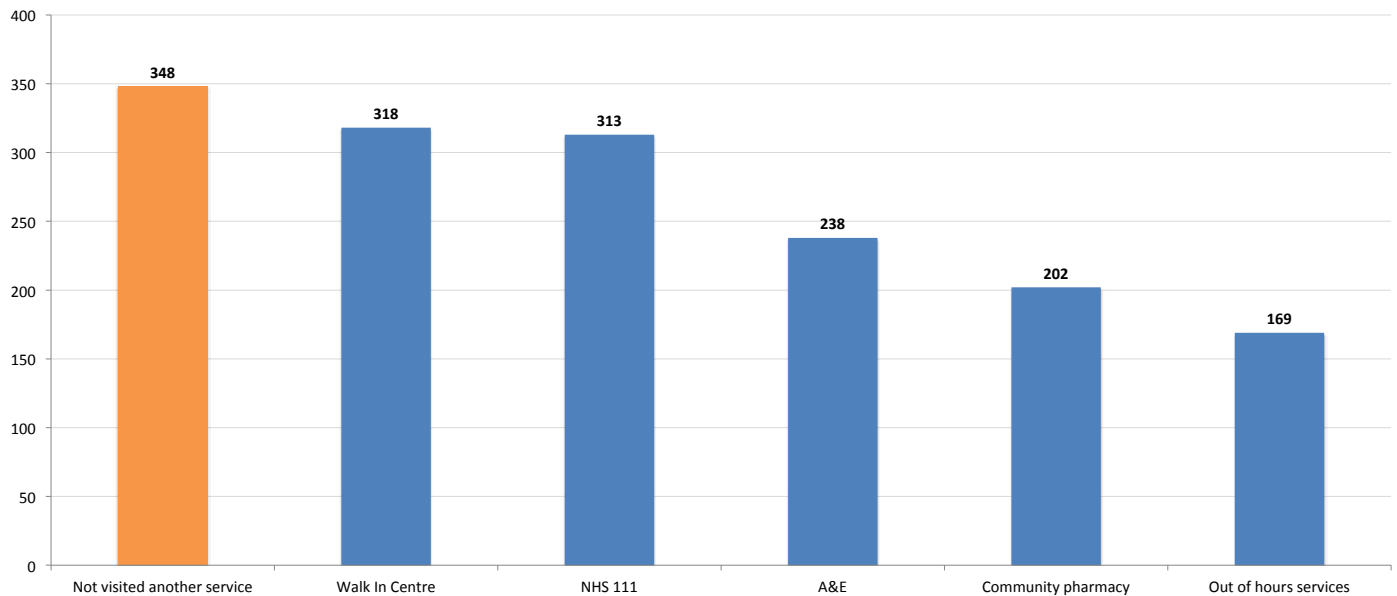
Method of transport	Summary of comments
Availability of appointments - non-specific	<p>The majority of the comments relating to this theme state that there is a long wait for appointments with some people saying that appointments are limited.</p> <p>A number of people said that it is difficult to see a GP within two or three weeks with some stating that it is very difficult to see a GP within seven days. Some people said described three weeks as too long to wait.</p> <p>Some people said that a telephone consultation is often required before an appointment can be confirmed.</p> <p>One person said "My GP is extremely busy so sadly I get inconsistent care."</p> <p>Nine people who took part in the survey said that they visited a Walk-In Centre as a result of not being able to get a GP appointment.</p>
Telephone Booking Issues	<p>The majority of comments cited not being able to get through to their surgery on the telephone as their main issue with arranging appointments and many shared their experiences of failing to arrange an appointment by telephone.</p> <p>The majority of comments state that when they do manage to get through to an operator the appointments are no longer available.</p> <p>Many comments referred to difficulties when you are required to phone a surgery at particular times of the day when you have other commitments.</p> <p>Many said they had regularly experienced a long wait on hold with people describing this as "frustrating" and "extremely difficult".</p> <p>A number of comments were made about phone lines being constantly engaged or being asked to call back at another time.</p> <p>Some people shared experiences of being told that they would receive a call back that did not occur.</p>
Availability of same day / urgent appointments	<p>The majority of comments received referred to a lack of availability for same day / urgent appointments.</p> <p>People described getting same day / urgent appointments as "impossible", "never available", "difficult" and "don't exist any longer".</p> <p>People appreciated that others are attempting to get urgent appointments at the same time.</p> <p>Some comments stated that they feel the best way to arrange a same day / urgent appointment is to visit the surgery in person at the opening time.</p> <p>Some comments stated that people are unsure what 'urgent' or 'emergency' means when visiting a GP.</p>
Work commitments	<p>Many of the comments for this theme related to the availability of appointments during typical working hours however, many people commented that it is also difficult to contact GP surgeries to arrange the appointments as this has an impact on their work time.</p> <p>Some comments were received relating to the challenge of arranging appointments around work commitments when you work shifts or work as a teacher. People also commented that often further advance notice is required for arranging work leave for appointments.</p> <p>Some said that it is only possible to arrange appointments in many surgeries during work time which causes difficulties.</p> <p>Some members of the public said that their finances had been affected due to attending GP appointments.</p>
Availability of routine appointments	<p>The majority of comments cited that people feel there is a long wait for routine appointments with many stating that they have waited between three and six weeks for a routine appointment.</p> <p>Some people said that routine appointments are difficult to arrange at a convenient time.</p> <p>People said that there is no option to pre-book routine appointments at regular intervals which they feel would be helpful.</p>



