

Prevention and self-care

How do you look after yourself in South Gloucestershire?

The aim of this project survey, which we ran in partnership with Sirona care & health, was to find out how residents in South Gloucestershire look after themselves.

Prevention and self-care is a local, regional and national priority, and consequently Healthwatch South Gloucestershire's Executive Board set this as one of our work priorities for 2018/19.

As services, such as the NHS, come under increasing pressure, people are being encouraged to take greater responsibility for looking after their own health and wellbeing, in order to reduce the likelihood of them needing to receive treatment and support both now and in the future. With this in mind, the Executive Board was keen to understand:

- What the term 'self-care' meant to people
- How people look after themselves
- Which services and local organisations they use to keep well and get information from to support this
- How services could be improved to better support their needs

We carried out this work using an online survey which we promoted across Twitter, Facebook, the Healthwatch South Gloucestershire website and through The Care Forum's monthly e-bulletin, as well as sending this to contacts directly and providing content to organisations to use in their newsletters and websites. We also carried out face-to-face engagement at ten events across South Gloucestershire. In total we received responses from 206 people during March and February 2019.

To support the survey further and generate quick responses, Healthwatch and Sirona care & health ran five Facebook polls from the end of February to the end of March 2019, asking a different question from the survey each week. The promotional campaign was called **#WellbeingWednesday**. We received 76 responses to the polls.

The findings contained within this report provide a snapshot of how people in South Gloucestershire look after themselves. In order to gain a more in-depth and accurate understanding of this across the region we recommend that further engagement is carried out with a focus on different community groups.

HEADLINES

- There was an overall understanding of what the term 'self-care' meant to people in terms of eating well, exercising and getting rest. Some responses were quite general, simply stating "Looking after myself", whereas others expanded on this and said that 'self-care' was also about having an awareness of their own health and knowing at which point they would need to seek medical intervention - a key differentiation in understanding what 'self-care' means.

Prevention and self-care

- The lack of availability of GP appointments came up consistently throughout the survey as being problematic. When asked which services people had used in the last 12 months, 175 people (89%) said they had been to see their GP and 149 (76%) said they had been to see their pharmacist. This data suggests that most people still use their GP as a first port of call, although some additional commentary we received suggested that people were starting to go to their pharmacist and other services, e.g. the NHS website, first due to the length of time it took to get a GP appointment. It is, however, not clear how many respondents this was the case for, so any conclusions drawn from this analysis must be treated with caution.
- Respondents listed socialising with friends and family, eating healthily and being active as the top three things that help them to keep happy healthy and well. Healthy eating and taking part in physical activity both help with leading a healthier lifestyle and prevention of developing chronic illness. Evidence also suggests that the [5 Ways to Wellbeing](#) - connecting, being active, learning, giving to others and being mindful - are beneficial to people's mental welfare. It was apparent from answers provided by respondents that engaging with their local community, taking part in activities, being sociable and learning new skills all contributed to their sense of wellbeing.

SURVEY FINDINGS

1) What does the term 'self-care' mean to you?

One area that the Executive Board was eager to understand was what people understood by the term 'self-care'. 197 (96%) people responded to this question.

Answers varied with people giving general statements such as "being well", "looking after your wellbeing" and "eating healthily" to others giving more detailed responses as to what they felt this meant:

- *"Changing my harmful habits and practises in relation to my physical, mental and emotional being and adopting better ones for the good of my general well-being."*

- *"To be aware of ways to enhance good health e.g. exercise, diet, friendship networks."*
- *"Confidence to know how to look after my wellbeing while understanding the impact of my lifestyle behaviours and to know where to go for support"*

Some people thought that self-care meant dealing with your own health and wellbeing and not accessing health services at all:

- *"Providing care services personally that were previously provided by others"*
- *"Looking after yourself with no help from anywhere"*

Whilst an element of self-care is about taking steps to adopt a healthy lifestyle through diet and exercise, as well as nurturing inter-personal relationships and taking part in hobbies, it is

Prevention and self-care

also about knowing at which point to access health care. We felt the following comments illustrated this concept this well:

- *“It means looking after yourself by watching your weight, not smoking or drinking too much alcohol. It means engaging with others to promote your wellbeing. It means educating yourself about health and fitness. It means calling on specialist medical help only when it is clear that you do not know what is wrong with you.”*
- *“5 ways of wellbeing. Taking some responsibility for one's health care using pharmacists, and other health care professionals before GP's or A & E.”*
- *“Looking after your own health and wellbeing. Adopting healthy lifestyle habits such as healthy eating, regular exercise and having a varied social life. It also means managing minor illnesses using home remedies and advice from a pharmacist instead of bothering the NHS.”*

One commentator felt this was a way of saving money:

- *“A NHS contrived avoidance to treat people in order to meet financial targets - as opposed to a world class, well-funded NHS focused on patient satisfaction in a wealthy UK”*

