

Listening to those who are homeless and living in deprivation in Lancashire

November 2016

Report summarising feedback from people in Lancashire in relation to how they use health and social care services.



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Introduction

Healthwatch Lancashire is committed to listening to patients and members of the public in Lancashire and making sure their views and experiences are heard by those who run, plan and regulate health and social care services.

According to Lancashire County Council, Lancashire has some very severe deprivation issues in various urban locations in Lancashire that are among the most deprived areas in England. The county has a large number of areas in the 10% most deprived localities in England.

This report summarises the feedback collected from homeless people and those living in deprivation about how they use the health and social care services and how they feel about it. The information was gathered by volunteers and members of the Healthwatch Lancashire team through engagement activities by attending foodbanks and homeless charity organisations during the months of August, September and October 2016.

Methodology

It is often those closest to the process who are best placed to give useful feedback on the way services work and how they can be improved. As patients and relatives are the ones who experience the process or service first hand, they have a unique, highly relevant perspective.

Patient and relatives input into designing services can be invaluable as sometimes seeing services from their point of view opens up real opportunities for improvement.

Representatives from Healthwatch Lancashire visited a number of community groups and organisations across Lancashire, encouraging members of the public to share their views and experiences of health and social care services. These visits are called Care Circles where we held structured conversations and recorded the feedback from the participants.

Healthwatch Lancashire visited 18 organisations between August and October 2016. In total, we spoke to 99 people.

The following organisations were visited:

In Preston, Chorley, South Ribble and West Lancashire:

- The Freedom Centre at St Wilfrid's Church – Preston
- Millbank Court – Preston
- The Trussell Trust Foodbank at Ecumenical Centre – Skelmersdale
- The Trussell Trust Foodbank at Trinity Methodist Church – Skelmersdale
- The Trussell Trust Foodbank at Oak House – Skelmersdale
- The Trussell Trust Foodbank at St Paul's Church - Longridge
- Salvation Army – Preston

In Fylde, Wyre, Lancaster and Morecambe:

- The Olive Branch – Lancaster
- Lancaster & District Homeless Action Service Ltd
- West End Impact – Morecambe
- George William House at Salvation Army – Fleetwood
- The Trussell Trust Foodbank at Citizen Advice Bureau – Kirkham
- The Trussell Trust Foodbank at Church Road Centre - St Anne's On Sea

In Burnley, Ribble Valley, Hyndburn and Rossendale:

- Crossroads at Salvation Army – Accrington
- Bradley Youth Hub at Safe Space – Nelson
- Bradley Youth Hub at Safe Space – Rossendale

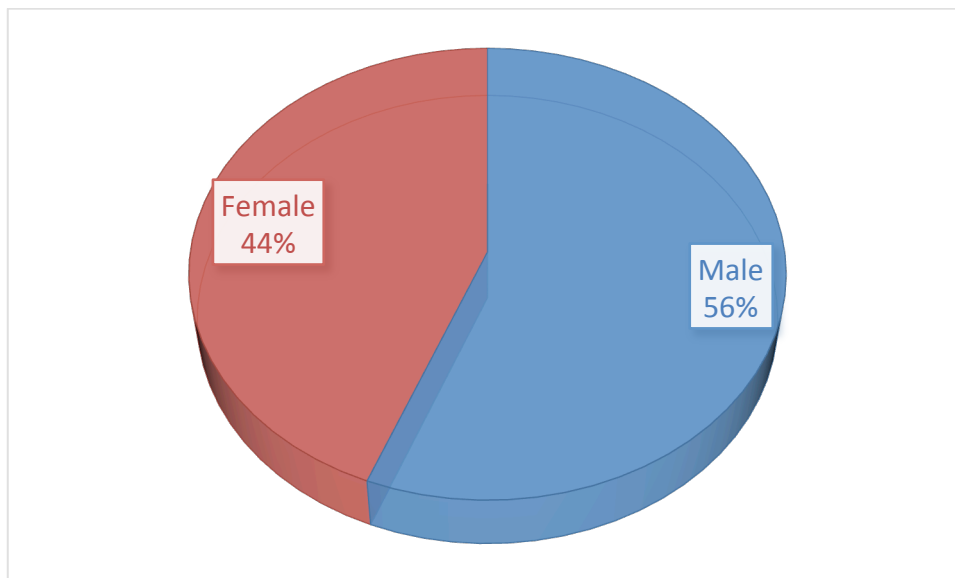
Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Lancashire would like to thank all those who shared their views, experiences and took part in the activities along with representatives from organisations who supported our visit.

