

# How has Coronavirus affected you?

A report by Healthwatch Hounslow



August 2020

“It has made me scared and I feel I’m deteriorating mentally and physically.

I’m struggling to cope.”

Local resident

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## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, Healthwatch Hounslow would like to thank the 3310 residents who were kind enough to take the time to complete our survey.

We would like to thank the Healthwatch Volunteers and our intern Karyna Panda for their hard work. Our thanks also go to Ranjana Selvaraj, Stuart McMichael, Fatima Abdi, Lisa Nugent, Marzena Zoladz, Darren Morgan and Mystica Burridge.

We would like to thank our partners - Hounslow Clinical Commissioning Group, Hounslow Local Authority, Voluntary sector, and many others for their continued support.

## 1. Introduction

Healthwatch Hounslow is an independent organisation that gives people a voice to improve and shape services and help them get the best out of health and social care services.

Especially during these difficult times, we wanted to hear about local people's views about the coronavirus pandemic. We quickly created a survey in response to the pandemic, with the aim of finding out how the people of Hounslow were coping during this difficult time.

The survey was developed with our colleagues from the Hounslow Clinical Commissioning Group. To ensure that the survey was produced with all in mind we engaged with various partners - CCG Primary Care Team, Hounslow Local Authority, Patient Representatives, Voluntary sector Partners etc.

The survey was launched on Survey Monkey on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2020 and ran until 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020. People were also given the opportunity to speak to us over the phone to complete the survey.

The information presented within this report reflects the individual experience of those who completed the survey and those we spoke to over the phone. Healthwatch Hounslow presents this as information to be considered and utilised to improve service provision and highlight areas of good practice.

## 2. Background

This research project took place as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) and the subsequent lockdown that took effect in England in March 2020.

As a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, Public Health England have identified the negative impact of the pandemic on BAME communities.

A separate report will be produced looking at the BAME data.

## 3. Methodology

The online survey was open to all residents who lived in the London Borough of Hounslow and also those who were registered with GP Practices in the borough.

A link to the survey was shared via our Healthwatch website, through social media and word of mouth and via a network of local contacts. People were given the opportunity to call us so we could complete the survey on their behalf.

No personal data was collected, although respondents were given the option to leave to call us if they wanted us to contact them about a certain issue.

## 4. Limitations

There were a number of individuals who we spoke with, but were unable to carry out telephone interviews with. This was down to a number of factors including where people were hard of hearing and or where there was a language barrier.

In analysing the responses and comments people made it apparent that there were errors within the survey. Some of the errors were within the questions. We have taken this feedback onboard and will in future make sure these errors are not repeated.

## 5. Executive Summary

This report is based on the feedback of 3,310 people, who completed the survey during May, June and July 2020.

This is a summary of key themes and issues (see sections 6 - 12 for findings in full).

### Key Findings: Themes

#### Infection Risk and Shielding

- A third of respondents (33%) consider themselves to be at high risk.
- Just a quarter (25%) are 'not worried' about spreading the virus to others.
- Concerns about social distancing and a 'second wave' are widespread.
- The shielding system has caused much confusion - for patients and services.

#### Health and Care Services

- Large numbers of people have avoided services, for various reasons.
- Those with cancelled appointments have received minimal or no information.
- We hear mixed views on levels of support from GPs and other services.
- People were under the impression that restriction of consultations (to telephone-only) placed some patients at risk.
- On visiting services, patients report good levels of infection control.
- We hear widespread criticism of midwifery and health visiting services.
- Delivery of medication is a known issue.
- A sizeable minority (10%) say information is not accessible to them.

#### Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Many people experience a better work-life balance, thanks to home working.
- Those with activities and routines are more resilient than those without.
- Household relationships are more likely to become strained.
- Parents and carers are finding the additional responsibilities to be difficult.
- People with existing mental health conditions are more likely to be impacted.

#### Wider Determinants (Community, Housing, Environment, Finances)

- Social isolation is on an unprecedented scale, with many completely alone.
- While the food box scheme is appreciated, it is not always effective.
- Many enjoy the reduced pollution and noise, and greater bio-diversity.
- Those with gardens are much more able to cope, than those without.
- Many have lost jobs, with the self-employed particularly impacted.

## Equality Check

When compared with White/White British respondents, we find that those from BAME backgrounds are more likely to:

- Be considered at high risk.
- Have received a shielding letter.
- Care for someone at high risk.
- Be worried about passing the virus on to others.
- Be worried about their own health, and the health of family and friends.
- Have a stated long-term health condition.
- Experience 'tense' household relationships.
- Be worried about jobs or financial security.
- Be worried about missing school or college.

And less likely to:

- Find it 'easy' to know what to do, to stay safe.
- Keep track of changing information and guidelines.
- Find information in formats accessible to them.
- Have a stated mental health condition.
- Access mental health support and resources.
- Miss seeing family and friends.
- Miss access to leisure facilities or holidays.

## Analysis of Feedback

This report is based on the feedback of 3,310 people, who completed the survey during May, June and July 2020.

Our analysis (sections 6 - 12) presents findings around physical health and access to services; mental health and wellbeing; personal and family relationships; environment and finances; communication and digital technology.

We analyse feedback as a whole, and also look closely at age, gender, ethnic background and existing conditions, to establish any findings that may be especially relevant to certain groups.

## 6. Physical Health and Service Access

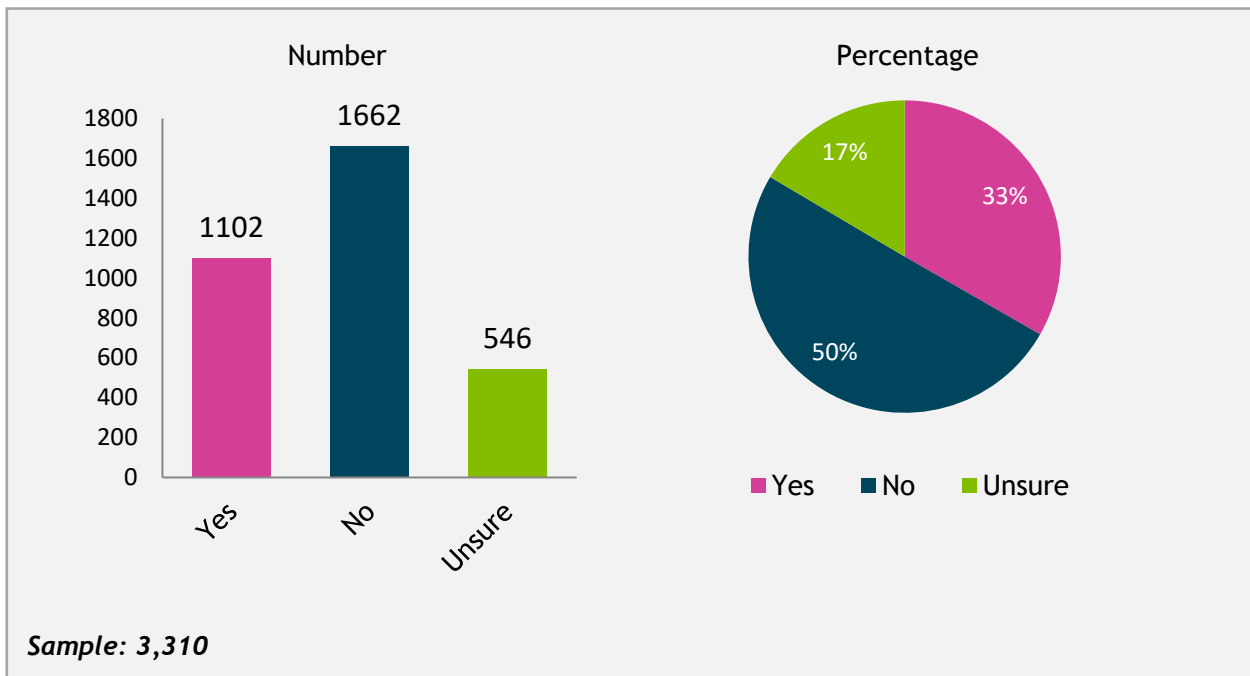
In this section, we identify those who consider themselves to be at high risk from Covid-19, explore infection concerns and shielding needs, and analyse feedback on service experiences and preferences.



## 6.1 Who is at 'High Risk'?

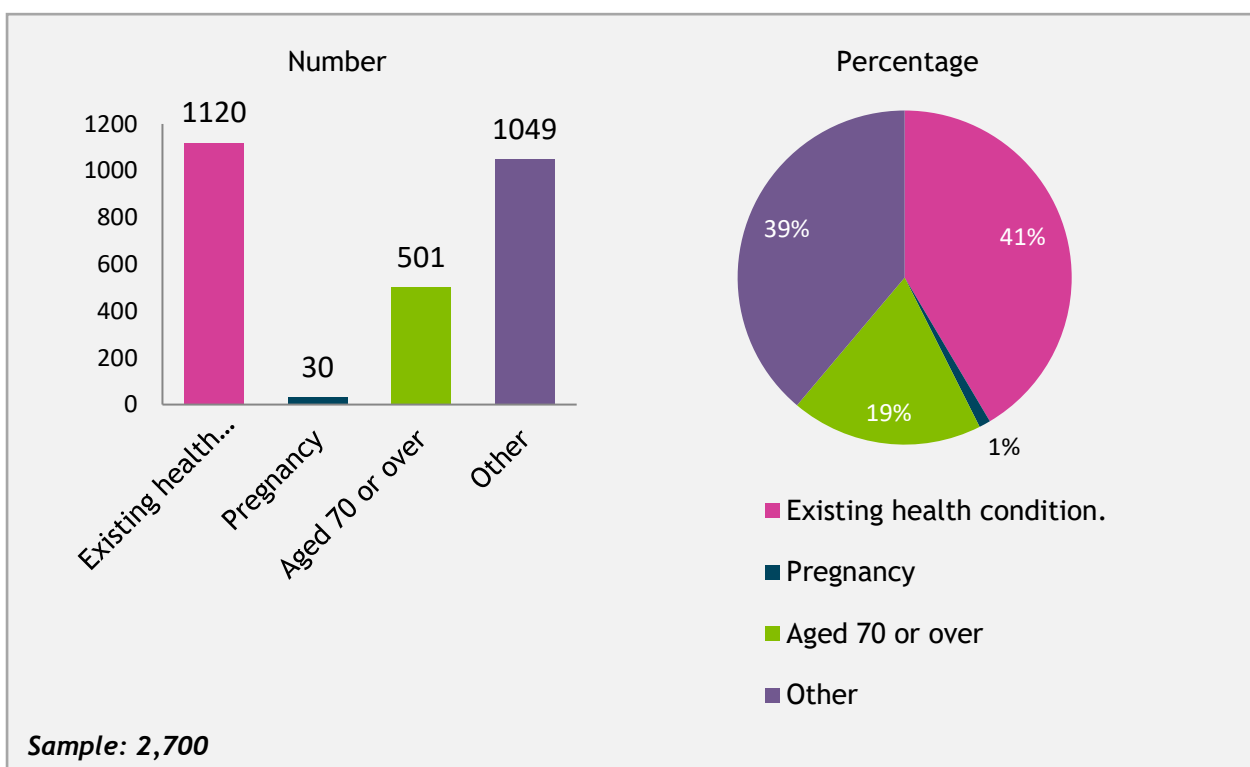
We began the survey by asking people whether they considered themselves to be at 'high risk'.

### 6.1.1 Do you consider yourself to be at high risk from Covid-19/Coronavirus?



A third of respondents (33%) consider themselves to be at high risk, while almost a fifth (17%) are unsure. Half (50%) do not consider themselves to be at high risk.

### 6.1.2 Please tell us why you consider yourself to be at high risk?



Of those identifying as high risk, 41% state an existing health condition, with common examples including Asthma, Diabetes, Cancer and Cardiovascular conditions. Age is also a consideration, with around a fifth of respondents (19%) indicating that being aged 70 or over is a high-risk factor.

39% of respondents give ‘other’ reasons:

Some cite poor physical conditions, such as obesity, high blood pressure and weakened immunity (often as a result of surgery).

Others are concerned that their working, caring or shopping commitments may place them in a position of risk. Just over a quarter of respondents (26%) say that they care for, or support people at high risk, with many fearing they may pass on the infection to their cared-for.

Frontline public sector staff, such as those working in schools or hospitals feel particularly vulnerable - as do people reliant on public transport. A number also say their ethnic background is a high-risk factor.

It is common for people to identify with more than one risk factor - with in some cases, several cited.

### 6.1.3 Impact Scale

When looking closer at specific groups, we find that several exceed the baseline of 33%.

Those with stated disabilities, are by far the most at risk, with over three quarters (76%) in the high-risk category.