Method of transport	Summary of comments
Appointments with a specific GP	<p>A number of people said that if you want to see a specific GP then you have to wait longer. Many said that they have been unable to get an appointment with their choice of GP and a number of people said that this affects consistency in their care.</p> <p>One person said "Every time I have arranged an appointment I get a nurse. I can't even remember what my doctor looks like."</p>
Reception and reception staff issues	<p>A large number of comments for this theme relate to people being unhappy with sharing personal details with reception staff. Some people stated that they are concerned about data protection whilst others questioned if reception staff have sufficient knowledge to make a decision on the urgency of an appointment.</p> <p>A member of the public said "If it is a private issue, I do not want to share with the receptionist."</p> <p>A number of comments said that they have had an experience where they feel that a member of reception staff have been unhelpful or rude.</p> <p>Some people stated that they feel that receptionists do not like making appointments or attempt to limit the number of appointments that they make.</p>

**6. We asked participants “Have you ever sought health advice from another service as a result of difficulty getting to see your GP?”**

The chart below shows the response to the question.



The table below shows a summary of additional responses received relating to this question.

**Summary of comments**

A number of additional services were provided by respondents including Child and Adult Mental Health Services, other GP practices, Patient Advice and Liaison Service, complimentary therapy services, clinical commissioning group, chiropractors and emergency doctors.

A number of people said that they sought advice from the internet.

A member of the public said that they paid to see a private doctor.

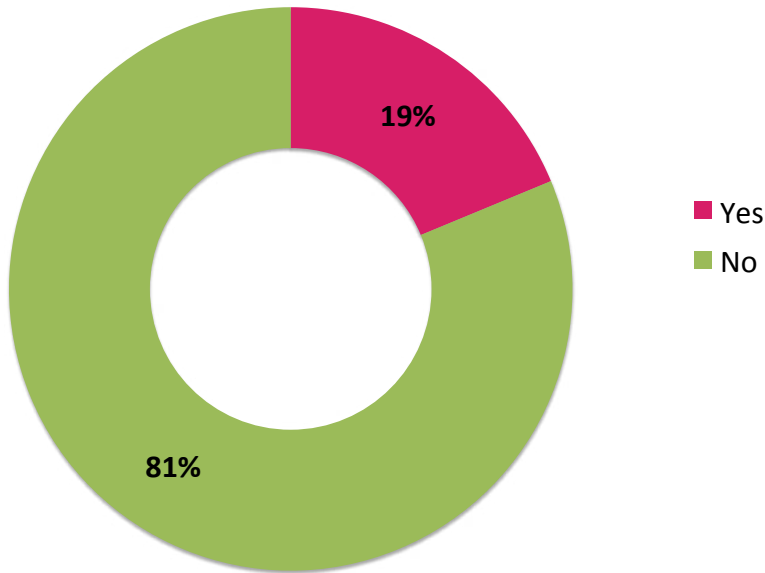
A member of the public said that they did not find their pharmacy or NHS 111 to be helpful.