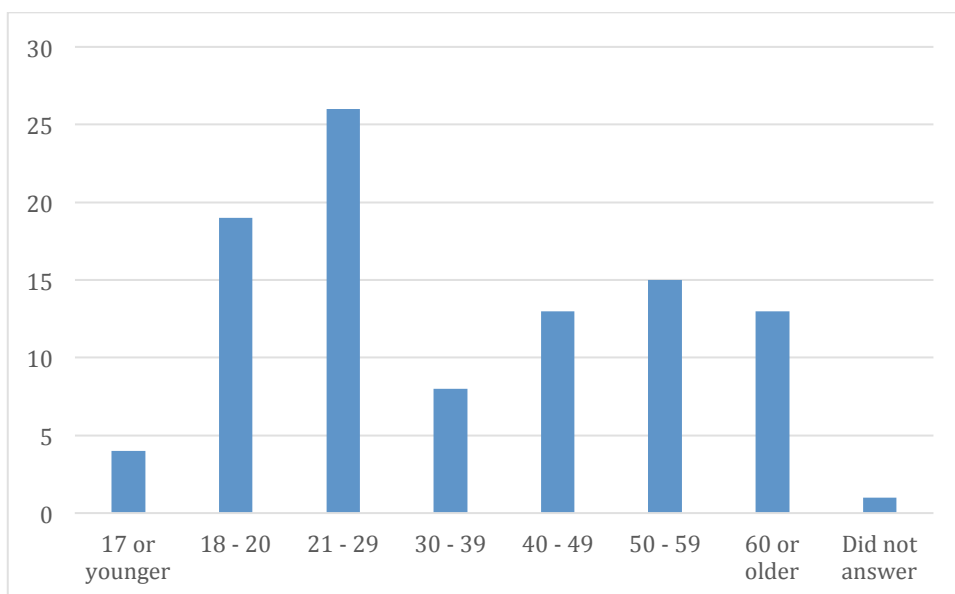
Results:

The Care Circles took place during August, September and October 2016. 99 people shared their views.

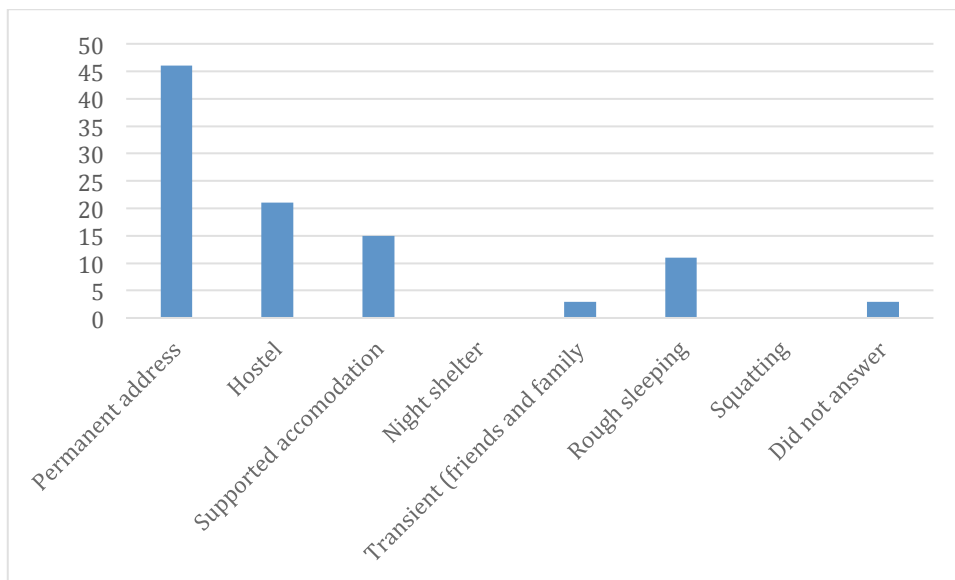
1. Are you male or female?