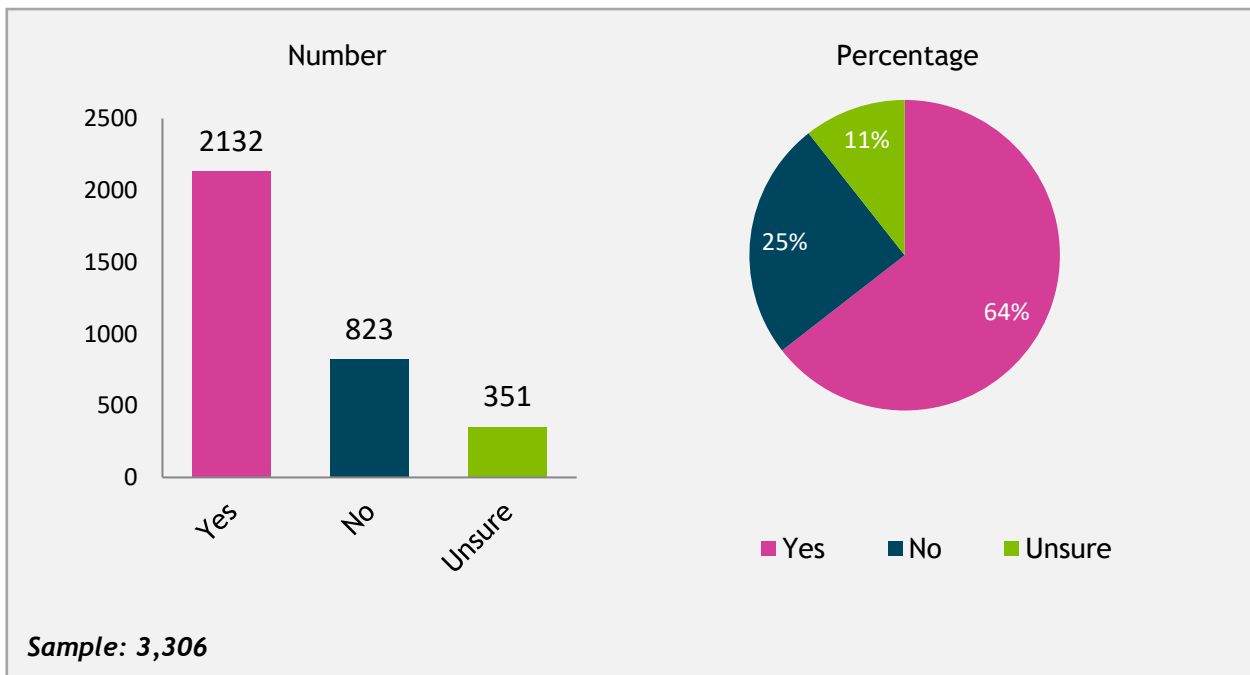
#### At ‘high risk’ from Covid-19/Coronavirus:

All respondents (baseline)	33%
BAME respondents	37%
Men	39%
Carers of people at high risk	39%
Mental health conditions	40%
Aged 65+	50%
Long-term conditions	64%
Disabilities	76%

### 6.2 Infection Spread - Concerns

It is notable that just a quarter of people (25%) are ‘not worried’ about spreading the virus to other people.

## 6.2.1 Are you worried about unknowingly spreading the Coronavirus to other people?



A significant number of people express anxiety about contracting the virus - with some 'fearful' and taking extra precautions. For households with members in high risk groups, the stress can be particularly acute - with some citing a lack of clear guidance.

Many are mindful not to make unnecessary trips outside the house, not least as there is no way of identifying who may be infected - the 'silent spreaders'.

### Selected Comments: Infection Spread

*"I have experienced periods of total fear and terror regarding catching the virus. Not knowing how my family would cope, how I would cope. How I would look after my elderly parents. Cleaning my house endlessly and washing my hands repeatedly even when not leaving my house. Feeling self-conscious about wearing a mask outdoors when others don't bother."*

*"I am a transplant patient, so it caused a lot of stress for those living with me."*

*"A guide should be issued to know what is expected of living with someone that has been advised he is high risk."*

*"I'm worried about going outside and catching it."*

*"Always thinking of not going out unnecessarily. What worries me most is I don't get or transmit it to others."*

*"I need to know more about silent spreaders."*

## 6.2.2 Social Distancing

Many people commented that while some observe good social distancing, the majority of people do not - with accounts of guidance not being followed, distances decreasing, and with the easing of lockdown, a perception that observing the rules is now 'voluntary'.

Busier streets, shops and transport are a concern, and fears of a second wave are widespread.

### Selected Comments: Social Distancing

*"Found myself angry seeing and hearing of other people who ignored social distancing and meet with friends and family outside and in their homes."*

*"There is now a widespread perception that isolation and social distancing are voluntary."*

*"I fear a second wave of the virus now the lockdown is being eased and social distancing is being reduced, due to the irresponsible behaviour of sections of the public."*

*"I'm worried that opening up retail shops, pubs and restaurants, most importantly schools will lead to a second wave. Cutting down social distances is another factor. I really don't want that to happen. I'm scared."*

## 6.3 Shielding

We hear accounts of basic information and communication lacking, causing uncertainty on what to expect, or do - for both service users and in some cases professionals (such as GPs and consultants).

In many cases, people expecting to receive a shielding letter did not, while in others, letters were sent to patients not at risk, adding to anxiety.

When information is received, people say it should be 'clear and to the point'. Some, seeking clarification have not found services to be helpful - with one person advised to refer to the internet.

### Selected Comments: Shielding

*"I want to know why I never received a letter to shield, despite my current Asthma medication and the GP saying that it was advisable."*

*"There seemed to be a complete lack of co-ordination put in place by the government on shielding. Information supplied said to contact the GP or consultant to get confirmation to go on the list. Neither were aware and the surgery did not even have a copy of the letter sent out. Seemed very poorly organised and I only got on the list by luck I think!"*

*"It would help if the information provided for the extremely vulnerable group (shielding) is very clear and straight to the point."*

*"I would like to know whether I should be shielding or not. Information given on shielding was very misleading as at one point the advice was contact your GP to find out if you should be shielded. They were unhelpful and referred me to the internet."*

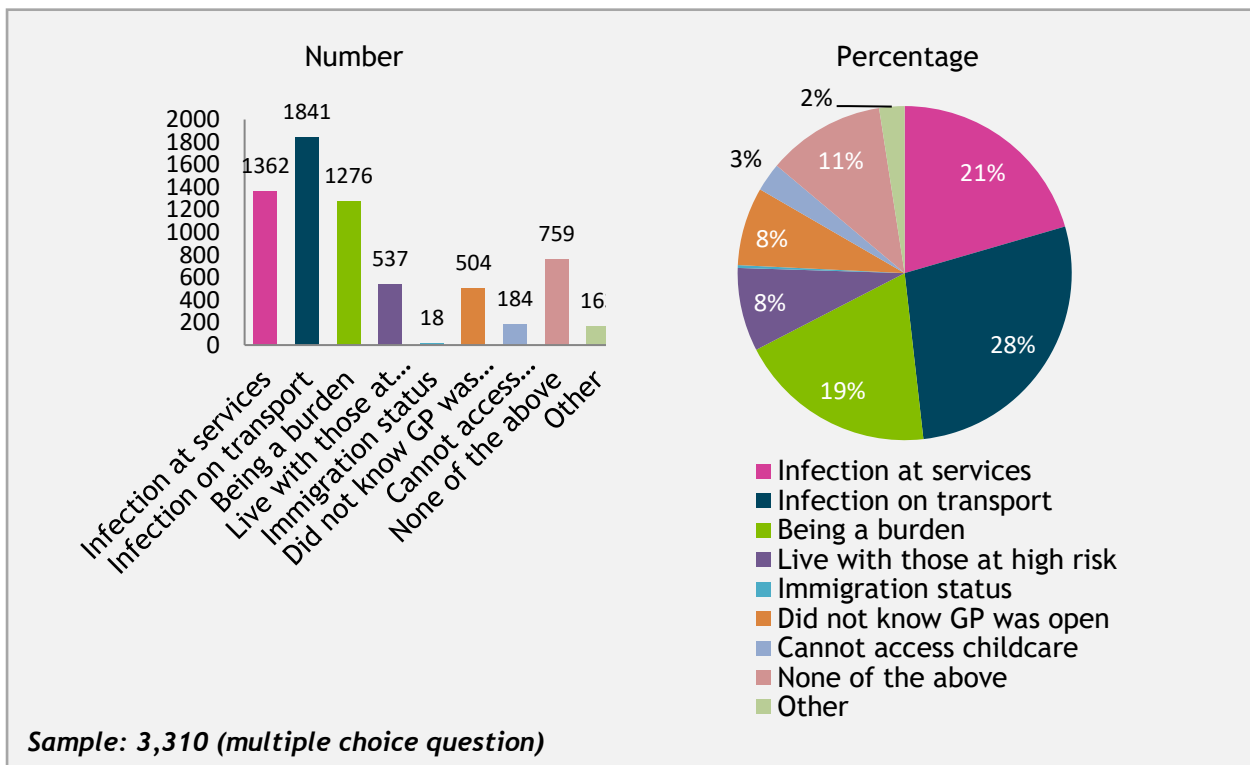
*"I would have liked to be contacted to let me know what is the next step for the shielded. I have had no contact from the Government apart from at the beginning."*

*"Very lonely and stressed until it was confirmed that I need not have shielded (out-of-date GP practice records)."*

## 6.4 Risks Associated with Health Services

It is a known fact that people, for a range of reasons, have avoided accessing health services during the pandemic. In one survey question, we posed a series of statements, based on well-known scenarios, and report on those scoring the most.

### 6.4.1 Do any of the following statement(s) affect the way you seek health care during the Coronavirus outbreak?



With 28% of selections, using public transport is considered the greatest risk, followed by fears of contracting the virus at the GP or hospital (21%).

People are also notably fearful of 'being a burden' on the NHS (19%).

## Selected Comments

*"I have had problems with my health, but I didn't like to contact the NHS, because I was afraid to catch Covid-19."*

*"I'll wait until health care workers have proper PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and testing."*

*"I would want health practitioners to visit me in my home. Reduces risks."*

## 6.5 Experience of Services

We look at experiences of services during the pandemic, such as GPs, hospitals (including outpatients and elective surgery), maternity and parenting, pharmacies, social care and multi-agency services.

In each case we highlight what has worked well, and what could have worked better.

### 6.5.1 GPs

In some experiences, GPs have been supportive, reassuring and quick to respond to needs and concerns.

For patients whose surgeries have closed, we hear about minimal levels of support, with some simply 'turned away' without adequate information or reassurance. In more than one experience, patients including parents have been told to call again in June.

One patient fears they will not be attended to, even if unwell, and this illustrates a wider perception.

## Selected Comments: GPs (Support)

### Positives

*"I called my GP last week as I have a medical issue. I was called back incredibly quickly by a doctor and she was reassuring and helpful. I am worried that I may need to go into the surgery for an investigation, but I feel relatively confident that all measures will be taken to keep me safe from contracting Covid."*

*"I think my Hounslow GP and my local pharmacy have been brilliant supporting my family. Always willing to listen and help."*

*"My GP and the surgery have been amazing and incredibly supportive and reassuring."*

*"I know that if I am worried about anything, I can telephone my GP."*

## Negatives

*“We attended for an appointment at the GP practice and were told to ‘go away we’re closed’.”*

*“My GP practice was closed and only accepting telephone advice but really saying ‘don’t come here, don’t bother us unless it’s urgent’.”*

*“The doctors are not accepting any patients, even with pre-existing health conditions. The receptionists from my GP practice are hostile.”*

*“When I rang my GP Surgery, all I could get was a recorded message saying they are closed due the virus - phone 111. That made me feel very insecure and anxious.”*

*“I phoned my GP in March to make an appointment for my daughter and they said that to call again in June.”*

*“I do not think the GP surgery is going to see me even if I am unwell.”*

Accessing GPs services can be difficult - some patients report that online booking systems have been disabled, resulting in congested telephone lines, while others, including deaf patients and those less articulate complain that telephone-only consultations are not practical for them.

In other examples, patients have found use of phone and email beneficial, preventing trips to the practice.

While some would like their cancelled tests, health checks and appointments reinstated, others have cancelled their own tests and treatment.

## Selected Comments: GPs (Appointment Accessibility)

### Positives

*“The surgery has been very efficient during lockdown - and engaged via phone/email very quickly - this is better than having to attend surgery for minor things and repeat prescriptions etc.”*

*“Found GP so helpful & easily accessible when I needed to consult. Reception very open and kind.”*

### Negatives

*“Getting through to my GP via phone is very difficult. I normally use online appointment booking but this has been turned off.”*

*“I would have preferred a face-to-face with my GP but cannot do it due to my health condition. It would have put my mind at rest. I am not happy with phone call appointments.”*

*“I feel people like me who are so insecure especially about their health should be able to see their GP face to face as this is different from a phone consultation and gives you confidence. I need to be referred for further treatment and this also has been halted due to the virus and is making my condition worse and as a result I am really suffering especially as I am in a lot of pain. I think it’s time patients like me should be given access to treatment face to face before it gets much more worse and difficult for us.”*

*“I am deaf and cannot use the phone.”*

*“I want to have my routine blood test.”*

*“I have put off arranging non-emergency appointments with my GP (smear test, breast screening and minor feet conditions) during this time.”*

While some patients comment on good levels of information and advice, such as text messaging, others do not. Those whose referrals and appointments have been cancelled report on little, or no contact.

#### Selected Comments: GPs (Communication)

##### Positives

*“It has been helpful to receive information via our GP by text to alert to services that are available.”*

##### Negatives

*“Would like more information on what I can still access at my GP surgery in person or online.”*

*“Not much contact from our GP about cancelled services or referrals for health care.”*

### 6.5.2 Hospital Services

Those with cancelled appointments, referrals and tests report on minimal contact from services - this can be especially worrying for patients with conditions such as Cancer. When seeking information, some have found services to be unresponsive. Patients attending hospitals comment on good levels of infection control and hygiene.