A member of the public said “I have wasted valuable time with my specialist over issues that a GP could solve as it’s easier to get an appointment with a neurologist than a GP.

A respondent said that they sought advice from a friend.

7. We asked participants “Are there any reasons why you would not be happy to see any GP who had access to your records?”

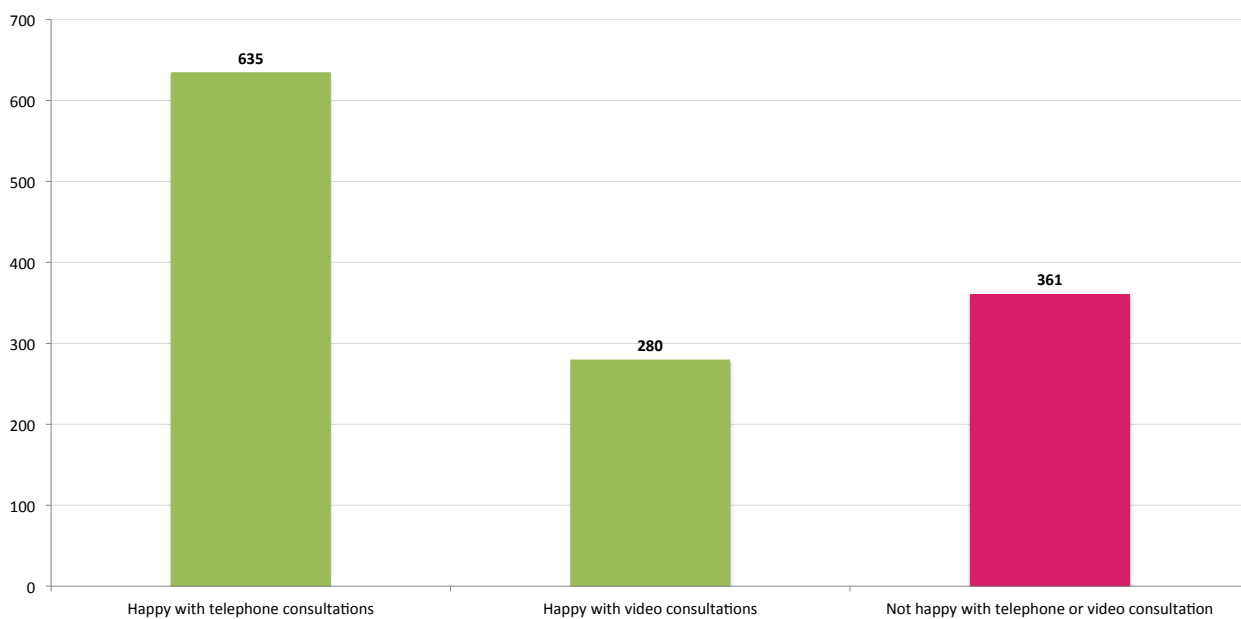
The chart below shows the response to the question.



**81% of people said that they are happy to see any GP who has access to their records.**

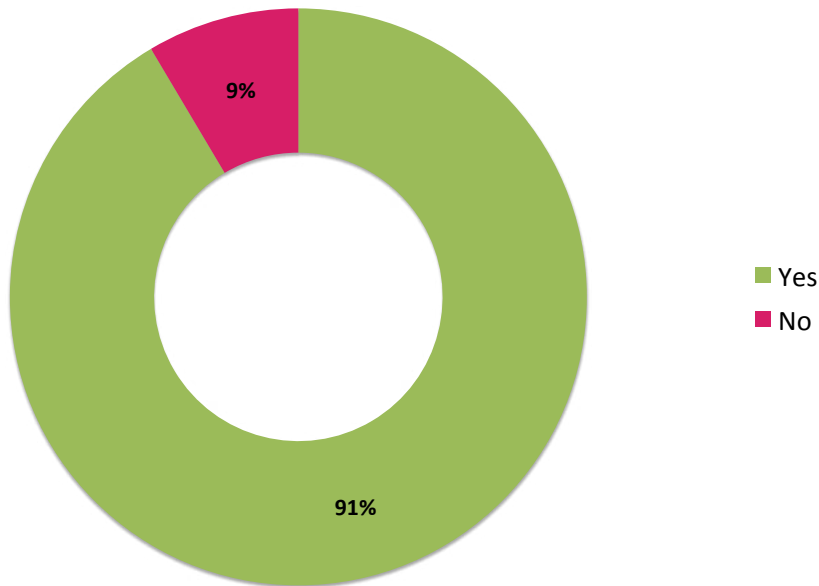
8. We asked participants “Would you be happy to have a consultation via telephone or video?”