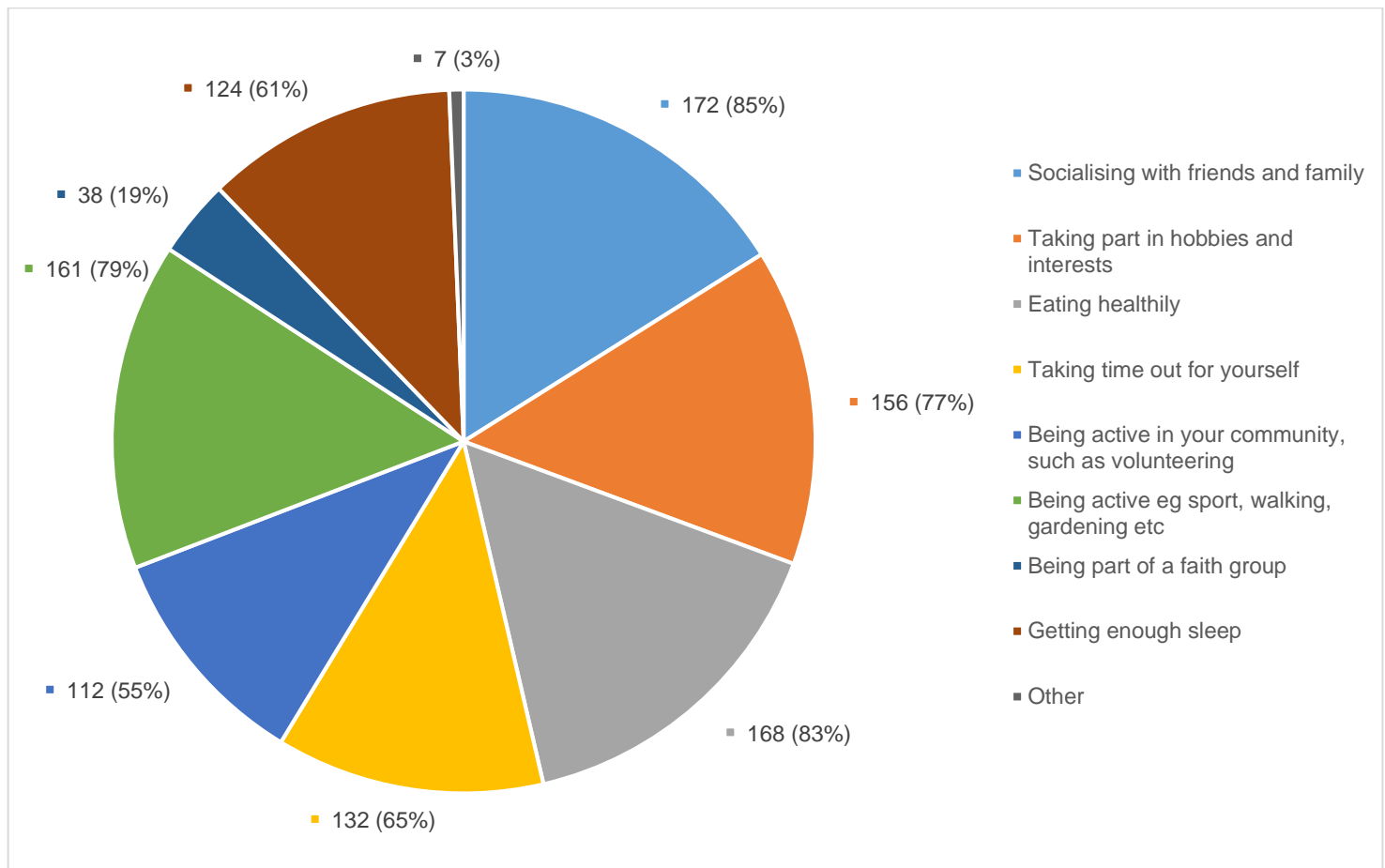
This was the only comment we received of this nature and taken in isolation is not statistically significant. We have, however, heard similar comments made at various engagements and events across South Gloucestershire.

The comments we have received about people's understanding of what 'self-care' is

demonstrates that there is a need to communicate clearly that people can and should still use health services. This needs to be done in conjunction with promoting the multitude of other ways that people can keep well before needing access to a GP.

Prevention and self-care

2) How do you look after yourself and your family/ relatives, in order to try and stay healthy, happy and well?



In total 203 people responded to this question. It should be noted that people were able to pick multiple answers so the total percentage adds up to more than 100.

The top three things that people participated in to keep happy healthy and well were:

- Socialising with friends and family - 172 (85%) responses
- Eating healthily - 168 (83%) responses
- Being active, e.g. sport, walking, gardening etc - 161 (79%) responses

Respondents were able to select more than one of the suggestions and it is noteworthy that the

majority of people - 178 (88%) - selected three or more from those presented.