#### Selected Comments: Hospital Services

##### Positives

*“I have accessed Charing X hospital during the period for breast pain problems. I received quick, excellent care at all times and the environment felt safe (visible cleaning, wearing of masks etc).”*



## Negatives

*"I slightly worry that a 5-year colonoscopy appt due now will be postponed for a long time. My mum had cancer young."*

*"My hip replacement has been postponed and I have zero feedback from any source."*

*"I'm worried about my appointment at the hospital and they haven't got back to me. I tried to follow up, but I didn't get a response from the admin staff."*

### 6.5.3 Maternity and New Parents

Expectant and new mums are particularly critical of services, including the GP, midwife and hospital. Little (or no) positive feedback is received.

We hear that midwifery and health visiting services have been delayed or reduced, in one case 'non-existent'. With mums self-isolating and not as able to call on the support of family and friends, the sudden lack of support can lead to isolation, anxiety and mental health problems.

In other experiences, one new mum says that prescription of antibiotics 'without diagnostics' is concerning, while an expectant mum regrets that the partner cannot be present at birth.

## Selected Comments: (Maternity and New Parents)

### Negatives

*"Very disappointed in antenatal care during pregnancy. My only midwife appointment was in February and we are now in June, and so was my glucose blood test cancelled. My midwife nor anybody else called me to check if my health is ok being pregnant and shielding at home on my own since March. Unacceptable."*

*"I think that new expectant mums should be offered more support as a lot of mum's to be feel anxious about having their first baby and now they have to contend with keeping safe, staying at home which affects their mental health, not being able to have the support of friends or other mums who may be in the same situation. And a lot of hospitals are not allowing their partners to be at their birth. It's a lot to deal with for new mums. I think they at least should be having a regular call from the midwives offering their support between appointments. We are living in very difficult times."*

*"More contact from health visitors would have been useful - even just a text to find out if I was ok or if baby was ok would have been reassuring."*

*"My maternity care has been virtually non-existent."*

*"I am still concerned about not being able to see the doctor when my baby gets sick. We were prescribed antibiotics over the phone at one point and I would like to limit being prescribed medication unnecessarily when there have been no diagnostics performed."*

#### 6.5.4 Pharmacies

Experiences suggest good levels of support from pharmacies, however delivery of medicines is cited as an issue.

##### Selected Comments: (Pharmacies)

###### Positives

*“Ram Dispensing Chemist on Whitton Road has been excellent in dispensing my prescriptions.”*

###### Negatives

*“I am worried about running out of medicine for my husband’s lung condition and glaucoma. It is also difficult to get prescriptions delivered - the pharmacist himself delivered the last one but it would be easier just to get them by post.”*

*“Pharmacy won’t deliver medication even though I am shielding.”*

#### 6.5.5 Social Care

We hear that social services have offered support and a listening ear to some residents. Care home visiting restrictions are a cause of anxiety for many. On home care, those who have cancelled due to infection fears, may be encouraged to reinstate their care - if reassured about PPE and infection control.

##### Selected Comments: (Social Care)

###### Positives

*“Social Services have been particularly helpful by calling regularly to see that myself and my son are coping health wise and financially.”*

###### Negatives

*“Cannot visit elderly parents in care home.”*

*“If my carer had proper PPE I might consider her attending me occasionally.”*

#### 6.5.6 Multi-Agency

One person with multiple needs comments that health, social services and the police ‘find it difficult to talk to each other’.

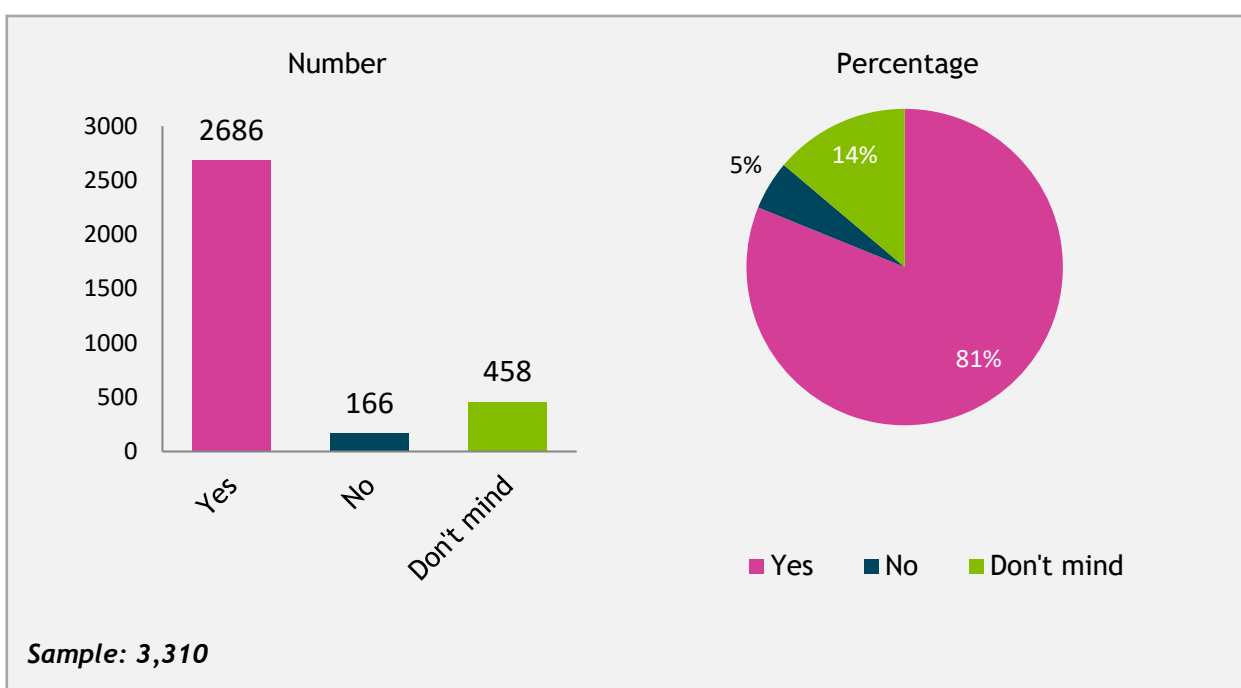
## Selected Comments: (Multi-Agency)

*“Joined up support is an issue. Different departments health, social services and the police find it difficult to talk to each other. This makes it difficult for those needing help. Explaining complex issues to many different agencies repeatedly is very stressful. A named coordinator/advocate who can collate information/background and coordinate support across agencies might have been helpful in my case.”*

### 6.6 Use of Face Masks at GPs

When asking if the use of face masks by GP practice staff and patients would be reassuring, the vast majority of people (81%) say it will.

#### 6.6.1 Would you be reassured if staff and patients wore masks at the GP surgery?



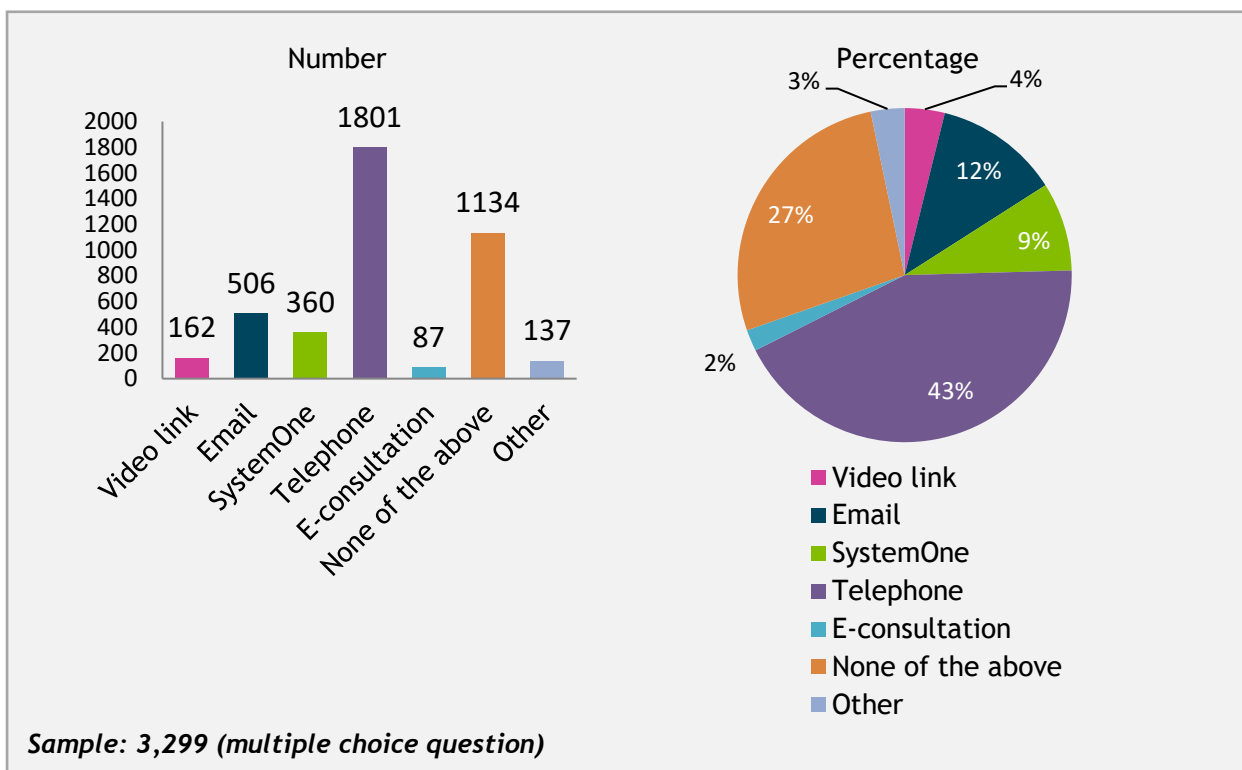
### 6.7 Service Access Preferences

To help inform future planning and commissioning, we gauge opinions on preferences for communication, and venue for testing and immunisations.

#### 6.7.1 Communication Preferences

We asked people about their preferred method of communication with their GP, practice nurse or other health professional, giving a range of popular options to select (including telephone, email and various online systems).

### 6.7.2 Have you used any of the following to communicate with your GP, practice nurse or other health care professional?



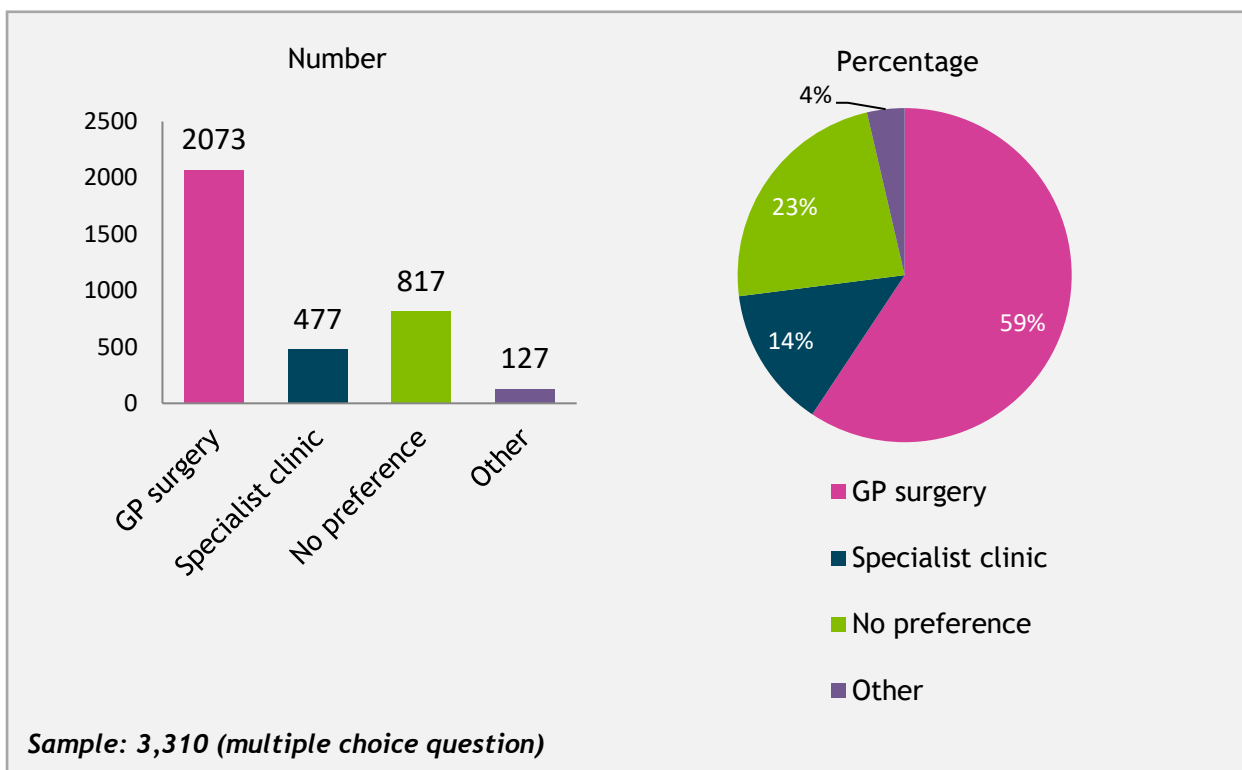
The most popular method of communication, by some margin, is telephone consultation - accounting for 43% of selections. Email accounts for 12%, while SystemOne Online Messaging receives 9%. Lesser used methods include video link and e-consultation, together accounting for 6% of selections.