The chart below shows the response to the question.



9. We asked participants “Would you be happy to be seen by a practice nurse for services they are trained to carry out?”

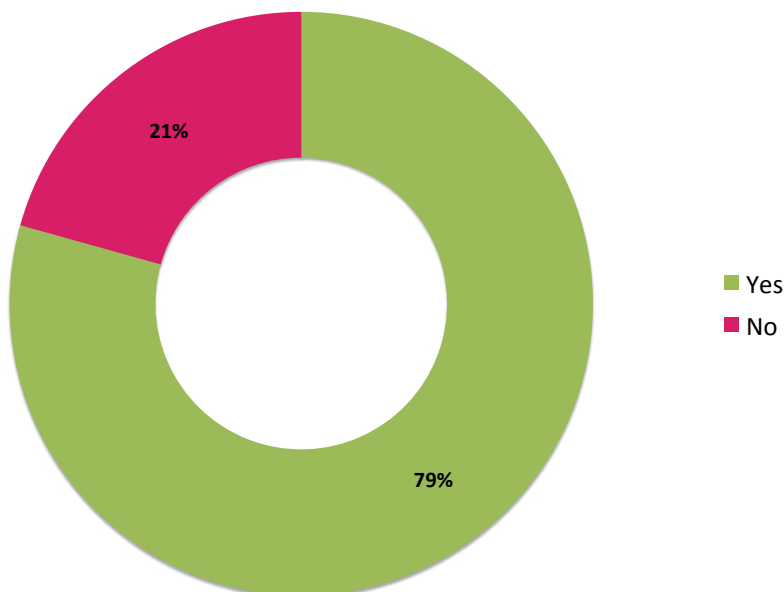
The chart below shows the response to the question.



**91% of people said that they are happy to see a practice nurse.**

10. We asked participants “Would you be happy to be seen by a pharmacist in the community for services they are trained to carry out?”

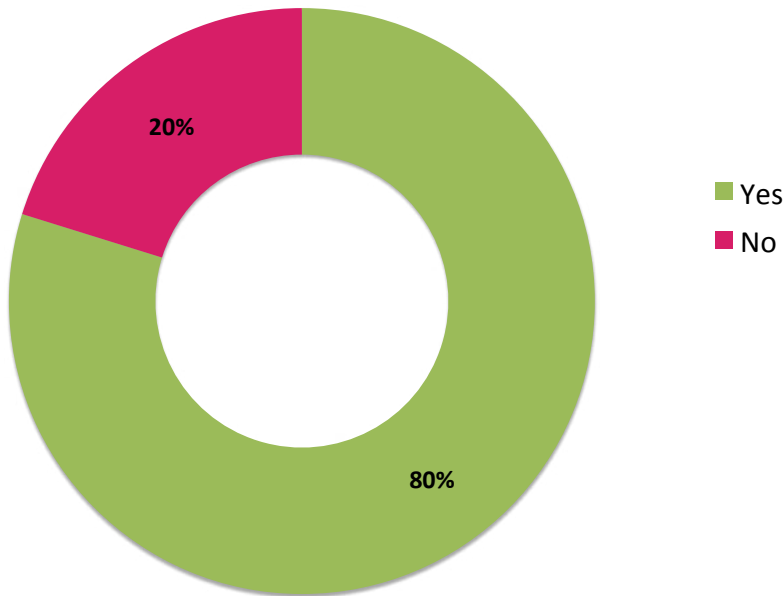
The chart below shows the response to the question.