Walking, gardening and volunteering came up as regular pursuits for a number of respondents, and older people mentioned learning with University of the Third Age (U3A) several times throughout the survey.

Facebook Poll

We used this question in the second of our Facebook polls. 15 people took part in this poll, Nine of whom (60%) said they socialised with friends and six (40%) said they took part in hobbies to help them stay healthy, happy and well.

Prevention and self-care

Being a carer

Of the 206 respondents, 41 - just over 20% - identified as carers. Here are a few of the comments that were made:

- *“Being a black carer I don't have much time.”*
- *“If my gym membership was subsidised as a full time carer then I could go swimming at an affordable time that would be very good.”*
- *“I do not have time to look after myself.”*
- *“I use Patient Access and their advice is pretty good, as well as NHS Choices. When I see the practice nurse she keeps me up to date with dietary changes and recommendations as well as my Personal Trainer does the same. I am a registered Carer for my daughter with Mental Health Issues so attend and receive information from Carers support centre, also received regular updates from the Heart Foundation.”*

For some of the carers time was an issue which they felt compromised their ability to take time out for themselves.

Organisations such as Caring for Carers, Time 4 Carers, Bristol Black Carers and Carers Support Centre were named throughout the survey as sources of support, with one respondent saying:

- *“Meet other carers who understand your life”*

This comment illustrates the benefits of peer support, shared experiences and the ability to access local specialist advice.

According to statistics from 2011 there were 6.5 million carers in the UK and this is set to increase exponentially to 9 million by 2037. Carers provide a huge amount of support to loved ones and save the economy an estimated £132 billion per year (see [Carers UK](#) and [Houses of Parliament Science and Technology report](#)).

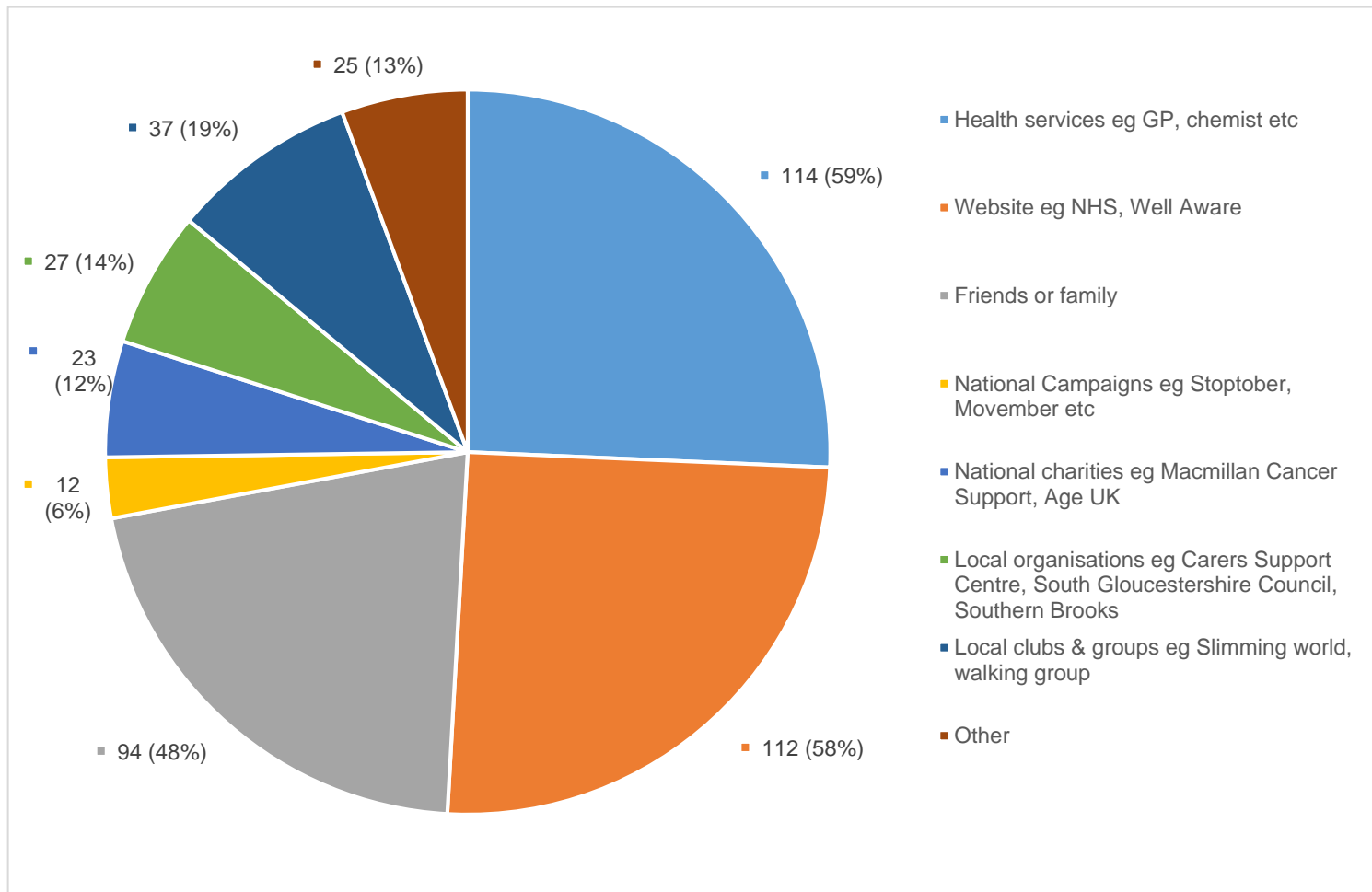
The value of carers to society cannot be overstated. It is vital for them to be able to take care of themselves in order to continue to carry out their caring role. Pressure on services would mount considerably without them and it is in the interests of services and commissioners to ensure adequate support is provided.