Those choosing 'other' give examples of using online repeat prescription services, text messaging and personal visits to the service.

### 6.7.3 Blood Testing and Routine Checks Preferences

On preferences for blood tests, blood pressure and routine checks, we asked people if they preferred to use their GP, a specialist clinic (or other service), or if they had no preference.

#### 6.7.4 If you needed a blood test or other routine checks such as blood pressure check where would you prefer to go?



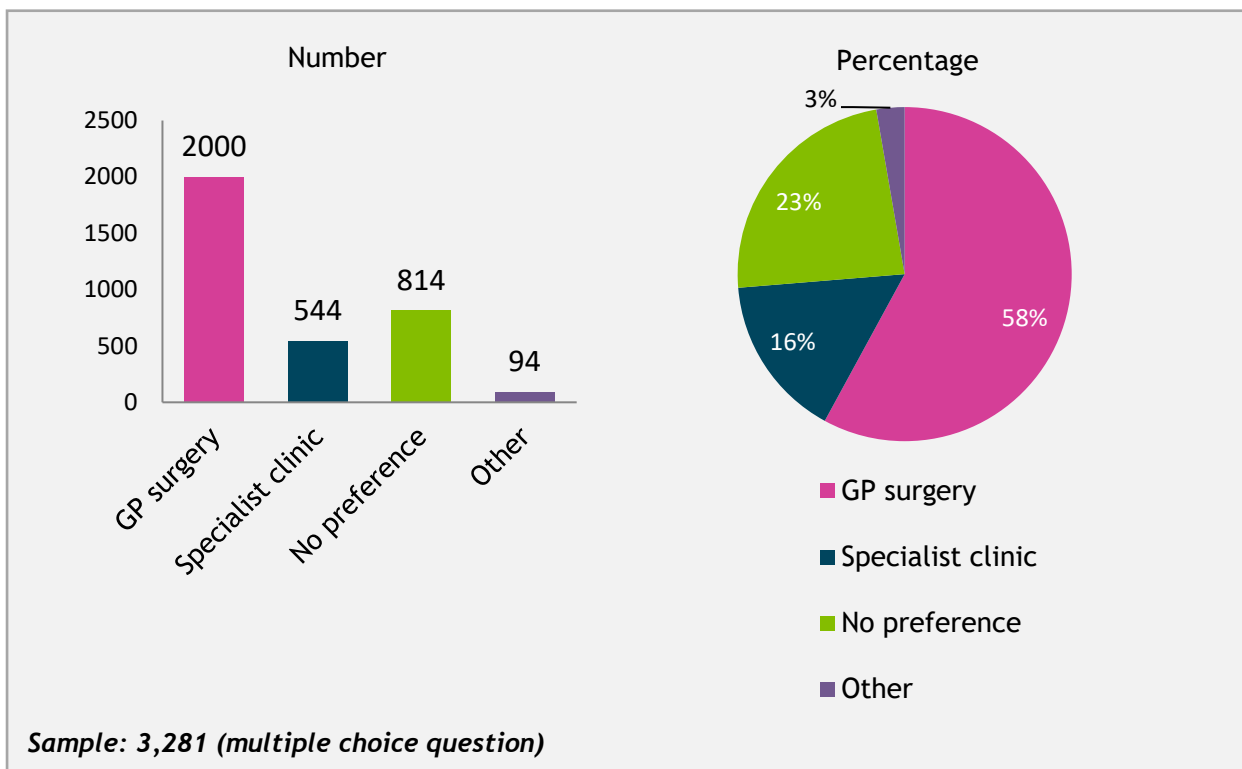
Accounting for almost two thirds of selections (59%) the GP is clearly the most popular option. Almost a quarter of selections (23%) indicate no preference, while specialist clinics account for 14%.

The majority of those selecting 'other' prefer a home check - either by a visiting professional, or self-administered.

#### 6.7.5 Smear Tests and Immunisation Preferences

On preferences for smear tests and immunisation services, we asked people if they preferred to use their GP, a specialist clinic (or other service), or if they had no preference.

### 6.7.6 If you need a smear or immunisation, where would you prefer to go?



With 58% of selections, the GP is by far the most popular choice. Almost a quarter of selections (23%) indicate no preference, with specialist clinics accounting for 16%.

Hygiene, infection control and locality (close to home) appear to be important considerations.

## 7. Mental Health and Wellbeing

We asked people if they felt that the pandemic has affected their mental health and wellbeing. A range of multiple-choice options was presented, including on loneliness, health, family and friends, finances, schooling, leisure and mental health support.

By a notable margin, inability to connect and socialise with family and friends is the prime concern, accounting for 68% of responses (see section 8 for more).

Just over half of respondents (54%) worry about the health of their family and friends, while just under half (48%) are missing leisure activities. 33% are concerned about their own health, while 32% worry about their job and financial security.

Lesser, but still significant concerns include loneliness and household relationships.

## 7.1 General Experience

As time goes on and the ‘initial shock’ of the pandemic recedes, some people have started to feel more relaxed, especially those now benefitting from the easing of restrictions.

We also hear that routines and activities are beneficial, while some people are also enjoying their newfound personal space.

In other cases, lives have been turned ‘upside down’ - some people, in difficult circumstances have multiple worries and concerns, while others, struggling with the scale and pace of change have experienced panic attacks and increased depression. Those living alone are particularly vulnerable.

One person notes that young people (15-25) are especially at risk of poor mental health and cites little, or no support.

### Selected Comments

#### Positives

*“I felt down initially but then started feeling grounded later.”*

*“Due to the relaxation of the restrictions I have felt much better since I can take a walk once daily. My mental wellbeing has improved.”*

*“I am okay because I have my own routine.”*

*“Yoga and exercise help through videos and online platforms - have helped my mental health and wellbeing.”*

*“Engaging in activities such as gardening helps me to relax. I am also de-cluttering physically and mentally.”*

*“Overall, the impact has been good because I've been able to focus on studying new things or existing ones a different way. I'm actually enjoying my own space on my own without distractions.”*

#### Negatives

*“It has made me anxious and scared - son missed out on doing his exams. Hardly any money. Nobody helping. Husband's important operation cancelled. It's turned me upside down and made me very stressed out.”*

*“My working life and social life has completely changed. I have had days when I feel very panicked about it.”*

*“It has made me scared and I feel I'm deteriorating mentally and physically, I'm struggling to cope.”*

*“My anxiety and panic attacks and depression have increased dramatically.”*

*“I live alone and, at the start, I felt isolated and claustrophobic, being stuck in doors all day, every day. It felt like the flat was shrinking around me.”*

*“Young people 15-25 have been negatively impacted by the pandemic and left with little to no support. Their lives have been turned upside down. There needs to be a focus on young people to prevent further escalation in the deterioration of their emotional well-being and mental health.”*

## 7.2 Employment

When talking about mental health, a notable number of people refer to their working situations. Many, who now work from home enjoy a better work-life balance, with accounts of increased happiness, less stress and anxiety, and a ‘better night’s sleep’.

Those with demanding jobs, such as teachers are finding it more difficult, with increased challenges and responsibility. We hear that some people have neglected their personal time and space due to work commitments, while parents working at home, without childcare, are also feeling more stressed.

Some employees have been supported by their employer - through ‘wellbeing groups’ and access to additional support.

### Selected Comments

#### Positives

*“In the first 2 months I spent 2 days a week at my office (I’m a key worker) and 3 days working from home. I am happier and less stressed. I am sleeping better and have more energy.”*

*“My mental health and wellbeing has improved and I’m much less stressed. I have enjoyed a mixture of going into the office and working from home.”*

*“The impact of Covid-19 has been quite positive for me, I now work from home and I’m able to get a better work life balance, I have more time and energy to do things that I enjoy at home and I’m suffering way less anxiety than I did before.”*

*“I have had help from work as they were concerned for my wellbeing. My employers set up wellbeing groups, which included meditation. I also have access to Workplace Options.”*

#### Negatives

*“As the headteacher in a primary school managing the stress and anxiety of others has been very difficult.”*

*“My job has become much more demanding and I do not have time to care for other parts of my life.”*

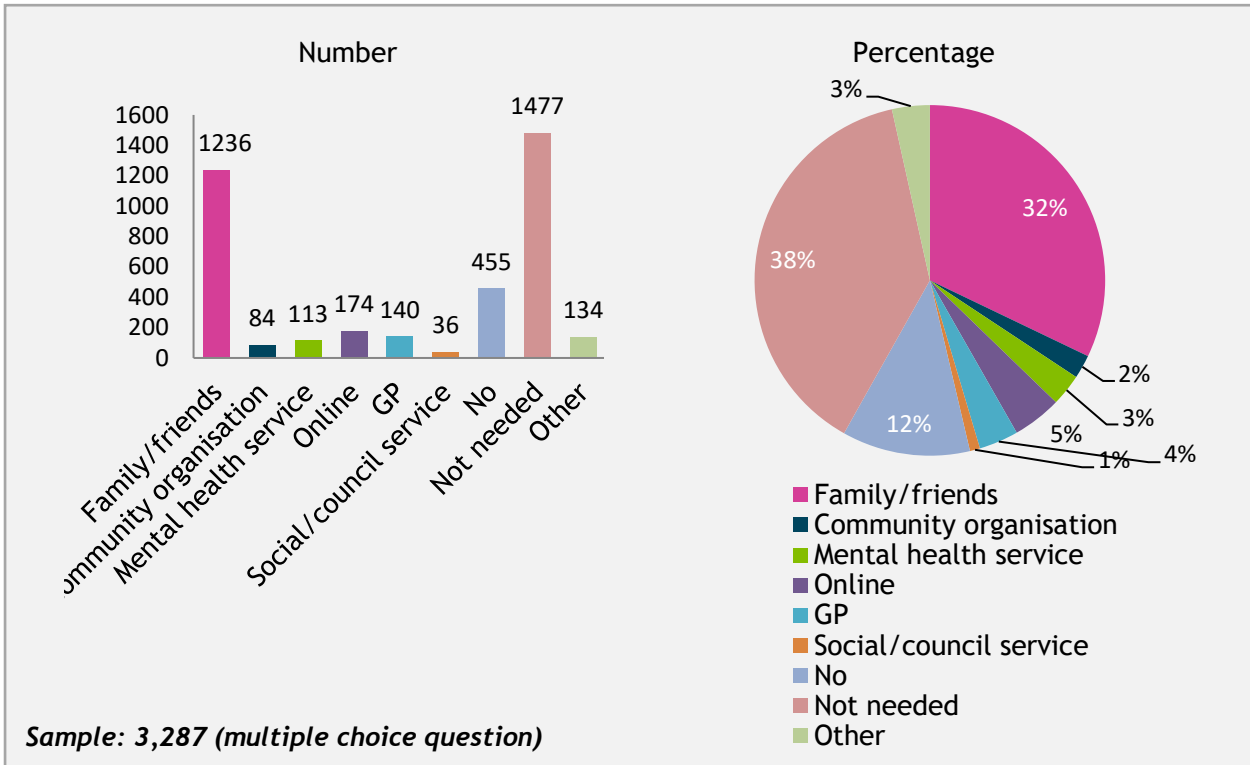


*“Lack of childcare while we try to work from home has been very stressful.”*

### 7.3 Services and Support

We asked people if they have been able to access support for their mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic, and if so, from where.

#### 7.3.1 Have you been able to access support for your mental health or wellbeing during this time, if so from where?



Half of respondents (50%) say they have been able to - of those, 70% have sought assistance from family and friends, and just 30% have accessed services.

On mental health support services, we hear very little positive feedback. Some people have not been able to access services such as psychological therapies, we also hear that when seeking help, services have not been responsive (such as calls not returned).

In one account an expectant mum says her mental health issues have been ‘ignored’, while in another, a person with language difficulties was signposted to an inappropriate, generic service.

#### Selected Comments

*“I have not seen my psychologist at all for complex PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder).”*

*“I just finished 10 sessions of mental therapy but it has come to an end and it will be difficult to get more sessions.”*

*“My daughter suffer with terrible depression - just wished there was someone to talk to as there really isn't anyone who can help.”*

*“I called 111 for emergency help with my mental health, was advised I would get a call back but never received it which made me feel very anxious and disappointed.”*

*“I am pregnant, ill and severely depressed. Midwifery has been indifferent and virtually non-existent. My mental health issues have been ignored. I hope once I give birth I never have to deal with the hospital services ever again as they have turned my much wanted pregnancy into the worst time of my life.”*

*“I spoke with a receptionist at the GP and they told me to access the mental health app online but I can't because I have a language barrier.”*

## 8. Personal and Family Relationships

This section explores relationships, including parents and children, households and wider family and friends.

### 8.1 Parents and Children

While some parents are pleased to have their children home, others, especially those with many children find it more difficult. As well as caring for, entertaining and in some cases home schooling, parents are also having to reassure their children, particularly those in at-risk groups.

The closure of schools and playgroups is also a cause for concern - about education and also social development.