2. What is your age?

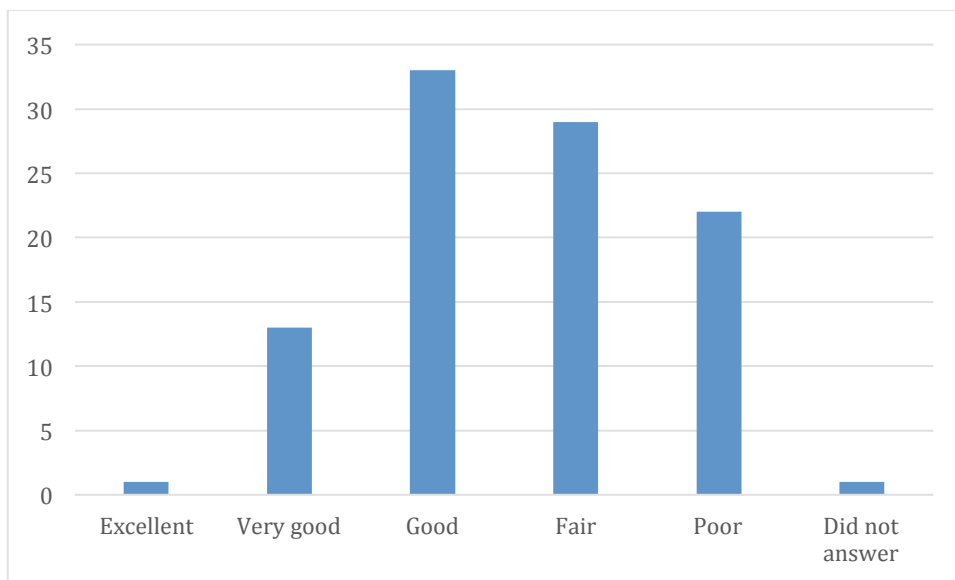


3. What is your current accommodation?



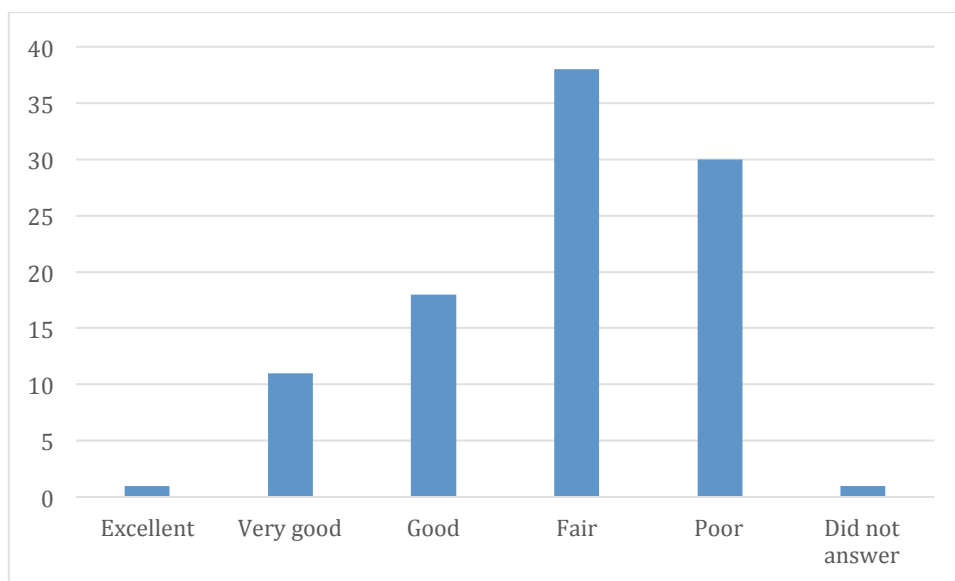
The majority of the people we spoke to said they have a permanent address, whilst 22% were at a hostel and 11% of people said they were sleeping rough.

4. In general, how would you rate your overall physical health?



The majority of the people we spoke to said that their physical health was good or fair whilst 22% people said it was poor.

5. In general, how would you rate your emotional health?



Almost 40% of the people we spoke to said their emotional health was fair whilst 31% said it was poor.

6. Is there anything that could help improve your physical and/or emotional health, and if so what?

(63 of the 99 answered)

Some of the comments shared:

"If my housing issues can be sorted out then that would be a big help."

"I could definitely do with more support rather than being ignored and being sent to anybody and everybody."

"There should be more support for the vulnerable, age should not come into it."

"To get the right help and information from the GP."

"I could definitely do with more physiotherapy."

"Help and support with my health requirements."

"More support from everybody at the NHS."

"Provide more support and not to be judged because of your circumstances."

"Be more understanding about our issues and do not pre-judge."

"Provide counselling support at the right time rather than delaying before your health messes up."

"More support from the GP and reception staff."

"Being referred for a service then waiting six to eight months to hear back, I am sure there must be another way, I suffer from mental health and time is of essence."

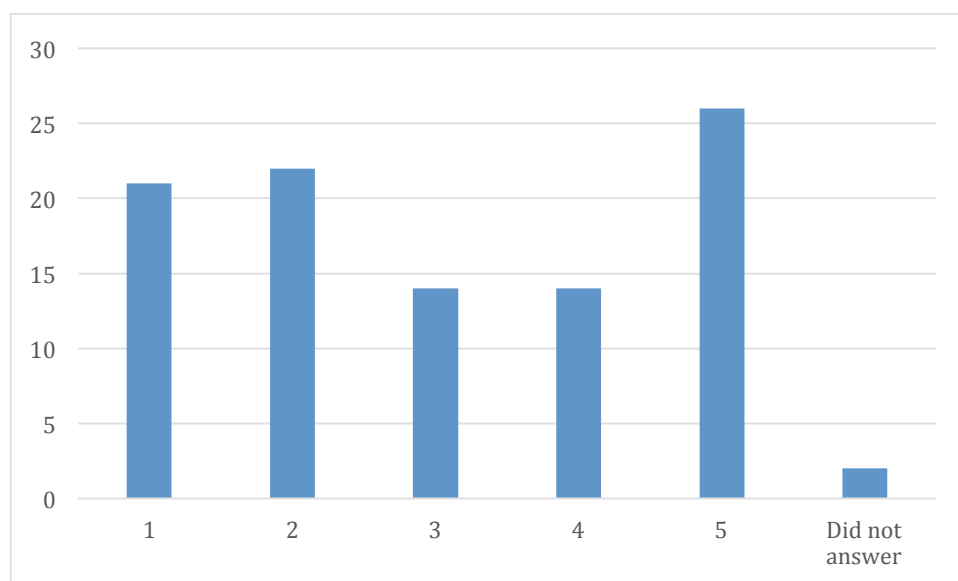
"Speed up the referral for mental health services."

"I have been in my flat for almost three years, to this date nothing has been done to improve the place. I have damp issues and water leaking. The council have accused me of damaging my own property."

"Be there to listen."

“More support from other organisations would be a big help.”
“If my health improved then that would be amazing.”
“Help with my mental health, hardly any support available.”
“More support for the veterans. I have had no support since leaving the army.”
“If there were more employment opportunities available then that would be great.”
“If the benefit process was run better then I would not be in a position where I had to rely on a foodbank.”
“If only there was way to relax and not stress.”
“More support from the government”
“To support me in my hour of need, like when I lost my husband, I got no support.”
“If support was provided to get me back into teaching.”
“Provide more support, the government/NHS can do more than what they are currently doing, what about us on the streets? Who is listening to us? This is the first time I have shared my feelings with anyone, come and talk to us in our little world.”
“I have bipolar, my benefits have been cut and no one is prepared to help me.”
“Not to be judged by my looks, appearance and smell. I am a good person.”

