

## Healthwatch Kent

Engaging with Communities

Experiences of Gypsy & Traveller Communities in Kent

---

June 2017



# Foreword from our Chief Executive

**Kent is a large and diverse county. We are home to the very rich, and the very poor. Kent is also home to many varied communities and cultures.**

The rich landscape brings with it challenges for the health and social care system. Different cultures use and experience services in different ways.

At Healthwatch Kent we wanted to hear from communities about their experiences of health and social care services. We wanted to hear about the good and understand the not so good.

Thanks to the help and support of the Kent County Council Community Liaison & Site Management teams we have visited 7 Traveller sites.

We heard stories about struggles to get appointments and the challenges caused when people need additional support.

I want to say thank you to all the people who shared their stories with us and who welcomed us so warmly and even offered us tea!

This report details everything that we have heard so far. We will use it to raise the issues faced by the Traveller community.

**Steve Inett**

Chief Executive



# Our Aim

- o We wanted to talk to as many people from the Gypsy & Traveller community as possible
- o We wanted to provide free Information & Signposting support as well as hearing about their experiences of local health & social care services

# How did we go about it?

We visited 7 official Traveller sites across Kent

Anyone who needed additional support was contacted by our Helpline

We talked directly with 47 members of the community





# Background

It is estimated around 26,000 Gypsies & Travellers are in Kent.



1.6% of the Kent population is Gypsy & Traveller, that is over 3x the national average.



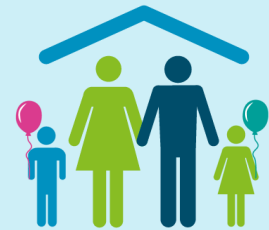
Caravan count 2016 (annually completed each July) was 1,908.

Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers and Roma are legally recognised ethnic minorities under the Race Relations Act.

New Travellers may have Traveller status under planning law.



Homelessness within the national Gypsy & Traveller community is around 10%



Life expectancy is 10 - 25 years lower than the national average.



Low immunisation, high infant, child and maternal mortality, high chronic disease, high anxiety & depression.



This is just as bad if housed.

Lowest educational outcomes



The community has a Low adult literacy rate (under 40%)

“Almost two-thirds of people in England can come at least one minority group towards whom they feel less positive. The most frequently cited are Traveller/Gypsies”.  
(Stonewall, 2003)





---

# What did we learn?

---

## A Summary

---

- o We heard from many people about their difficulties getting to see a local GP.
- o Many people reported difficulty registering and accessing services
- o High percentage of adults had literacy issues and needed extra support to fill in forms and read appointment letters. Many older residents were illiterate.
- o Access to information was a challenge for many. Broadband was not available at most sites making it hard for people to find out about services and complete online information

### Other issues included:

- o Quality of treatment
- o Waiting times
- o GP services
- o GP appointments
- o Hospital appointments
- o Staff attitudes

“My wife died recently, turned out she had cancer. She looked after all bills, sorted the bank, filled in forms. I can’t deal with any of this so now I have older daughter who tries to help me.”

“I have to say the Site Managers here have been brilliant. They help explain things and will write for me if a form needs filling in. They might get fed up with it soon though!”





---

## What did people tell us?

---

Doctors are really good. I will be offered a telephone consultation if no appointments are available for my child.

---

My mother has COPD and is also Diabetic. She need a GP appointment and was offered one in 2.5 weeks time. So I took her to Darent Valley Hospital where she was given antibiotics for a chest infection.

---

I've lived in Kent for 7 years and have been unable to register with a GP. I am a Diabetic and asthmatic. I travel to Surrey to see a GP for my medication.

Pleased with the service provided at Aylesford GP Practise. No problem seeing a GP.

---

Can't get GP appointment, I was told to go to Walk-in Centre in Gravesend

---

Child had a rash and high temperature. Called 111 and they arranged for Maidstone hospital to call me.

Refused an appointment for my child. I can never get appointment and I'm told to go to the Isle of Sheppey Walk-In Centre but I can only get there if someone takes me.

GP OK. Will give children same day appointments if needed.

Long waiting times at Walk in centre. Other people went in ahead of me with no explanation.

Difficult to get a GP appointment. Different GPs have changed my medication for anxiety which is worrying me.

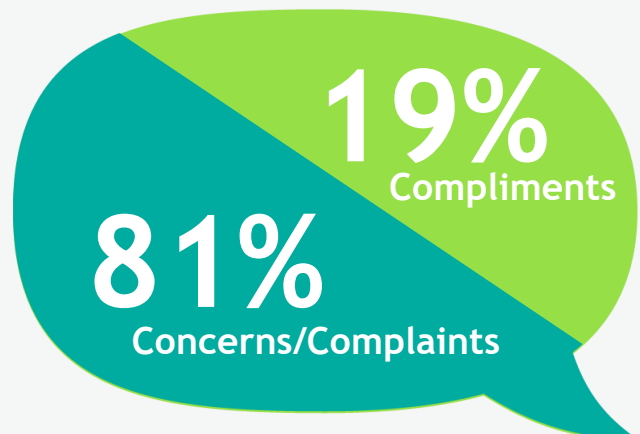
Margate QEQM hospital is generally ok. I usually get seen in A&E because I can't get a GP appointment.

---

Great service. Been with same dental practice since I was 6 years old.

---

Mental health support group was cancelled with 1 weeks notice. Patients found it very stressful and upsetting. We felt we had been let down and couldn't cope without support for that long.



---

# What did people tell us? Continued.

---

## Dental services

---

- o Information about NHS dental services was poor at most of the sites we visited.
- o Our Healthwatch Kent dental leaflets were very popular as they had up-to-date, clear information about how to get an NHS dentist and the charges involved.
- o We spoke to one family whose child was asthmatic and very fearful of dentist.
- o They had not been able to find a suitable dentist to support his needs
- o We were able to find him the right service at Sevenoaks Hospital where he has since been treated.



---

## Our recommendations

---

- We will ask all Kent Clinical Commissioning Groups for an update about their work with Gypsy & Traveller communities and for them to respond to our report.
- Healthwatch Kent will develop a bespoke 'Help Card' which will be freely available to the Traveller Community so that they can indicate any additional support they may need.
- We will work with NHS organisations to ensure this Help Card is widely used and recognised
- We will continue to visit Traveller sites to monitor feedback and developments and continue to raise the issues we hear.





---

# Healthwatch Kent

**Healthwatch Kent is the independent voice for local people in Kent.**

We gather and represent people's views about any health and social care service in Kent.

Our role is to understand what matters most to people and to use that information to influence providers and commissioners to change the way services are designed and developed.

Our FREE Information and Signposting service can help you navigate Kent's complicated health and social care system to ensure you can find and access the services that are available for you. Call us on 0808 801 0102 or email [info@healthwatchkent.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchkent.co.uk)



**By Telephone:**  
Healthwatch Kent  
Freephone 0808 801 0102



**By Email:**  
[info@healthwatchkent.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchkent.co.uk)



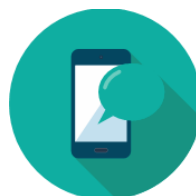
**Online:**  
[www.healthwatchkent.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchkent.co.uk)



**By Post:** Write to us or fill in and send a Your Comments Count form. FREEPOST RTLG-UBZB-JUZA Healthwatch Kent, Seabrooke House, Church Rd, Ashford TN23 1RD



**Face to Face:**  
Call 0808 801 01 02 to arrange a visit



**By Text:** Text us on 07525 861 639.  
By texting 'NEED BSL', Healthwatch's British Sign Language Interpreter will make contact and arrange a time to meet face to face.

---