Consideration therefore should be given by services about offering different opening times to meet the varying needs of carers.



Prevention and self-care

3) Where do people go or who do they speak to when they want to know how to keep healthy and well?



194 people responded to this question. It should be noted that people were able to pick multiple answers so the total adds up to more than 100.

There was an almost even split between seeking advice from health services, such as GPs or chemists, and looking for information online, closely followed by speaking to friends or family. This then reduced significantly for the other services or campaigns. People had the

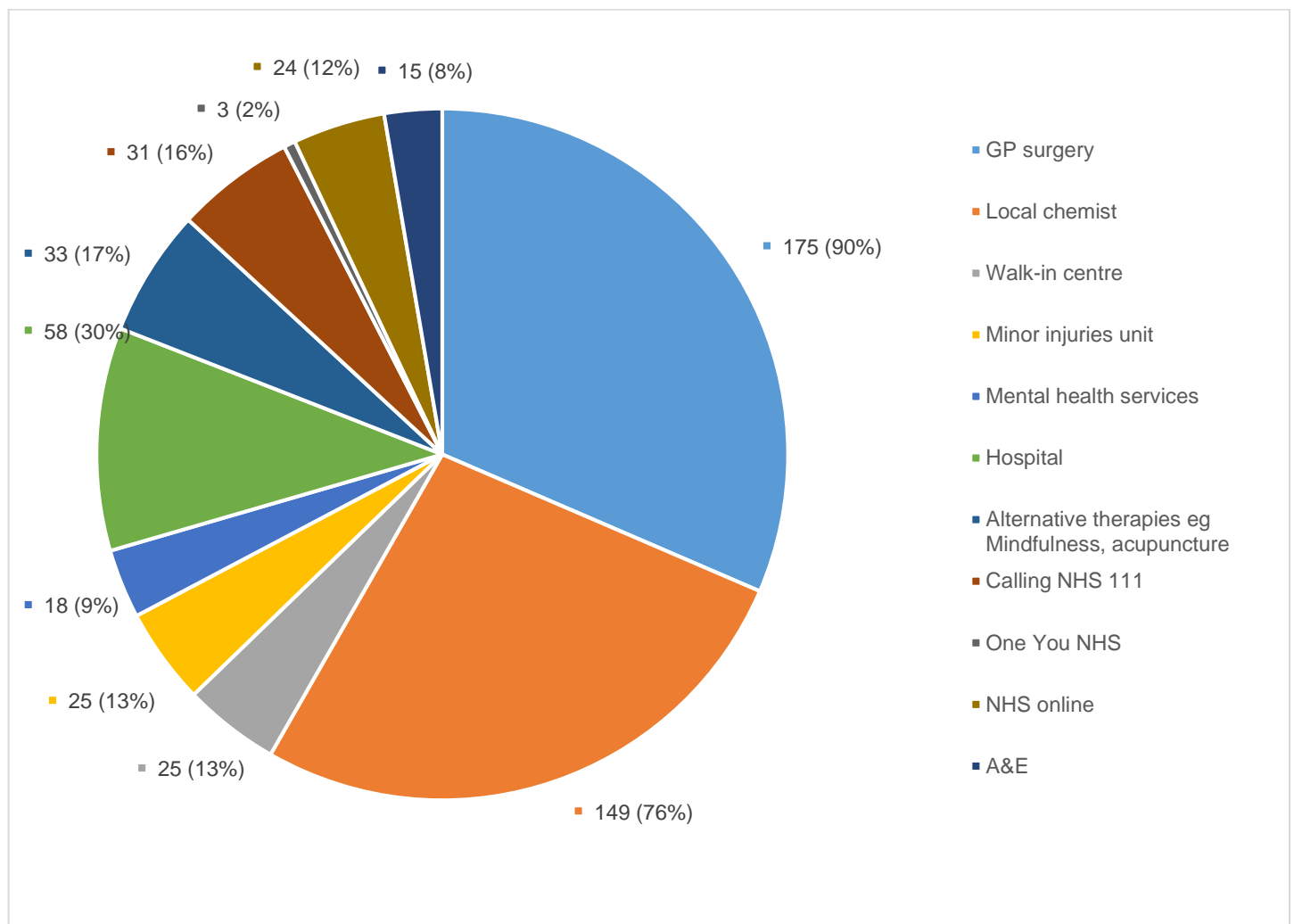
option of selecting more than one of the choices listed.