### Selected Comments

#### Positives

*“Kids are super happy to be with us at home. I had to resign from all my activities and look after the children. I miss meeting people and having time for myself. I need a break. But overall it's been a positive time with family.”*

#### Negatives

*“Having all 4 of my children at home is incredibly difficult. I have just had a baby 3 weeks ago and I haven't had any support whilst I am recovering. I am so exhausted and drained. I love my children but they have me on the go from morning until night. I don't get to shower anymore, the children hurt themselves whenever I go to the toilet, I'm hungry, the list goes on....”*

*“My children were very concerned, particularly for the health of the asthmatic one, but also for all of their family members. I had to work hard to find ways to reassure them all would be ok.”*

*“Slowed down my child’s education and isolated her from friends and activities. This has been the worst part.”*

*“I worry about my children not having contact with their own age groups.”*

*“Happy to spend more time with family. Worried every day about home schooling.”*

## 8.2 Households

Many people comment on a lack of personal space during lockdown. We hear accounts of increased stress and tension within households, with some people feeling ‘short tempered and irritated’.

A minority of households report a more relaxed environment.

### Selected Comments

#### Positives

*“It has been a worrying time, however there have been positives for my family - such as time spent together.”*

*“I have found it really nice having some time at home to do the house up, spend some proper time with my partner, rest, eat well and generally be a lot more relaxed.”*

#### Negatives

*“I think it has put everyone on edge. It’s very important in any relationship to have your own space and the lockdown has affected that - putting relationships between households under stress”*

*“Occasionally short tempered and irritated by other household members.”*

*“As a person who is shielding my family still had to go work. This caused a lot of tension as they had to always washing and using hand sanitizer.”*

*“I miss my own space as there are six of us at home and I’m used to having an hour or two to myself while they are at school or work.”*

*“I am stuck in one room. I steer clear of my husband where possible. I have a special needs child who can be very challenging.”*

### 8.3 Wider Family and Friends

Those able to connect with family and friends, or with strong social support networks are finding it easier generally to cope. We hear that online groups, such as WhatsApp have helped local neighbourhoods to support each other.

For people without social networks it can be very difficult - we hear common accounts of loneliness and in some cases complete isolation, with nobody calling to check on welfare.

Families, especially grandparents are missing personal interaction, with remote contact cited as a 'poor substitute'. Many people also report not being able to attend funerals in person.

#### Selected Comments

##### Positives

*"I feel I have coped ok so far. Though single and living alone I have kept in touch with friends and family through phone and internet."*

*"My mental health has improved as I spend more time with my family and talk to friends who live abroad."*

*"So many local friends. My road also has a WhatsApp group and we got to know each other and support each other very well during this time."*

*"Neighbours have been supportive."*

##### Negatives

*"I am on my own so I have felt unbelievably lonely and alone. No work. My usual support network very much retreated into their own groups and I felt very on my own."*

*"I live alone and thought I would be only minimally affected but I am surprised at the sense of isolation as I am used to my own company. I think I underestimated the importance of daily contacts at work and socially."*

*"I live on my own and nobody has telephoned if I am ok except two neighbours in the beginning. I am scared."*

*"I miss seeing my mother, children and grandchildren and being able to give them a hug. Not able to arrange large family get together for birthdays. Not been able to see groups of friends and going out for meals etc."*

*"I miss getting together with family and friends. Having meals with them. Talking on the phone is a very poor substitute most of the time."*

*"Social distancing has changed my relationship with my grandchildren."*

*"It fluctuates hugely but missing my mother's funeral was dreadful."*

## 9. BAME Communities

Around a third of respondents (1,049) identify either as from a Black or Minority Ethnic (BAME) community, or from a non-White background.

### 9.1 Physical Health

When comparing survey results with those who identify as White/White British (W/WB), we find that respondents from BAME communities are notably more likely to be at, or care for somebody at high risk, and to have received a shielding letter.

BAME respondents are also significantly more worried about their own health, and notably more so about the health of family and friends and passing the virus on to others.

#### 9.1.1 Impact Scale

	BAME %	W/WB %
Considered to be at high risk	37%	31%
Received a shielding letter	29%	24%
Care for somebody at high risk	30%	23%
Worried about passing the virus on to others	70%	62%
Worried about own health	41%	29%
Worried about the health of family and friends	59%	52%
Have a stated disability	5%	5%
Have a stated long-term health condition	44%	38%

### 9.2 Mental Health and Wellbeing

While BAME respondents are less likely to have a stated mental health condition, they are also less likely to be able to access support and resources for mental health needs.

#### 9.2.1 Impact Scale

	BAME %	W/WB %
Have a stated mental health condition	10%	14%
Can't access mental health support and resources	9%	6%

### 9.3 Family, Friends and Relationships

When looking at family, friends and relationships, we find that those from BAME backgrounds feel notably less negative, as a whole, about missing family and friends. We also find that household relationships are markedly more strained - this may in part be down to living conditions.

#### 9.3.1 Impact Scale

	BAME %	W/WB %
Feel lonely	21%	20%
Miss seeing friends and family	61%	71%
Household relationships are tense	18%	11%

### 9.4 Wider Determinants

We find that BAME respondents are significantly more worried about their job or financial security, marginally more worried about missing school or college, while notably less negative, on the whole, about missing leisure activities or holidays.

#### 9.4.1 Impact Scale

	BAME %	W/WB %
Worried about job, or financial security	40%	28%
Worried about missing school or college	6%	3%
Feel sad about not having access to leisure facilities	44%	50%

### 9.5 Communication and Information

On communication, those from White/White British backgrounds find it significantly 'easier' to obtain and understand information and advice, and to keep pace of changes in guidance and messaging.

White/White British respondents are also notably more likely to find information in accessible formats.

### 9.5.1 Impact Scale

	BAME %	W/WB %
Have found it 'easy' to know what to do, to stay safe	63%	73%
How found it 'easy' to keep up to date with information	65%	70%
Have found information in accessible formats	67%	77%

While government statistics reveal that those from BAME communities are more at risk, the lack of information and clarity as to why, is concerning for many.

Others feel that the focus on inequality, post pandemic should not be lost.

#### Selected Comments

*“Recent news about BAME people being more at risk is very worrying especially as we have not been told the reasons why.”*

*“Concerned about my risk as BAME but under 55, just diagnosed as diabetic, hypertension and depression.”*

*“I don't want this Government to whitewash issues for BAME communities. Want us to use the opportunity that Covid-19 has highlighted to improve health and housing and work opportunities for BAME communities.”*

With the disparity between communities clear, it may be necessary to undertake further research, to better understand themes and issues.

## 10. Wider Determinants

In this section, we look at wider social determinants including the environment, activities and stimulation, finances and employment, and food and shopping.

### 10.1 Living Environment

Many people have noticed cleaner air, a quieter environment and more wildlife. Those with gardens recognise themselves to be fortunate, as many have no outside space.

We hear that cramped living conditions are uncomfortable, especially with children, or if working from home. On the wider community, some complain that neighbours have added to discomfort.

## Selected Comments

### Positives

*"We have been fine, we enjoy our garden and I do a weekly shop. Not seeing family was hard but as we have a large garden they would pop in for a quick visit. Them over one side, us the other."*

*"There's better air quality, since the outbreak. The biodiversity surrounding the borough has increased for better (I noticed I could see butterflies more often). There is much more community spirit and kindness - this period of time has given me time to re-evaluate what is important in my life."*

*"I also really appreciate all the beautiful places around here I can walk - parks, canals, riverside."*

### Negatives

*"My son is 14 years old and I'm at home since lockdown and we do not have a garden. We live in a block of flats and social distancing is at high risk. I really want to have a property with a walk-in shower and garden for my family - it's really having a very big impact on my mental health."*

*"Hard to get enough sunlight without a garden or balcony."*

*"My husband and I feel very confined in a small space with a baby."*

*"Bored of working from home (small flat)."*

*"My neighbours have made this time hell for us, my mental health and anxiety are suffering."*

## 10.2 Activities and Stimulation

Many express frustrations at losing their activities and routines, with some citing a 'big impact' on their lives and mental wellbeing. With gyms and leisure facilities closed, some people are also worried about their physical fitness and health.

Those with routines, such as work or a daily walk are finding it easier.

## Selected Comments

### Positives

*"Very frustrating, boring, no company. On the other hand, am probably slightly fitter as feel I need to have my early morning walk every single day."*

*"I was very anxious at the beginning but thankfully I have been working so kept a lot of normality to my daily routine which I am grateful for at these strange times."*



## Negatives

*“Limited ability to do normal activities - frustrating.”*

*“It has had a big impact on our lives. Not being able to see friends and family and not being able to go for a walk and not being able to do the normal things we used to do. We feel like prisoners in our own home.”*

*“Stopped my wife and I being helpful grandparents; stopped me volunteering; stopped my part time work; stopped our social and leisure activities outside our home.”*

*“Really need to know when gyms will re-open as I desperately need to train properly again in order to stay sane and to stay fit.”*

*“I am bored of watching people from inside.”*

*“To keep as fit as possible I swim twice a week. My mobility has been very affected, not being able to do this. It has also impacted on my mental welfare. No proper information by our local swimming pool and no facility to renew my concessionary card and I am in fear of losing it.”*

## 10.3 Finances and Employment

Many people have lost jobs and income. We hear that self-employed work has dried up, redundancies have been served, and recently secured jobs rescinded. Those on furlough are more fortunate, however many still have doubts about their long-term job security. For those out of work, many note that the job market is exceptionally tough.

For those in financial difficulty, money can be a ‘persistent worry’, with effects on mental health and relationships. Some worry more about finances, than the pandemic.

## Selected Comments

### Positives

*“It has been easier since being furloughed however our long-term job security is in the back of our minds.”*

### Negatives

*“The main impact has been on work - being self-employed I have not been able to get new work since the lockdown. I did not get government support but have had sufficient funds to support myself.”*

*“I had a job offer rescinded and so am now unemployed.”*

*“We have all lost our jobs and are currently unemployed.”*

*“Unemployed and no job market.”*

*“It has increased my anxiety for both my family's wellbeing and my own future including my relationships with friends and my future job prospects. Financial instability is a persistent worry.”*

*“With lack of money and no job it's affecting my mental health I'm always crying, stressed out and going into depression. I can't sleep at night thinking how will I pay rent bills etc.”*

*“I'm more worried about finances and mental health than I am about the virus.”*

## 10.4 Food and Shopping

A large number of people report being assisted with shopping - by neighbourhood schemes, family, friends and neighbours.

For many, securing supermarket delivery slots can be problematic - one person notes that being designated high risk by health services does not guarantee priority. Some have resorted to buying from smaller, local shops where choice is restricted, and prices are higher.

On food boxes, we hear that one person has not been successful in cancelling unneeded deliveries - resulting in waste.

### Selected Comments

#### Positives

*“I have appreciated calls and letters from neighbourhood schemes offering help with shopping etc.”*

*“My pharmacist has been great delivering my medication every month, but by far being given access to priority supermarket slots has been the most life changing action during lockdown.”*

#### Negatives

*“Frustrated that despite my wife receiving high risk notifications from the NHS I cannot secure deliveries from supermarkets.”*

*“I feel that more support could have been given in regards to priority online shopping booking slots.”*

*“As I'm 60 years old I don't fall into a high risk category. I've found it difficult to shop as I couldn't get an online slot so had to shop local where prices have been high resulting in me buying less healthy foods.”*

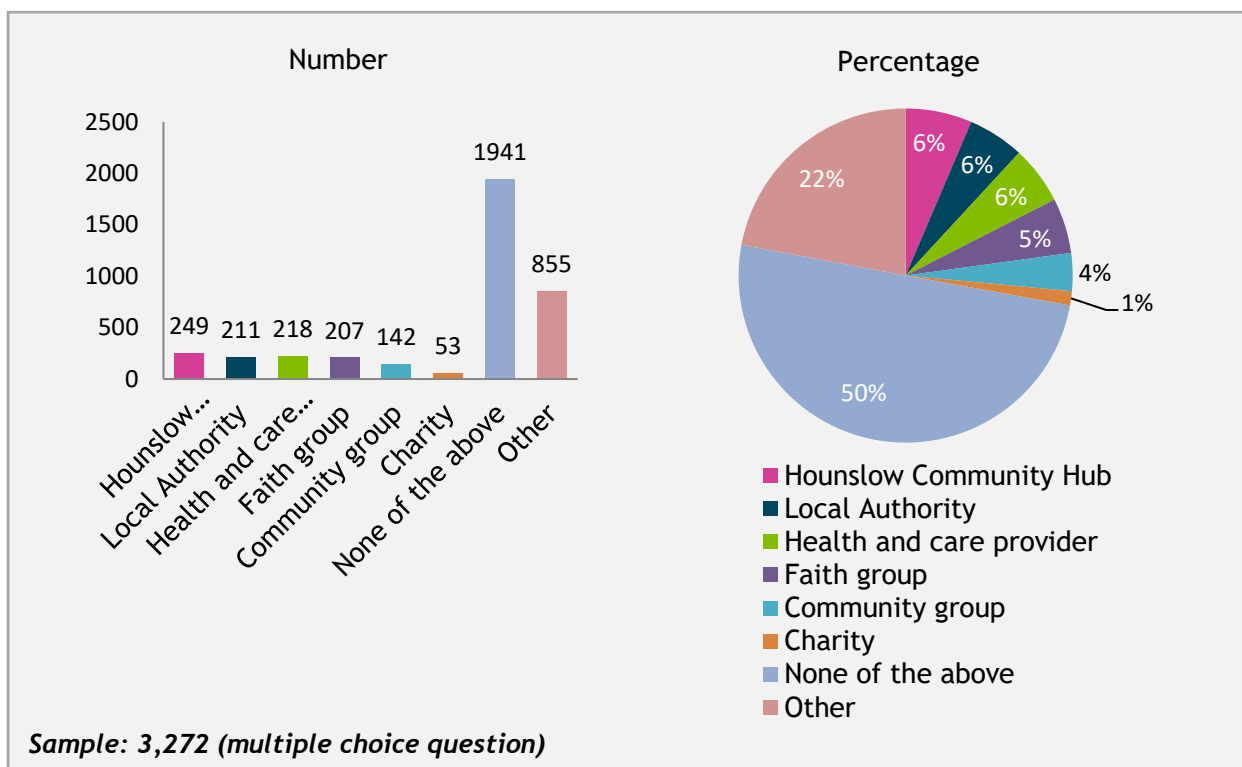
*“I receive food boxes. I've tried to stop them by the routes given, but they still keep coming. I've emailed, spoken by telephone to different depts. Followed government channels to no avail. I have food and worry that I am leaving others short. Please can it*

*be stopped. The driver doesn't ring the bell and just leaves the box or boxes on my doorstep. Sometimes days pass before I notice it's there. Seems so wasteful."*

## 10.5 Community Support

We asked people 'who has offered the greatest help' during lockdown, listing a range of groups and services.