**79% of people said that they are happy to see a pharmacist in the community.**

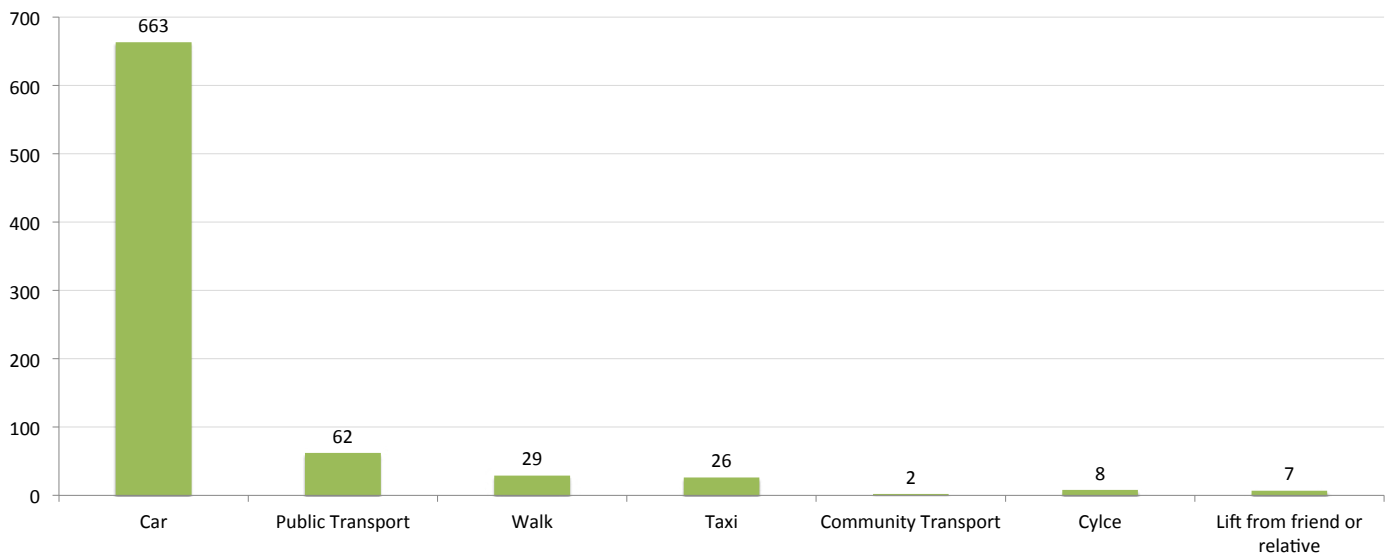
11. We asked participants “Would you be happy to see a GP or a healthcare professional in premises other than your own doctor’s i.e. a community health centre?”

The chart below shows the response to the question.



12. We asked participants “What is your usual mode of transport to see your GP?”

The chart below shows the response to the question.