Facebook Poll

Nine people took part in the fourth of our five polls. Six respondents (67%) said they used online services such as NHS 111 and three (33%) said they contacted a health service, such as their GP, to get information on how to keep healthy and well.

Prevention and self-care

4) Which services have people used in the last 12 months?



Perhaps unsurprisingly 175 (90%) respondents had been to see their GP in the past 12 months, and 149 (76%) had been to see their pharmacist. With 60 out of 195 respondents (31%) seeking advice about health and wellbeing online it is indicative that people favour face-to-face engagement with a health service provider.

We analysed the responses to this question to ascertain whether or not there were any significant differences between the age ranges and the services they use.

It was difficult to draw significant conclusions as there was a large variation in the number of

respondents who were 65+ (82, 42%), for example, versus those who were 18 - 24 (2, 1%) as illustrated by the table below:

Under 18	0%	0
18-24	1%	2
25-34	6%	11
35-44	11%	22
45-54	16%	32
55-64	23%	46
65+	42%	82
Prefer not to say	1%	2
	(Skipped	9)

Prevention and self-care

If we look at the figures proportionally, however, the majority - over 80% - amongst all age ranges have been to see their GP in the last 12 months, followed by going to their local chemist. Figures for the latter ranged between 47% - 80%.

Only 27 people (14%) sought information online - 24 (12%) did this via NHS online and three (2%) did this via One You. When looking at the different ages this was proportionally higher for 35 - 44 year olds with six out of the 22 respondents (27%) within this category stating they had done this. The figure was 16% or lower amongst all the other ages. Due to the low number of responses the statistical significance of these results should be treated with caution.

Of the 206 respondents, 25 (13%) had used a Walk-in Centre and 25 (13%) had used a Minor Injuries Unit. Based on the responses given it would appear that there is still a lack of awareness of the other community health services available to treat minor injuries or ailments.

From October 2016 - February 2017 Healthwatch South Gloucestershire spoke to members of the public about 'Right Care, First Time' using a survey to find out which services people use and why. The aim of this piece of work was to raise awareness of other community health services, to ease pressure on GPs and A&E, and continues to be part of a nationwide initiative. The report can be read [here](#). Our findings at the time showed that giving people information about these other services had a direct and positive influence on people's knowledge and use of them.

Further information is available on the [Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group website](#) but we

would recommend that further promotion is done in South Gloucestershire.

When asked what people found good or what could be improved upon by these services, the following responses were given:

What did people find good about these services?

Staff attitude	66%	116
Treatment explanation	58%	101
Appointment booking	52%	91
Quality of care	51%	90
Communication	37%	65
Administration	19%	33
Other	6%	11

What did people think could be improved?

Appointment booking	60%	80
Communication	30%	40
Administration	22%	29
Staff attitude	20%	26
Treatment explanation	17%	23
Quality of care	17%	23
Other	15%	20



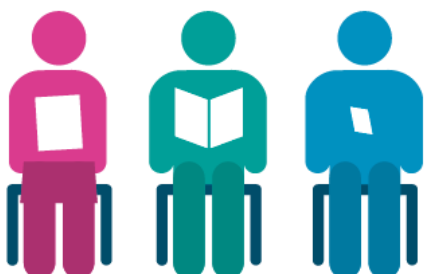
Prevention and self-care

It is apparent from respondents that appointment booking is a big issue. The lack of available appointments came through consistently throughout the survey, indicating that visiting a GP is what people choose to do first and foremost to look after their health and wellbeing.

People were able to add more commentary about this in the free text box. We received 63 comments in total and 32 (50%) of which focused on issues around getting appointments:

- *“It takes a full calendar month to get an appointment at the general practitioner surgery even if it’s an emergency”*
- *“Difficult to book an appointment to see a doctor or nurse about a non-urgent condition. I have always been able to get an emergency appointment, if required, by phoning the surgery but sometimes the first available appointment on the website for a blood test or consultation can be two or three weeks away.”*

RECEPTION



In 2017/18 Healthwatch South Gloucestershire carried out a GP survey - receiving over 200 responses - and people’s experiences of booking appointments with their GP has not changed since then. The report can be read [here](#).