### 10.5.1 Have you been able to access support for your mental health or wellbeing during this time, if so from where?



When reviewing feedback, we find that friends, family and neighbours have been the largest single form of support, by a large margin.

Among the services mentioned, Hounslow Hub receives much praise, with accounts of staff going above and beyond to assist residents. However, one resident notes that information on what is available, and who is eligible, could be clearer.

While community cohesion has improved during the pandemic, we also hear that some, living alone have a complete lack of support, with nobody calling to check on welfare or offer assistance - one vulnerable person in this position observes a lack of community spirit. We also hear that minorities, such as the gay community can feel more isolated and vulnerable during the lockdown.

People over 75 report feeling marginalised, with those fit-and-able to help others 'side-lined'.

## Selected Comments

### Positives

*“Thank you for all the work the support Hub has done, it’s greatly appreciated by residents and has been reassuring knowing that if help is needed there is a dedicated local support source available. I imagine it has been difficult for the staff manning this service but thank you to each of you and your efforts and dedication during this difficult time.”*

*“The council hub was very helpful and the Bedfont hub even better mainly because of [name] who was collecting prescriptions and even going to the vet for the cat’s meds by bus. He has been such a great help to us.”*

*“I think the local authority has on the whole done a very good job and I have been sharing your posts with family in other boroughs. You have kept up essential services well and provided good comms.”*

*“Contact with neighbours and local community has increased and is very important.”*

### Negatives

*“My friends live far away, no one from my estate has thought of putting a leaflet through my door offering help for shielding. I’m too scared of going out - last time 11th March. They could take my rubbish down to bins, don’t want to pester friends to drive from far away just to take my rubbish downstairs. I live alone in my flat it’s a shame there’s no community spirit.”*

*“A more coordinated approach across Hounslow from the beginning would have been really helpful. All organisations need to look at their long-term strategic plans for pandemics etc.”*

*“It would have been nice to know more about who is entitled to what from the community hub and what is on offer.”*

*“As a gay man I feel even more isolated then ever since this outbreak and having coped with homophobia on my estate.”*

*“Although we are both over 75, we are in relatively good health and would like to help others if possible but seem to be side-lined. We could always do something, even to drive people around to appointments etc.”*

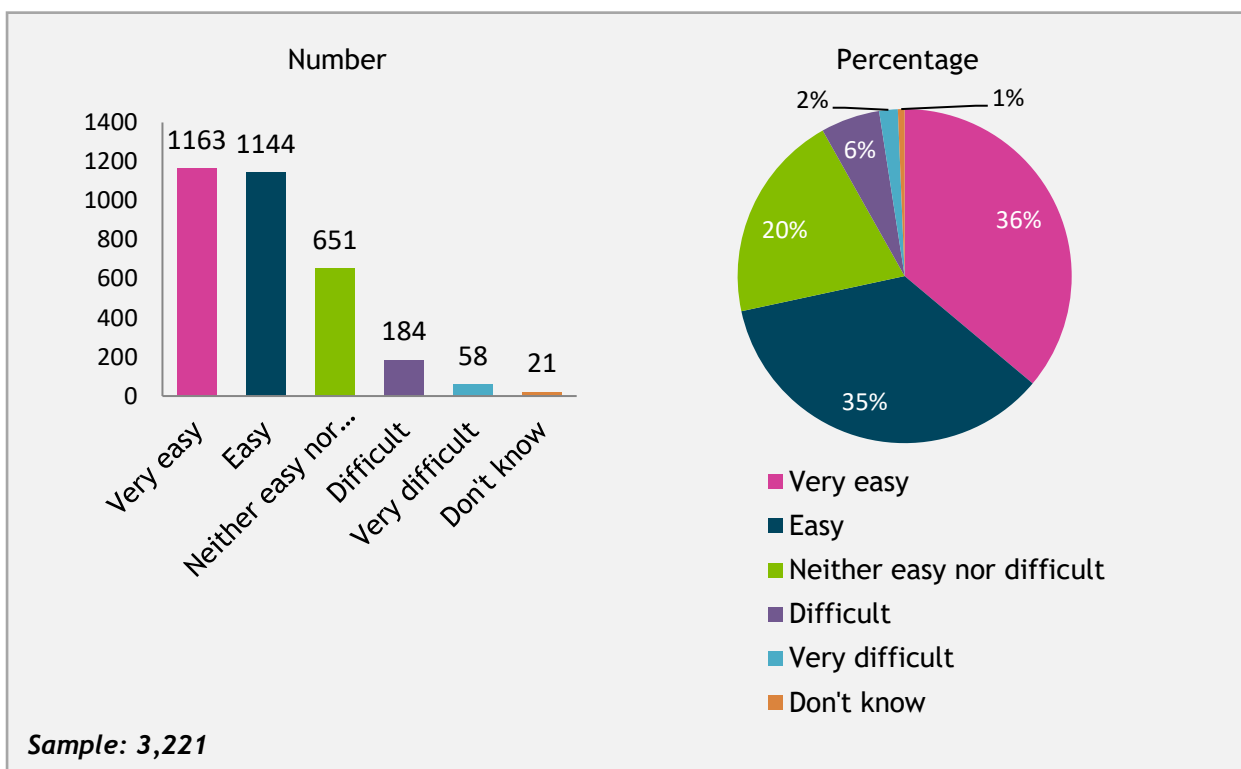
## 11. Communication and Information

This section examines various aspects of communication, in particular whether people have enough, and the right information, to keep safe.

## 11.1 Knowing What to Do, During Covid-19

We asked people how easy they find it, to ‘know what to do’ to keep themselves and others safe, during the pandemic.

### 11.1.1 How easy have you found it to know what to do to keep yourself and others safe during the pandemic?



Around three quarters of respondents (71%) find it to be ‘easy’ or ‘very easy’ with 8% finding it more difficult.

For some, the abundance of websites and information sources can make it difficult to obtain clear information. One person, who has no problem finding information notes that different sources can ‘contradict each other’ - organisations themselves say it can be difficult to be clear and concise.

In other accounts, it is felt that the constant advice may infringe on people’s daily freedoms, while others, who find the messaging to be clear, would like it ‘blunter still’ to influence behaviour.

#### Selected Comments

*“The government advice was not easy to locate - lots of different websites etc and the guidance itself not clear enough.”*

*“Easy to find info, but different sources often contradict each other.”*

*“I think the government have made it very difficult for any organisation to be clear and concise.”*

*“I signed up for daily updates from the government website and Hounslow council. I passed the signup links to a neighbour, so that she could stay informed.”*

*“More advice about keeping safe at work when able to go back.”*

*“Message clear to me but perhaps could be more blunt to get through to those who ignore restrictions as they do not seem to understand/care that their actions could result in their own or someone else's death.”*

*“Stop giving advice and let us get on with managing our own risk and our lives.”*

### 11.1.2 Impact Scale

When looking closer at specific groups, we find that those with a stated mental health condition are least able to know ‘what to do’.

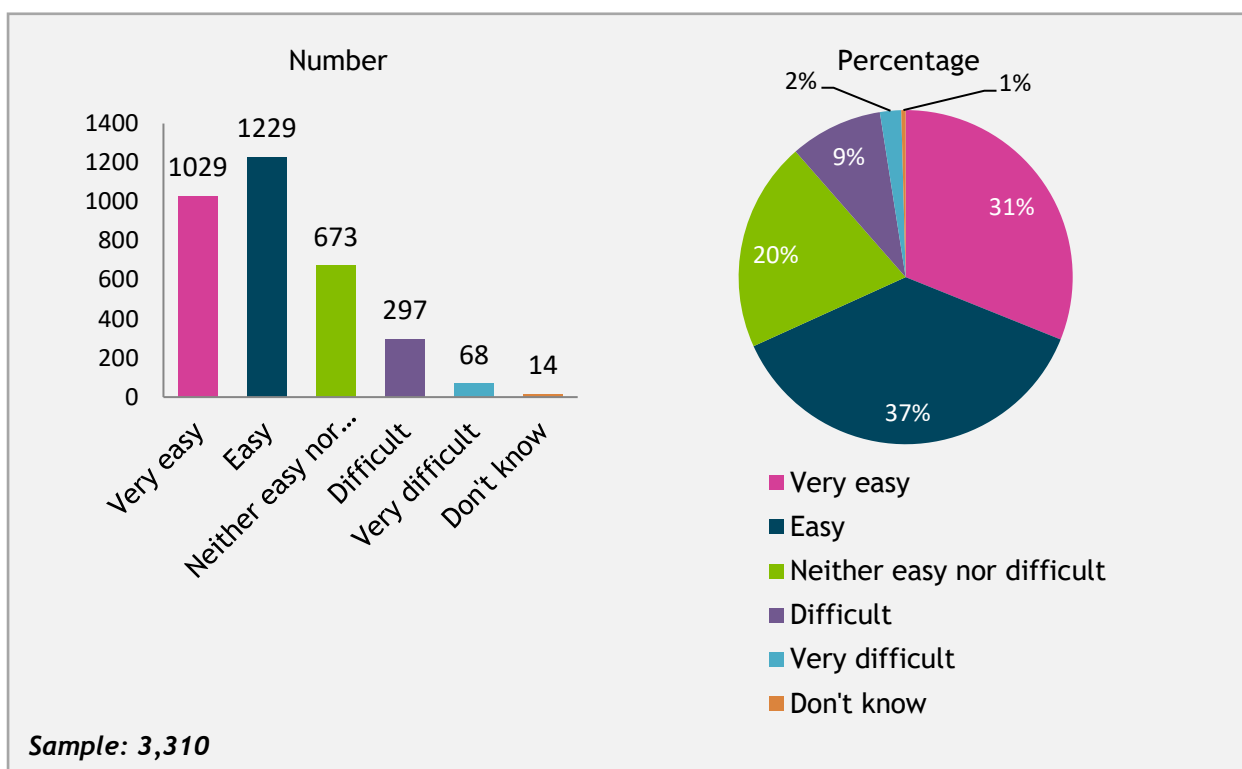
**Find it ‘easy or very easy’ to know what to do, to keep yourself and others safe.**

All respondents (baseline)	71%
Long-term conditions	67%
Carers of people at high risk	66%
Aged 25-49	66%
BAME respondents	63%
Aged 18-24	63%
Disabilities	62%
Mental health conditions	59%

### 11.2 Information - Keeping Up to Date

We also asked people how easy it was, to remain up to date as information, advice and guidance changes over time.

### 11.2.1 How easy have you found it to keep up to date with the changes to information about how to keep yourself and others safe during the pandemic?



The majority of respondents (68%) find it to be ‘easy’ or ‘very easy’ with 10% finding it more difficult.

Repeated and constant use of simple slogans, such as ‘stay at home’ or ‘wash your hands’ have clearly influenced behaviour.

It is noted that ‘straightforward’ language and images are helpful, however the more complex messaging, such as on employment, schooling or shopping can lead to confusion - with complaints about ‘unclear and conflicting information’ common. The ‘Stay Alert’ message has attracted widespread criticism.

Many feel that leading by example is important - with officials breaking the rules undermining trust.