7. On a scale of 1-5, how important is your health to you? (1 is not important and 5 is very important)



22% of the people we spoke to felt their health was not important to them whilst 27% said it was important.

8. Are there any things that affect your health negatively, and if so what are they?
(58 of the 99 answered)

Some of the comments shared:

"Stress."
"No support when needed."
"Body pain."
"Asthma."
"Hay fever."
"My health."
"Smoking."
"Drinking."
"Drugs."
"Losing my mum."
"My mental health issues."
"Pressure."
"I self harm."
"Language barrier when I go the GP and hospital."
"My bipolar."
"Depression."
"Arthritis."
"Stress and anxiety."
"No support, left to fend for myself."
"Being passed to anybody and everybody and getting no help."
"Being homeless."
"Diabetes."
"Not being able to stay fit as cannot exercise."
"I cannot sleep and GP will not prescribe me sleeping tablets."
"Pressure and stress of family."
"Epilepsy."
"Arthritis in both knees."
"Living on the streets."

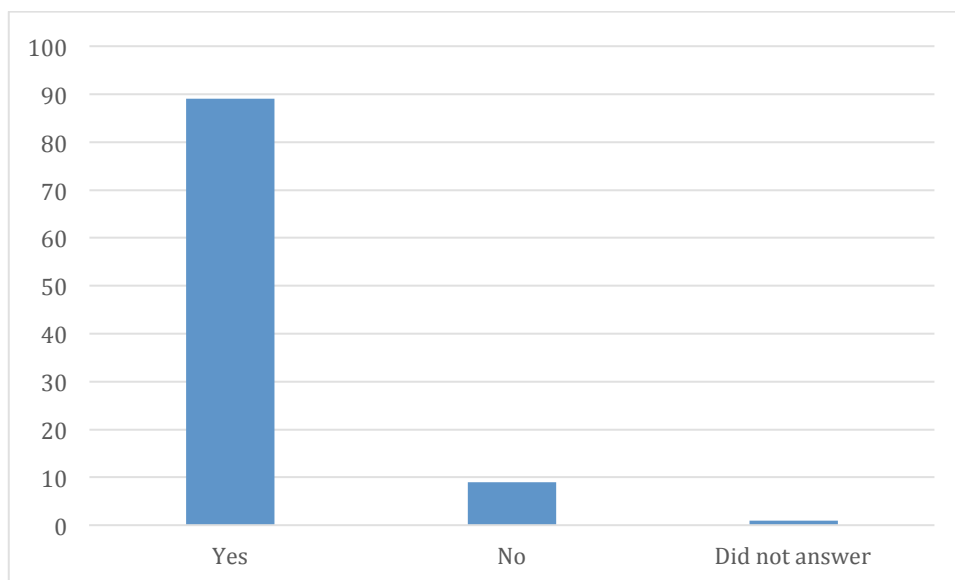
9. Are there any things that affect your health positively, and if so what are they?
(31 of the 99 answered)

Some of the comments shared:

"Family."
"Smoking helps me."
"I turn to drugs for comfort."
"Going to the gym."
"My baby."
"Friends."
"Support from other people and organisations."
"Going fishing, cycling and being married."
"Talking to my children."

*"Attitude to life."
"Walking clears my mind."
"The smile of my child."*

10. Are you registered with a GP/doctor?



Some of the comments shared:

"I'm still under my old address but I'm scared to tell them as I do not have a fixed address and think they might get rid of me and I will end up with no GP."

"I am struggling to get a GP as I do not have a fixed address."

"I cannot register, so I always go to the hospital if I am not well."

"I got help from the organisation that supports me, if it was not for them then I would have struggled and may be end up doing something silly."

"I just need to go to the surgery with the form completed."

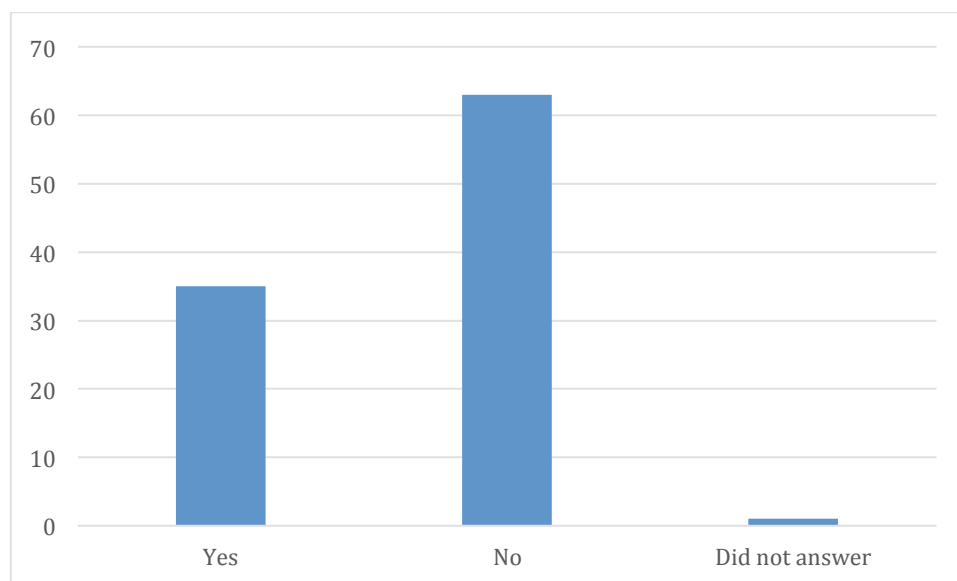
"I have been asked to provide evidence or identification but I cannot afford photographic evidence."