The following comments suggest that people are starting to consider options such as their local chemist before seeing their GP:

- *“Chemist great advice. Doctors very hard to get an appointment”*
- *“The fact appointments take so long to get makes me use my pharmacy mostly these days”*

This feedback suggests that these individuals were able to get the help they needed from this service without having to make an appointment at their GP.

One respondent provided the following commentary which is a good example of a GP referring their patient on to another service, and which proved to be beneficial to them and their ability to manage a long-term condition:

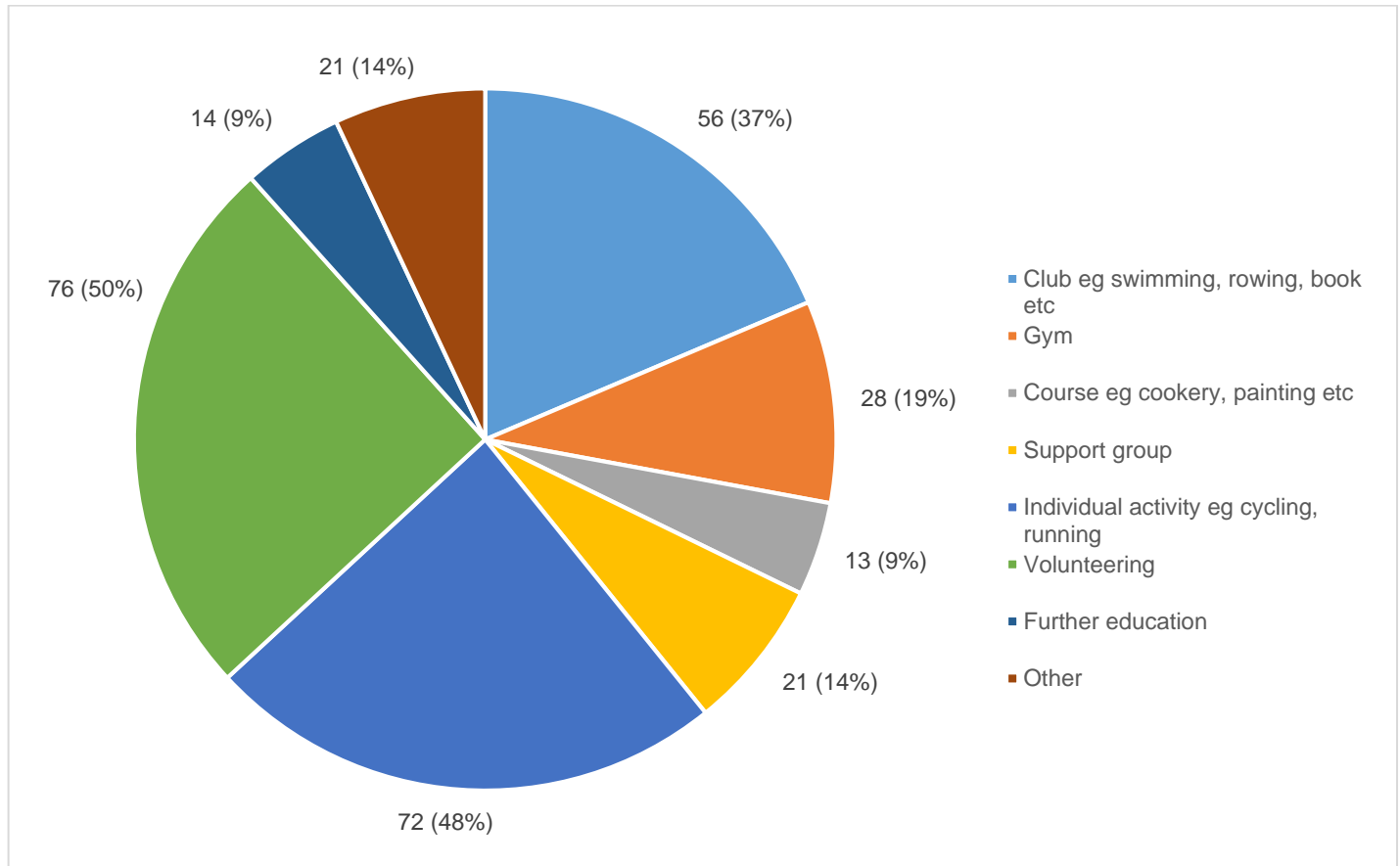
“I visit the GP as little as possible and do seek out other practitioners (am at present working with two women who treat/advise with nutrition).

“Through my GP I am attending a pre-diabetic group for the next year. Because of the above I consulted Nutrition Detectives and am following their instructions.

In the first group I have learnt some things i.e. the difference between types 1 & 2 Diabetes, and meeting in a group gives support. Under the title Living Well Taking Control. In the second I have learnt more about myself and how to treat myself through my daily diet.”