#### Selected Comments

*“Easy while shielding, have not been out since lockdown began, it will be more difficult coming out of isolation.”*

*“I found the government advice unclear and unhelpful. What does “Stay alert” even mean??! It added to my anxiety.”*

*“Conflicting government messages mean varying levels of interpretation and compliance from different people.”*

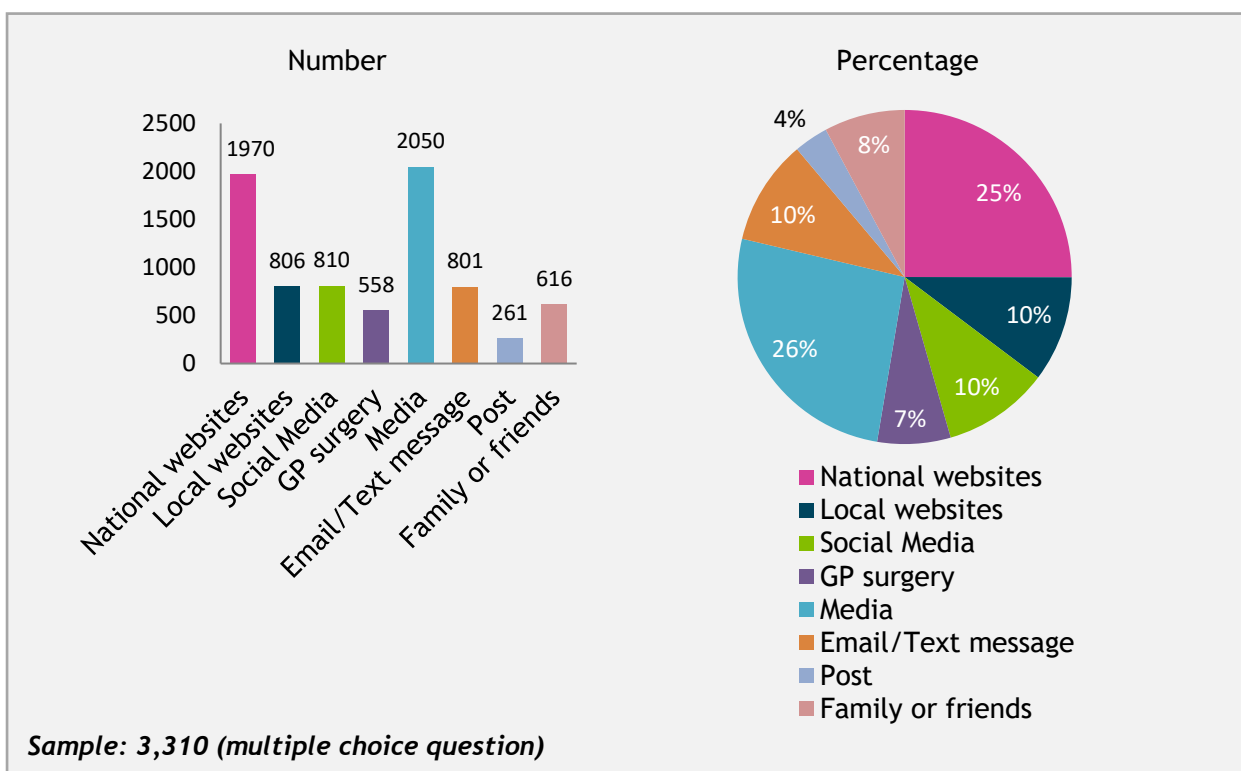
*“It was very easy at the beginning. Clear message easily understood by all. Once Cummings was prioritised over the rest of us the message became very unclear and I lost all confidence in what was being said.”*

*“The government’s messaging was clear at first but confused when Stay Alert was introduced.”*

### 11.3 Helpful Information Sources

We asked people which sources of information they have found to be ‘especially helpful’. A range of multiple-choice options given include online sources (national, local and social media), the GP, media (television, radio and newspaper), email or text messaging, post and family or friends.

#### 11.3.1 From these options, which information or sources of information have you found especially helpful?



By a slim margin, the most popular option, receiving 26% of selections is the media, followed by national websites, at 25%. Receiving 10% each are social media, local websites and email or text messaging. Less utilised options include family and friends, the GP and post. When reading comments, we see that those working in services are a trusted information source.

Despite its popularity, many people complain about the ‘sensationalist’ nature of mass media, with some distrust at headlines and facts. An exception to this is the daily Government press briefings, viewed as more reliable generally.



## Selected Comments

*“Government daily briefing - definitely not the disgraceful media.”*

*“I take Covid-19 news from official bodies, over the media, as it is not sensationalist and it is fact checked. The media has been scare-mongering, plus you have the conspiracy theorists spreading false information.”*

The vast majority of feedback (almost all) about national websites relates to the BBC. For many, it is the ‘primary source’ of information and is highly praised for being clear, impartial and reliable.

With summaries reflecting official guidance, it has also become a one-stop-shop for many.

## Selected Comments

*“The BBC website is excellent for information.”*

*“The BBC website has become the primary source of information on the basis of simplicity, clarity and reassurance. We watch the daily briefings but generally to follow up with an online summary for clarity.”*

*“The BBC website is clear and impartial.”*

*“The BBC website seems reliable to me.”*

*“The BBC summarised advice from all sources so I didn’t have to look for it.”*

*“The BBC has had excellent summaries of the government guidelines.”*

Locally, Hounslow Council is praised for ‘clear and helpful’ updates, with Instagram also utilised.

## Selected Comments

*“Hounslow Council email updates very clear & helpful.”*

*“Hounslow Council Instagram page. Detailed posts explaining services throughout the lockdown period.”*

*“I appreciate the regular updates from Hounslow Council. Very helpful and reassuring source of information.”*

## 11.4 Topics that are 'Difficult' to Access

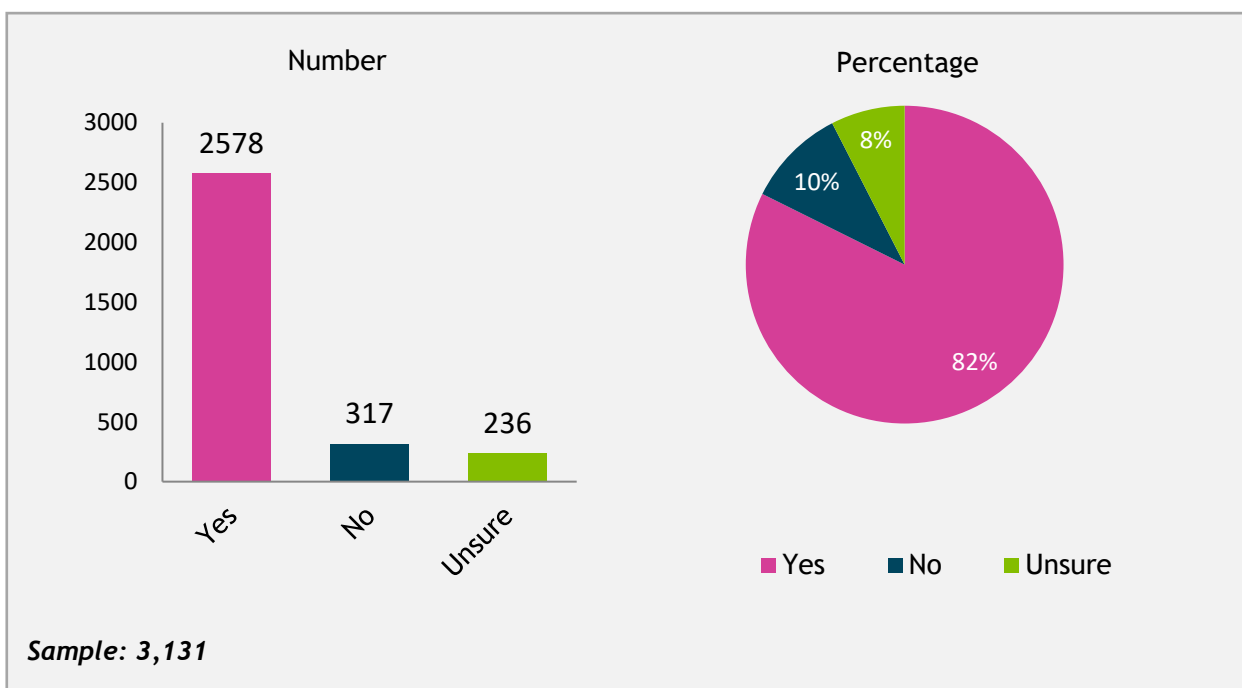
We asked people which topics, if any, they have found it difficult to get clear information on.

Clear front-runners are dentistry (23%) and information on testing for Covid-19 (21%).

## 11.5 Information Formats

We also asked people if they have been able to find information and advice in formats or languages accessible to them.

### 11.5.1 Have you been able to find information and advice in the format(s) or language(s) needed to make it accessible to you?



While the vast majority of respondents (82%) said yes, a sizeable minority (10%) said no.

We hear praise for Hounslow Council updates, which offer information in various community languages.

There is some criticism about English only news sources, while the deaf community says the lack of BSL (British Sign Language) interpretation at press briefings is adding to worry and concern. Information format and presentation is also called into question - one example given is use of small fonts and unclear colouring, in emails.

For some who may be tired or depressed, the ability to find relevant information quickly is important.

## Selected Comments

### Positives

*“Hounslow Council offers information in other languages, which I think is very good.”*

*“Hounslow Council email updates have been brilliant.”*

### Negatives

*“Print on all incoming emails is far too small and pale grey on white background makes it hard to read - same applies to attachments but those I can often zoom to enlarge.”*

*“I work with Deaf people and the lack of BSL interpreters in the Downing Street briefings is adding extra worry and concern to the deaf community.”*

*“Others who don’t understand English have found it hard to understand the news updates.”*

*“Sometimes the information provided is not available in my language (Albanian) but it is not severely difficult.”*

*“The information I wanted was impossible to find.”*

*“I have found that getting clear information was challenging.”*

*“My depression can drain my ability to look up information or seek help.”*

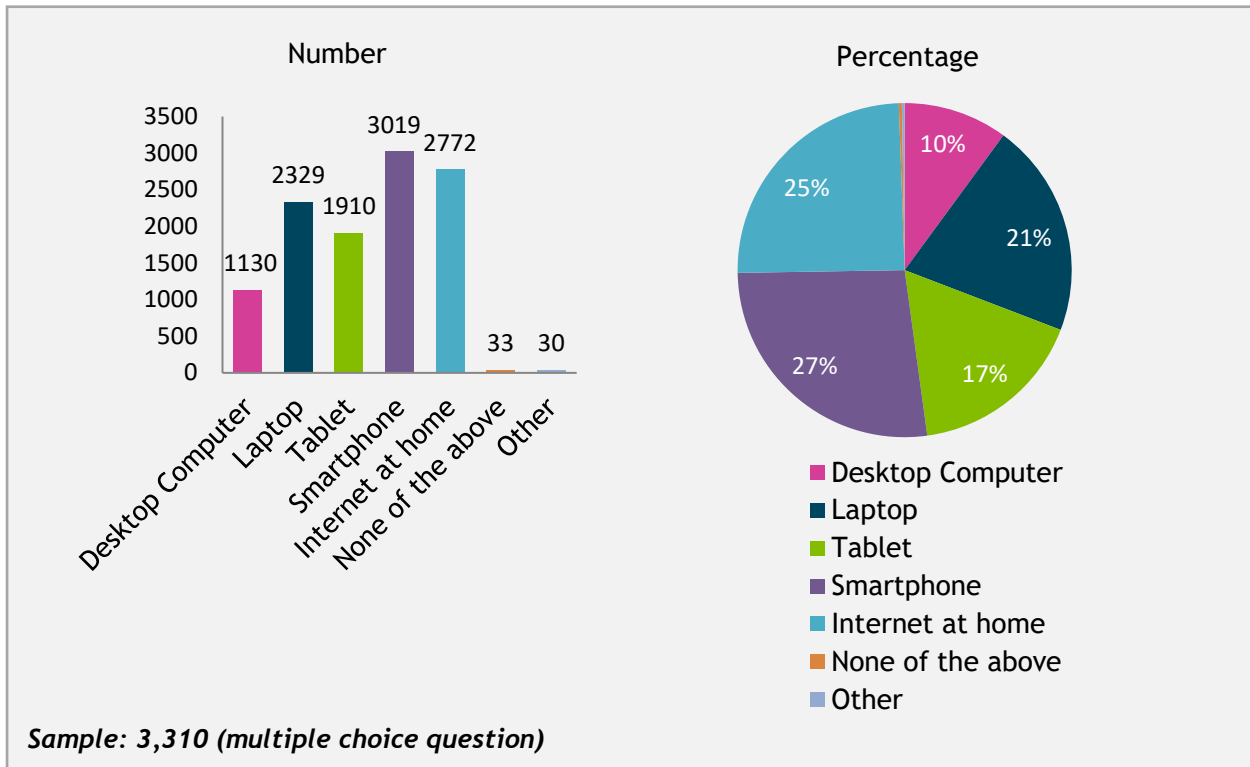
## 12. Digital Technology

In this section, we look at access to digital equipment, confidence in accessing services online, and what might help in increasing use of digital services.

### 12.1 Access to Digital Equipment

We asked people which items of digital equipment they had access to at home, with multiple-choice options including desktop computer, laptop computer, tablet, smartphone and internet.