"I keep moving around so not really applied anywhere."

"I do not have a fixed address so would struggle to get one, so I don't waste my time."

"I went to register and was asked to complete a form, I cannot write or read so said I will drop it off later, not gone back since."

11. Are you registered with a dentist?



Some of the comments shared:

"I am struggling to get one."

"I am still looking for one."

"I do not have a dentist, I had a bad experience as a child and will never go back."

"Being registered with a dentist is not a priority for me as I have more important issues to worry about."

"I am with a dentist but under my old address, I am scared if I tell them then they will get rid of me."

"I have no teeth so not really bothered."

"I have a fear of dentist."

"I have more important things to worry about."

"I have dentures so do not need one."

"It has almost been 18 months and I am still waiting to be registered."

"I got accused of fraud even though I was on benefits and it was the receptionist that filled my form in. Will not go again as I am scared I will get a big bill through the post."

"I move around so struggling to register."

"Not registered, I just live with the pain and take paracetamol."

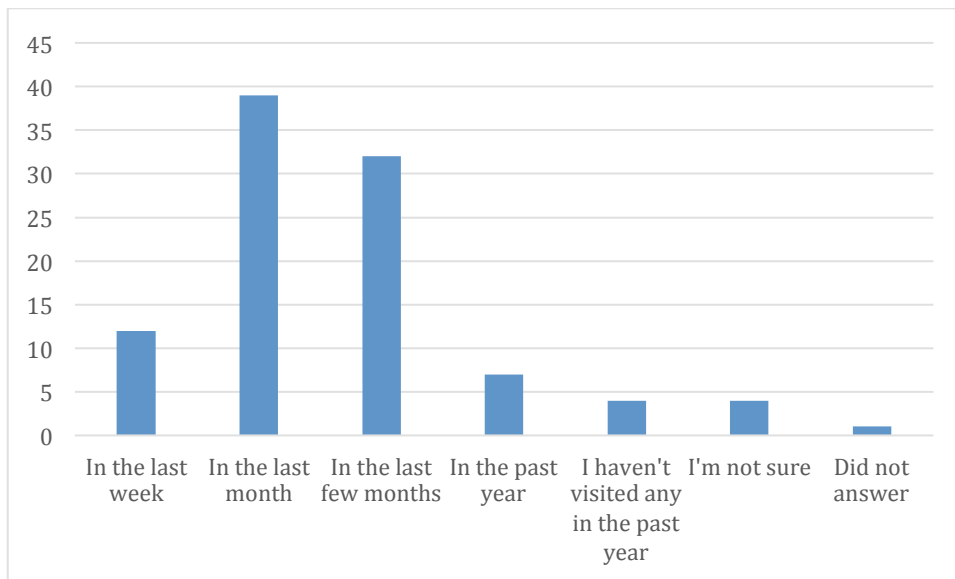
"My last dentist just offered me advice and billed me for £40, I have not paid that so I am on the run."

"I have other priorities."

"I'm still on the waiting list."

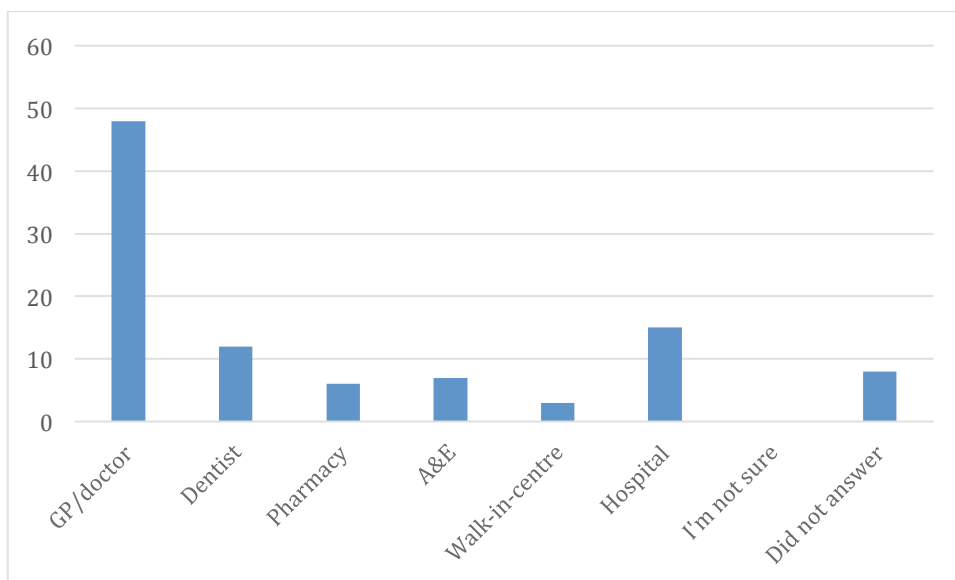
"There is nothing available on the NHS, where I am, it is all private and I just cannot afford it, if the worse comes to the worse then I will end up in hospital and they will have to treat me."