Prevention and self-care

5) Naming local organisations, groups joined or activities taken part in over the last 12 months



154 people responded to this question. Volunteering came out on top with 76 (50%) respondents choosing this, closely followed by individual activities, such as cycling and running, and then joining a club.

A small number of respondents - six in total - specifically named Bristol and Avon Chinese Women’s Group and South Glos Chinese Association. We recognise that this number is not statistically significant but we know from feedback we have received during other engagement work that local community groups provide invaluable support to people and keep them connected to their local community.

We feel that this highlights the importance of these smaller community groups and that their value should not be overlooked by

commissioners. These findings are supported by our recent work on frailty and can be found in our [Ageing Better in South Gloucestershire report](#), where the point was raised about future funding and the long-term sustainability of volunteer-led groups being under threat.

Results from this question, coupled with those from question four, emphasises the fact that face-to-face engagement is still the most important and effective way of raising awareness of and promoting local services.

An over-reliance on digital promotion would exclude certain groups of people and we would advise that alternative methods of promotion are used, in addition to what is being done online to ensure everybody’s needs are being met.

Prevention and self-care

One You NHS website

When asked if they had heard about the One You NHS website, which aims to help people make healthier choices, with free tips, tools and support, 161 people (81%) responded “no” to this question and 38 people (19%) said “yes”.

We were told:

- *“Have recommended it to others”*
- *“I actually totally disagree with most of the advice on it, but it is a nice idea”*
- *“Just made me think about my health”*
- *“Have used to check BMI, especially when I got diagnosed with high blood pressure and high cholesterol”*

Facebook poll

We asked members of the public about the One You NHS website in our very first poll, and very much in keeping with the findings above, 13 (76%) said they had not heard of it and four (24%) said they had.

Change4Life

When asked if people had heard of the Change4Life website, 95 respondents (48%) said “yes” and 103 (52%) said “no”.

People told us the following about how it had helped them:

- *“Food swap suggestions especially for my grandson.”*
- *“My daughter had a leaflet given to her from Stoke Lodge Primary school”*

- *“It hasn’t - I think the leaflets are a waste of money”*
- *“Choosing healthy alternatives when shopping”*

When comparing people’s responses to being asked if they had heard about the One You NHS website and the Change4Life website there is a notable difference in people’s awareness of each - 19% of people said they had heard about One You versus 78% who said they had heard of Change4Life.

The Change4Life website was launched 10 years ago with substantial investment and a lot of public engagement carried out, including TV advertisements. By contrast One You was launched in 2016. Both serve to illustrate that a clear and consistent message is vital in order to get information out to people and for them to make lifestyle changes.

Well Aware

We asked respondents to let us know whether or not they had heard of Well Aware. 198 people answered this question, with 83 people (42%) saying “yes” to this and 115 people (58%) saying “no”.

Well Aware was established in 2013. With limited resources available it is positive that 42% of respondents said that they had heard of it, however we feel that more promotion is required. Looking at the impact that all three online tools have had, it is evident that it takes years with ongoing promotion for members of the public to become aware that these information and signposting tools are available.

Prevention and self-care

We were told:

- “I can go to the website and other Chinese people can too as there is Chinese language version in their website.”
- “Internet based ideas which demonstrate how NHS finance gurus think care should be delivered - as opposed to continuity of care on a personal basis by adequate numbers of GPs”
- “It hasn't - they do not offer any activities that interest me such as science based