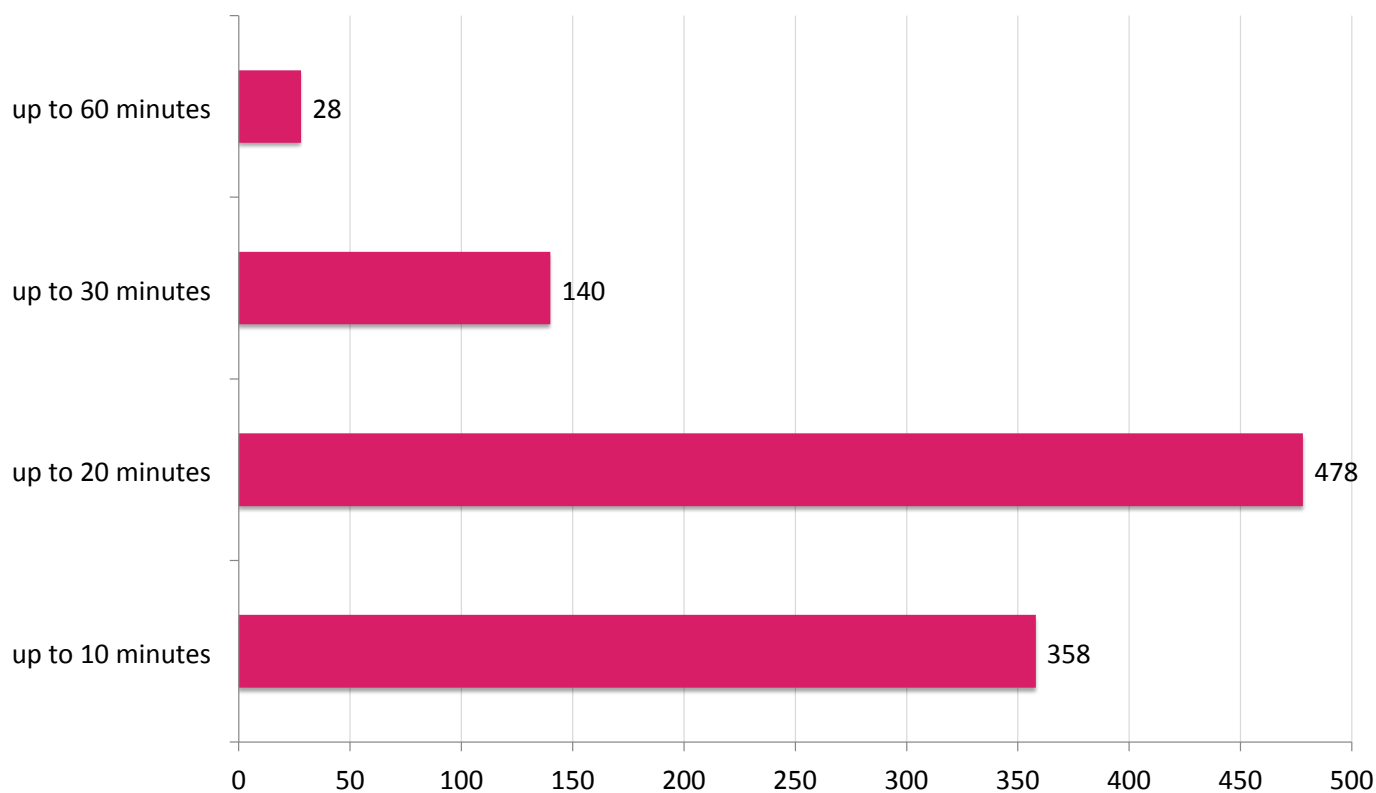
In March 2016, Healthwatch Lancashire published a ‘Your Care and Getting There’ report which summarises responses to a survey from 742 people in Lancashire about transport to primary healthcare services.

Responses to this survey did follow a similar trend of ‘by car’ being the most used method of transport however, responses to the ‘Your Care and Getting There’ survey were captured in settings where people were using community transport and public transport services.

To read the ‘Your Care and Getting There’ report visit [www.healthwatchlancashire.co.uk/reports](http://www.healthwatchlancashire.co.uk/reports)

13. We asked participants “How long would you be willing to travel to access GP services using your routine mode of transport?”

The chart below shows the response to the question.



## Real People of Lancashire

A number of people and groups shared their stories regarding transport to services with Healthwatch Lancashire whilst undertaking the campaign.

Here are some of their stories...

### “My GP is currently open at times that are convenient to me”

Healthwatch Lancashire spoke to Vernon from Freckleton.

Vernon said: “My GP is currently open at times that are convenient to me; it is open between 8am and 6.30pm from Monday to Friday. I am retired and find that I can get appointments easily. I have been with my GP practice for over thirty years.

When I ring my GP practice I can usually speak to someone without a problem. When I had severe back pain I rang my surgery and the practice nurse wasn't available to speak to me, however my doctor called me back to offer an appointment over the phone. This made me feel that I was listened to.

Sometimes the surgery is very busy and I avoid these times such as the mornings. I know it is quieter on Tuesday afternoons. It is not a problem for me as I can be flexible around the surgery and the appointment times they offer.

For most appointments I am happy to see any GP available and I would be willing to have a phone call for certain appointments. I do not have a phone that is compatible to make video calls but if a facility was available in a public place to have video calls with a GP then I would do this, as long as it was in private.