12. When was the last time you visited any healthcare service, for example, pharmacy, walk-in centre etc?

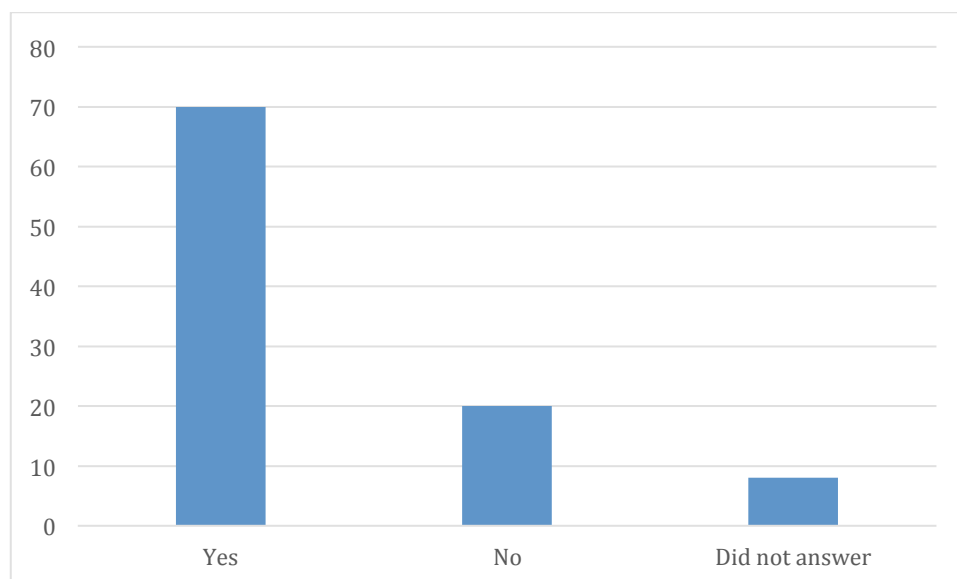


The majority of the people we spoke had not visited a healthcare service in the last few months.

13. What type of healthcare service did you last visit?



14. Did you feel listened to in your last visit to a healthcare service?



Some of the comments shared:

- "I felt my GP lost patience with me as I have a speech problem and talk slow."*
- "Sometimes I feel like I am not listened as they are busy looking at the clock."*
- "The consultant that I saw was very helpful and supportive, however, I did feel that some staff did look down at me because of the way I was dressed and smelled."*
- "My issue is that my GP only listens to me to a certain point then loses interest."*
- "Was very good and listened to me."*
- "My current practice is really good, my previous one was awful and could not wait to leave them."*
- "My GP was very patient with me."*
- "I struggle to understand sometimes as my english is not the best."*
- "Staff were amazing, saved mine and my baby's life."*
- "I do feel I get rushed sometimes at my GP."*
- "The pharmacy I went to was fantastic."*
- "Went to my dentist and had the treatment I required."*
- "The last time I went to the walk-in-centre, it went well, got listened to and given good advice."*
- "I felt my GP wanted me out as soon as possible."*
- "Went to my GP as I was having suicidal thoughts, I got the help and contact numbers and felt okay."*
- "Went into the hospital for some treatment, the treatment itself was good, however, the care was awful."*
- "I admit that I smell and look scruffy, however, this should not be an issue for the reception staff when booking me in."*

15. Did you find the information you were given helpful?

Some of the comments shared:

"Some of the information provided was useful."

"I felt I got mixed messages."

"Everything was explained to me as I cannot read."

"Leaflets were provided."

"Plenty of information given but my GP forgot that I cannot read."

"No proper information provided."

"Very helpful, even got a call from a nurse, then my GP who spoke to me about my issue."

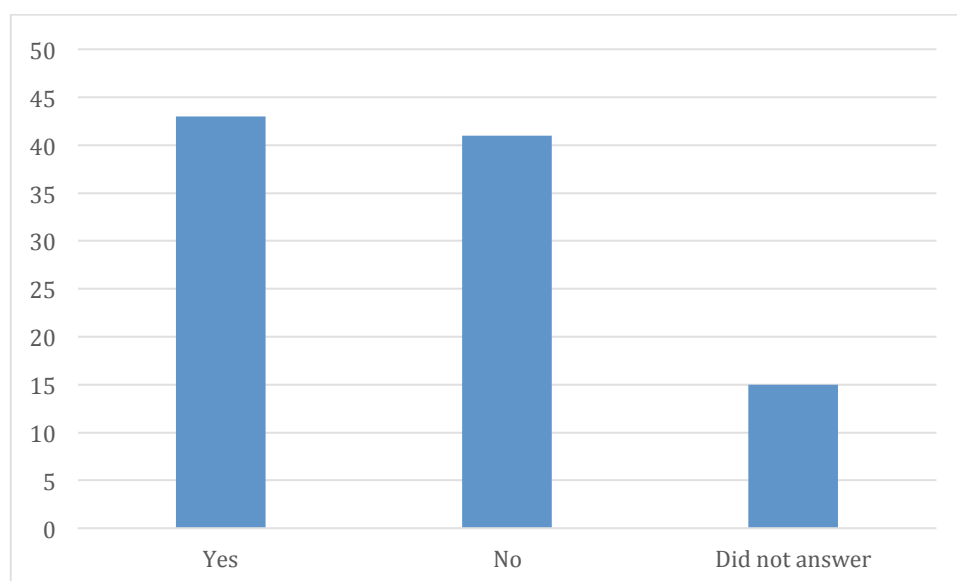
"The phone consultation was good, everything got explained to me."