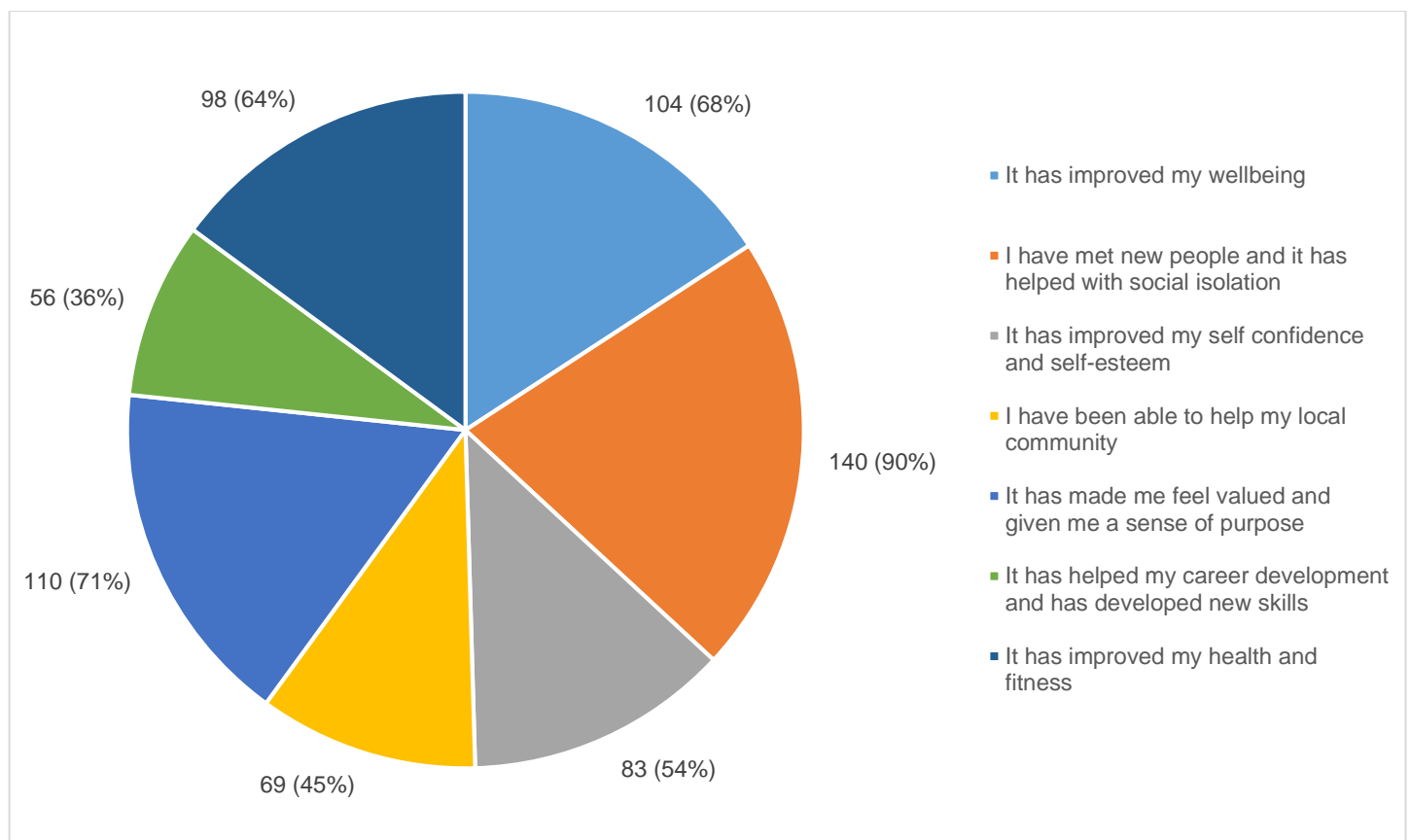
activities, metal work or higher education. Cheap generic. Hardly anything in Yate and I don't drive and lack the confidence to travel on public transport.”

- “I'm able to find local information a round health and activities really quickly and easily.”

Facebook poll

Our final poll asked people about Well Aware and 35% said “yes” they had heard of it and 65% said “no” they had not heard of it.

6) How have the organisations, groups and activities people have joined or taken part in helped?



154 people responded to this question. It should be noted that people were able to pick multiple answers so the total adds up to more than 100

Healthwatch felt this was an important question to ask in order to gauge the advantages of people taking part in new activities or adopting new and healthy lifestyle habits.

Prevention and self-care

The top three benefits were meeting new people with 140 people (90%) selecting this, 110 people (71%) saying that they had been given a sense of purpose and felt valued and 104 (68%) stating they had seen an improvement in their wellbeing.

It is interesting to note that wellbeing is more than just physical health. Whilst this is a vital element of 'self-care' the benefits to an individual of being engaged in their community, meeting new people or taking part in activities cannot be overstated.

Healthwatch South Gloucestershire Recommendations

- It is evident from the additional commentary provided by respondents that the majority already participate in an array of activities and adopt aspects of the '5 Ways to Wellbeing'. From the feedback received, social connectivity is consistently named as one of the main things to keep them happy, healthy and well. Whilst this is encouraging, it can by no means be seen as a benchmark of what everybody does and we recognise the statistical limitations of the responses received to the survey. Healthwatch would recommend for further targeted engagement to be carried out across South Gloucestershire. We would also recommend looking at ways in which to share clear messages to help promote 'self-care'. We know from the Change4Life website that resources and consistent messaging are needed in order for the public to take notice and make lifestyle changes.
- More support and promotion of smaller community groups should be looked at by commissioners. Organisations and groups geared towards different cultures, carers, or those with specific health conditions provide invaluable additional support to primary care services. These organisations often rely on volunteers and charitable donations to deliver vital services and support to the local community. With limited resources and funding the long-term sustainability is precarious for these groups but the role they play more widely needs to be factored in to commissioning strategies.
- More promotion is required to make the public aware of what other community health services are available, including walk-in centres and Minor Injuries Units to tie in with 'Right Care, First Time'. This would free up appointments at GP surgeries for those most in need of them. Commissioners therefore need to consider how best to promote these other services across South Gloucestershire.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Healthwatch would like to thank everyone who took part in the survey to share their views, as well as Sirona care & health for supporting this project.