It is around eight miles to my surgery and I use public transport to get there. When I have a medical problem which requires me to go to hospital I have trouble with the bus routes taking an extremely long time. I would benefit greatly if GPs would give advice on Patient Transport and if I was able to choose the hospital I was referred to.

I use my local pharmacy for illnesses that don't warrant seeing a doctor but I would not like to use the NHS 111 service as I do not believe it saves resources.”

## “There were no problems getting an appointment until my GP retired a year ago..”

Healthwatch Lancashire spoke to Maria from Skelmersdale.

Maria said: “I was with the same GP practice for thirty-five years and there were no problems getting an appointment until my GP retired a year ago and things seemed to change.

Now there are four doctors and you never get to see the same GP. It is very difficult to get an appointment and I try not to visit the doctors anymore because of this.

My GP practice is open from 8.30am to 5pm and they close over lunch for an hour. I think it would help if the surgery was open on a Saturday to improve appointment availability. My old GP had begun to take appointments on a Monday evening to help those who worked but this is no longer available.

To get an appointment you have to phone up at 8.30am and then you have to wait until the phone is answered, you aren't put in a queue it is just a matter of ringing and hoping that you get through to someone. I know people walk down to the surgery to book appointments because the phone lines are so busy. If you do manage to book an appointment, it is usually a two week wait to see the doctor.

I had a chest infection which required antibiotics but I avoided the doctors until my daughter became worried. She called for me to get an appointment and was on the phone for half an hour before she got through and I managed to get the last emergency appointment for the day. Otherwise she would have had to ring again daily until she got one.



I went into the GP surgery recently and there was only one receptionist who was trying to deal with the queue of people and also answer the phones and handle the prescription service. It looked like she needed help as she was run off her feet. I think the online booking system would be good, but it may disadvantage the people who do not use the internet.

I would like to be able to make a routine appointment at a time and date convenient for me. People know their own bodies and what is an emergency and what is not. There are people who go to the doctors often but this doesn't mean it should be made harder for other people too.

I would be happy to have consultations over the phone or through video and I have sought information from my pharmacist and a walk-in centre so I didn't have to see my GP but this is only appropriate for certain problems.

I don't trust anymore that GPs are offering their best service and it feels as though you are getting pushed away and that everything is a money saving exercise but this is making it harder for other services such as walk-in centres and emergency departments.”



## Response to our findings

The Lancashire Primary Care Co-Commissioning Management Group provided the following response to the findings of the report:

“The Lancashire Co-commissioning Management Group would like to take this opportunity to thank Healthwatch Lancashire for this important work. The purpose of the survey was to gain more feedback from service users to supplement existing intelligence relating to NHS primary medical care access and patient experience, primarily to help shape extended access to general practice.”

“The survey was developed by a group of clinical commissioning groups and NHS England representatives, including GPs, and the information garnered will help inform commissioners about the potential unmet need and expressed demand for primary care services. It also helps us to ensure that when trying to access care patients know where to go to receive the best advice to getting the right care as soon as possible.

“In working through the responses contained in the survey it is encouraging to observe the vast majority of patients consider that their GP practice is open at a convenient time. However, for others, it is clear that extended access in the evening and weekends would be considered to be beneficial. It is encouraging therefore that clinical commissioning groups across Lancashire, supported by NHS England Lancashire, have developed plans to implement 7 day access to primary medical care services that will include services being available 8am until 8pm weekdays with further provision on Saturdays and Sundays.”

“The survey also highlights difficulties some patients are experiencing in trying to book appointments at their GP practice. To help address this specific issue, the Lancashire digital and technology work stream have prioritised the implementation and uptake of online services in general practice to enable patients to book appointments, order prescriptions and view patient medical records on line. The digital work stream will also explore the opportunity for patients to use video consultations and health care apps to enable other modes of access to general practice besides traditional face to face consultations.”

“Finally the survey helps inform commissioners about the potential to use the wider primary care workforce such as community pharmacy and practice nurses to deliver general practice services to patients.”

“The Co-commissioning Management Group will continue to engage with the public and service users to ensure that primary care being provided for patients not only meets their needs, but is accessible and of a high quality.”