"I was not given any leaflets or advice, had to go to the library and use the internet to find the information."

"I was not explained anything and felt they could not wait to get rid of me."

"I was given no help."

16. Could your experience of using healthcare services be improved and if so, how?



Some of the comments shared:

"For me everything was good."

"I was given the wrong diagnosis. The medical staff need to read the notes correctly."

"Improvement on referral times would be good."

"Do not make people beg to get accepted with GP's or a dentist."

"Listen and understand, be helpful and have patience."

"Treat everyone fairly."

"Provide better care."

"Do not judge anyone."

"Try and be more understanding."

"Provide better support when language becomes an issue."

"Have more interpreters available."
"I suffer from bipolar and I am still waiting for my treatment, please hurry the process."
"Improve the waiting times at GP's and hospitals."
"If the reception staff at my dentist did their job properly then I would not be sitting at home stressing how to pay the bill or being accused of fraud."
"Help me find a dentist."
"GP's should give more time to the patient, understand our circumstances."
"I feel the reception staff at my GP and staff at the hospital do not like me. I have heard them make comments about me."
"At my discharge, I was told what to do when I get home, even though they knew I am sleeping rough."
"Treat me as a human being."
"Be more caring, listen to my issues properly rather than look at the clock."
"Get treated fairly at the hospital."

17. Does anything stop you from using healthcare services? (If yes, please specify)
(57 answered)

Some of the comments shared:

"Rude receptionist."
"Bad experience at the dentist."
"Not being able to produce a utility bill or photographic evidence as I do not have a fixed address and I cannot afford a passport."
"Being judged the minute you walk in to the GP practice or hospital."
"I am dying so do not want to waste NHS money."
"My mental health issues."
"People looking at you and laughing."
"Because I am from Europe, I feel people laugh at me when I ask for help."
"Everytime I go to my GP and tell him my issues, he prescribes me anti-depressants. He never refers me anywhere else and keeps saying it's all in your head."
"Lack of services available so why bother asking."
"I am registered blind and feel besides one organisation no one else helps me."
"Being charged for a service when you are led to believe it is free."
"The waiting list puts me off, I have been waiting six months."
"Lack of support from social services."
"Dignity, my pride."

18. Do you get support from any organisations, and if so which?

Organisations mentioned:

"Salvation Army."
"Foodbanks."
"Citizen Advice Bureau."
"Prince's Trust."
"Local Day Centre."
"Acorn Centre."
"Family Support Groups."
"The Trussell Trust."
"Face to Face."
"Early Break."
"West End Impact."
"Support Accommodation."
"Shelter."
"Inspire."
"Peer Support."
"The Olive Branch."
"Walking Group."
"Age Concern."
"All Saints Church."
"Galloways."
"Methodist Centre."
"Minds Matter."
"Alcohol Anonymous."
"All the homeless support groups."
"Millbank Court."
"The Foxton Centre."

General comments:

- *"I am not interested in seeing a locum as my GP knows my circumstances and I do not like to share my life story with others."*
- *"GP is always my first contact but I do not see the point anymore. By being homeless my mental health issues are worsening; I personally feel my GP is not that good at supporting me."*
- *"Some of the difficulties I have faced being homeless are finding a house, work, drinking, relying on drugs and family relationship breakdown."*
- *"I recently went with a friend who is showing signs of early dementia. You could tell the GP knew nothing and just wanted us out."*
- *"When medication goes wrong it creates anxiety and you end up doing something silly."*
- *"The government/council need to stand up and listen to the people of Skelmersdale. We are getting nothing, we always seem to miss out on everything."*
- *"I lost my partner and have been feeling suicidal for a while. I went to the hospital and they just said you need to see your GP."*
- *"Because of my mental health issues, I just ring the police now and let them decide what they do with me as GP's/hospitals are awful."*
- *"I sleep in the park and seem to get no help."*
- *"How does it work when you have to pay for services (private) as there is a long wait on the NHS. I cannot afford it."*
- *"I got struck off by my GP as I had not gone for a while."*
- *The reception staff at a GP or dentist need to understand that not everyone can read or write. I was once asked to fill a form in, the reception staff could have said "Are you okay to fill this form in?", instead she said "Can you take a seat and fill this form in?", I got mad and left as I did not want anybody to find out that I could not read or write."*
- *"I am ashamed to visit the foodbank but sometimes I have no choice."*
- *"The people at the Trussell Trust are fantastic."*
- *"The support provided at The Olive Branch is so much appreciated, sometimes you just want to talk to someone and this place provides that."*
- *"All the volunteers who help should be given a knighthood."*
- *"If it was not for Lancaster District Homeless Association I would be dead. Just to go to this place to have a cup of tea and have a shower is a godsend."*
- *"The Salvation Army have saved my life."*
- *"If it was not for Safe Space then I would not be here today, they have given me a roof, supported me and built my confidence up."*
- *"I feel homelessness destroys self-esteem and self-confidence."*
- *"Homelessness leads to depression, anxiety and other health problems."*

Healthwatch Lancashire Summary of Findings:

Here is a summary of findings from the visits to the groups:

- More than 20% of the people we spoke to said their physical health was poor.
- 39% of the people we spoke to said their emotional health was fair whilst 31% said it was poor.
- To improve their physical/or emotional health, some suggestions we received were:
 - Resolving housing issues and having access to more support.
 - Better understanding from the GP and reception staff.
 - There being better support from other organisations.
 - A quicker referral process to reduce waiting as long as eight months to be seen by a specialist.
- 22% of the people we spoke to felt their health was not important. The main reason were due to their personal circumstances. Health was not something they were worried about as their biggest worry was where they will be sleeping and where their next meal will come from.
- Some people relied on smoking, drinking and taking drugs to make them feel better, even though they knew it is not good for their health, they felt they had no choice and this was their only way to cope.
- 9% of the people we spoke to were not registered with a GP. The main reasons given for this was because they had no fixed address, no utility bills or any photographic evidence for identification.
- 36% of the people we spoke to were not registered with a dentist. The main reasons given for not having a dentist were:
 - Struggling to get one.
 - Being on the waiting list.
 - There being no NHS dentist available due to services going or and affordability.
 - Having no fixed address and not being able to produce a utility bill or photographic evidence.
 - Being billed for a service (when it was supposed to be free) then getting accused of fraud.
 - Phobia of the dentist.
- Nearly a quarter of the people we spoke to said they did not feel listened to during the last time they visited a health service.
- 51% of the people we spoke to said their experience of using healthcare services could be improved.
- The people were asked what prevented them from using the healthcare services. Some of the respondents said that the reception staff were very rude, they were judged by the way they dressed and smelled, and that their mental health was not being assessed properly.
- Most of the people we spoke to turned to local voluntary organisations and groups as they feel they do not receive support from the council, the NHS or the government.

- The majority of the people we spoke to said they have a permanent address, whilst 22% were in a hostel and 11% said they were sleeping rough.

Case Study:

Healthwatch Lancashire Project Officer, Ilyas Patel, spoke about his experience of undertaking the Homelessness and Deprivation Project.

He said: *“Initially when I was given the task I was a bit apprehensive as to what would happen or even whether anyone would want to share their experience with me about their life and about being homeless or living in deprivation.*

How wrong was I? From the initial contact made with the organisations to meeting with the people, it has been extremely eye opening. My perception was that people would not want to share their experiences and what they have had to go through or have been through, but hardly anyone declined to talk to me.

All the groups that myself and our volunteers met with were greatly appreciative. They made us feel welcome and were glad that someone had come to see what they do and listen to how their service users live their life. They said they rarely get anybody from the NHS (National Health Service, Clinical Commissioning Groups or the council coming to see what they do and what support the local organisations provide.

From the foodbanks that I visited to local support groups, I felt everybody provided an amazing service. The volunteers and I observed the connection between the people and the staff and volunteers who were there to listen and just help in any way they could.

For me, the biggest thing has been the passion and devotion shown by the staff and volunteers that support local groups and people.

Listening to some of the stories has touched my heart and has changed the way I look at my life now. I now realise how lucky I am to have a family, a home, hot meals, a bed and shower facilities; the things we all take for granted every day.

Some stories shared by the people were really sad, people talked about how they sleep in the park, subways, at the train station, and how some have been attacked at night whilst sleeping.

One person commented that he fell asleep in the town centre near the door of a store, when he woke up he was in hospital. He was told that, apparently, he had been kicked in the head and staff had found him in the morning bleeding and called for an ambulance.

I met another gentleman who told me about how his life had dramatically taken a turn for the worse. He said living down South was great, he had a big house, a lovely wife and children and a fantastic job. After several months of arguments with his wife, he went through a divorce and lost everything. He fell ill, lost his job due to mental health issues and ended up living on the streets. He moved away as he did not want his children knowing how he was living and now stays in contact just via Facebook.

On the positive side, I met a person who had been living rough but changed his life around. After months of sleeping on the streets and the train station, he eventually went to Emmaus for help. He stayed there for six months and got the support he needed, started to believe in himself, applied for a flat and re connected with his family. Just seeing him smiling and sharing his story made me happy. The thing that struck me most was that I have known this person now for over two years in a professional capacity and would never have realised what he went through in the past.

For me the biggest compliment goes to the organisations who support the homeless and people living in deprivation. The work the staff and volunteers do goes largely un-noticed. The time they spend just listening to them, preparing food parcels and trying to help in any way they can is really amazing."

Response from The Olive Branch:

The Olive Branch has seen a significant increase in referrals through 2016, both for adults and for children, as have other foodbanks including nationally The Trussell Trust, which will therefore have a significant impact on the health of those in poverty. The Olive Branch also seeks to address not just the need for food, but provide that kind of holistic support many people need.

For many people, as well as the difficulties/attitudes they come across sometimes with accessing healthcare, a big problem is that they don't seek help because they are struggling so much just to keep going, to have enough food to eat – which itself causes their health to deteriorate – that they don't seek help for health issues as soon as they would if they weren't in poverty

A very significant number of these people have mental health and/or addiction issues and there is insufficient resource allocation in the NHS / CCGs (or voluntary sector) to provide the help needed.