### 12.1.1 Do you have access to any of the following at home?

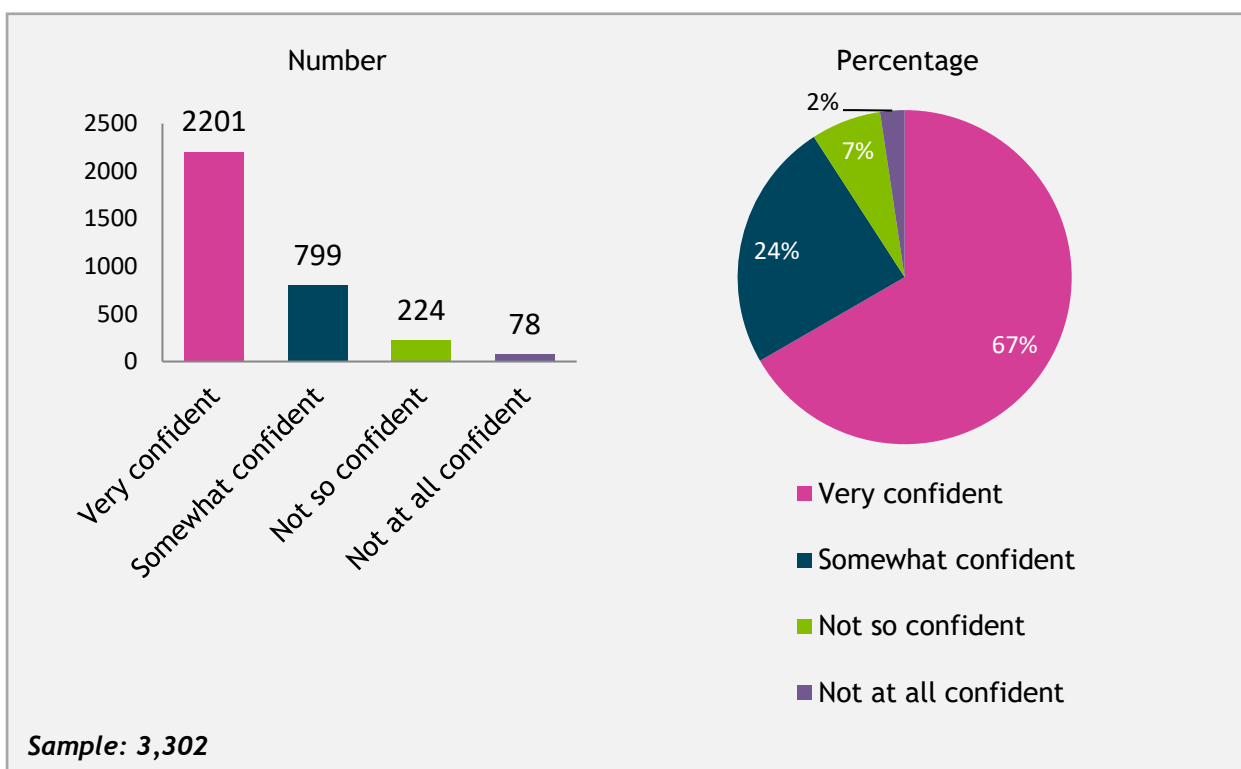


The majority of people have access to a smartphone (27% of selections), and broadband (25%). On computers, laptops are most popular (21%), with tablets also well utilised (17%) and desktops somewhat less so (10%).

### 12.2 Confidence in Accessing Services Online

We asked people how confident they felt, to access services through a computer, tablet or smartphone.

### 12.2.1 How confident do you feel using a computer, tablet or smartphone to access healthcare?



The vast majority of respondents (91%) feel ‘very or somewhat’ confident, with just 2% feeling ‘not at all’ confident.

### 12.2.2 Impact Scale

When looking closer at specific groups, we find that those with stated disabilities are least confident, by some margin.

#### Feel ‘very or somewhat’ confident to use a computer, tablet or smartphone to access healthcare

All respondents (baseline)	91%
Long-term conditions	86%
Mental health conditions	85%
Aged 65+	83%
Disabilities	75%

### 12.3 What is Needed to Increase Confidence?

We asked people what is needed, to increase confidence in using a computer, tablet or smartphone, to access services online.

On reviewing respondent's suggestions, we find the most significant trends are on guidance and training, so knowledge appears to be of prime importance.

We also detect themes on accessibility, confidentiality, and equipment and cost. All themes and sub-themes are listed below:

### Accessibility

- Ease of access
- Easy to operate websites and applications
- Feeling of there being a real person at the other end
- Making it simple - easy logging in without lengthy passwords required
- Translation of instructions

### Confidentiality

- Being sure it is not recorded
- Confidence about encryption of my medical notes
- Confidence in privacy
- Knowledge that my personal details would be safe and that I wasn't at risk

### Equipment and Cost

- Being given a means of access
- Consistent good internet connection and mobile network
- Free internet
- Money to own one
- Proper desktop computer would be useful but they are very expensive

### Instruction and Training

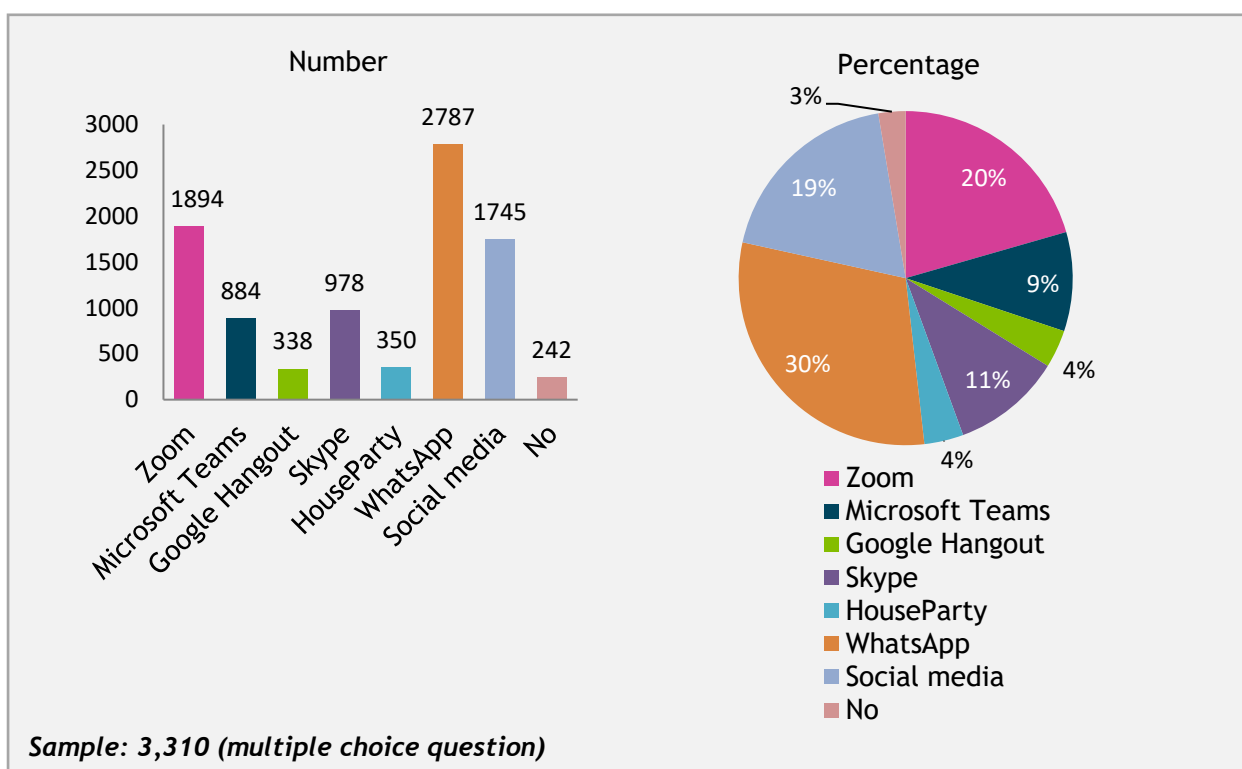
- A better understanding of how software works & what some icons mean
- A simplified guide on how to use different online platforms
- Just clear instructions
- More knowledge of the computer package when they keep updating the version
- Online courses
- Someone to show you how to do it
- Understanding how systems work

## 12.4 Online Communication Methods

We also asked people which online-communication methods they have used.

The most popular by some margin is WhatsApp (30% of selections), with Zoom (20%) and social media (19%) also well utilised. Lesser used, but still popular are Skype (11%) and Microsoft Teams (9%).

### 12.4.1 Are you using online methods to communicate (e.g. Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangout etc.).



The applications help facilitate a diverse range of activities - examples given include work and social meetings, coffee mornings, Pilates and fitness classes, choir rehearsal, study and home schooling.

## 13. Recommendations

Based on the analysis of feedback, we make the following recommendations on health and care services, mental health, and wider community services.

### Health and Care Services: 8 Recommendations

1. With the perception that some GP practices closed, we hear that patients received mixed messages with some saying that they had been turned away with little, or no advice or support. Some have been advised to 'go home and contact 111' with others told to 'come back in June'. With such accounts filtering into the media, patients say they are less confident to get in touch with their GP, even if unwell.

**Suggestion:** *It is inevitable that a large proportion of those unsupported will be vulnerable, or in need of medical attention. We feel that nobody should be unsupported, and any information or signposting advice needs to be as personal and specific as possible, as generic 'catch all' information is not always reassuring, or effective.*

- *Systems need to be in place with regular communication for vulnerable patients. Appropriate levels of communication should be established for*

*different groups of patients. For example, a text from Public Health could be sent out to patients who do not require much support. A monthly call could go to patients who require more support. Links with local voluntary organisations would help in reaching out to patients as well.*

2. Patients with sensory conditions (such as deafness) and those less articulate, or with anxiety say that restriction to telephone-only GP appointments is not practical. In some cases, we hear that the removal of choice has also resulted in the removal of basic support.

**Suggestion:** *It is clear that a 'one size fits all' consultation system results in the marginalisation of vulnerable communities, and we have many, varied examples. We would like to see some level of flexibility, choice and prioritisation around appointment and consultation systems.*

- *Specific time slots for those with sensory conditions and language barriers.*
- *Face-to-face options*
- *Home visits*
- *One-page information or leaflet for those patients about booking GP appointments during the Covid-19 pandemic.*

3. Those with cancelled medical appointments, referrals and tests report on little, or no contact from GPs and services. Patients with conditions such as Cancer are especially worried. When seeking information, some have found services to be unresponsive.

**Suggestion:** *Feedback suggests that a lack of communication on cancelled appointments is a major cause of anxiety, and a key contributor to worsening physical and mental health. We would urge services to get in touch with all patients in this situation, as soon as possible, with clear (and unambiguous) reassurance on reinstatement of appointments.*

- *Ongoing communication/dialogue with vulnerable patients is needed. Perhaps an 'Upgrade for the Pandemic'.*

4. Some patients have cancelled or delayed their own treatment and tests, citing fears around infection, PPE, or of 'being a burden' at this time.

**Suggestion:** *Again, a large proportion of those avoiding services will be vulnerable, or in need of attention. Assuming that services are safe, with adequate capacity, we encourage widespread positive messaging, nationally, regionally and locally, to ensure that those who need treatment, testing and care, receive it.*

*Ongoing communication/dialogue with vulnerable patients is needed. Perhaps an 'Upgrade for the Pandemic'.*

- *Focusing on targeted campaigning by working with partners.*



- *Looking at why patients have cancelled their appointments and following up with them.*

5. It is reported that midwifery and health visiting services have been delayed or reduced. With mums self-isolating and not as able to call on the support of family and friends, we hear that the sudden lack of support can lead to isolation, anxiety and mental health problems.

**Suggestion:** *While we recognise that services are reduced and home visiting difficult, this needs to be balanced with the needs of patients, some of whom are isolated and in difficult situations. We urge services to make contact, if possible regularly, with patients to check on needs and welfare.*

- *Specific support services for pregnant women and new mums.*
- *Hotline service*

6. When asking people about 'risks' associated with health services, the most common response was infection risk while travelling to-and-from appointments, especially if public transport is involved.

**Suggestion:** *This is an interesting point - while services themselves may be safe, patients still need to travel and those in shielding groups are understandably weary. Perhaps vehicles that are 'Covid Secure' could be commissioned, to assist those most at risk.*

- *Working with the Local Authority to review transportation options.*
- *Offering a range of appointments - late (10PM)*
- *Focused campaigning*
- *Patients would rather have their smear/blood tests/immunisation at their local GP surgery. Therefore, a choice of options should be offered.*
- *Working with local transport networks.*

7. On shielding, we hear accounts of basic information and communication lacking, causing uncertainty on what to expect, or do - for both service users and in some cases professionals such as GPs and consultants. Confusion around shielding letters is commonplace.

**Suggestion:** *To call the shielding system 'chaotic' would not be an unfair statement, given the level of uncertainty and confusion. We would urge all services to review medical records, clearly establish who is in the shielding group, and get in touch. We also know that medical records can be outdated (for example those not needing letters, have received them), so a thorough and comprehensive review of records is needed.*

*Looking at the annual review system. Is the current system working?*

*Additional:*

- *Support with IT training and guidance - reviewing opportunities. Covering cost of equipment.*

## Mental Health and Wellbeing: 3 Recommendations

1. In many cases, those able to work from home experience a better work-life balance, with proven benefits for mental health and wellbeing.

**Suggestion:** *We would urge employers to offer flexibility and choice on home working, where possible and appropriate. With proven benefits on mental health and wellbeing, this may equate to happier, and more productive staff.*

- *Local Authority can provide a leading example in offering flexibility and choice on home working. They can offer local guidance and information to smaller businesses.*

2. Those with activities, hobbies or routines appear to be more resilient than those without.

**Suggestion:** *If possible, the level of social prescribing should be increased and enhanced, to reach more residents and reduce isolation. While this will have a cost implication, the subsequent reduction in physical and mental health conditions may in fact benefit services in the longer to medium term.*

- *Offering community support through Mental Health groups and specialist services.*
- *Funding projects which benefit the local community.*

3. It is noted that those with existing mental health conditions will be much more impacted and at greater risk during the pandemic. Those in need of help don't necessarily seek it.

**Suggestion:** *We would urge services, GPs in particular, to identify those with a known mental health condition and check on welfare.*

*Reviewing systems in place and regular communication with vulnerable patients.*

*Additional:*

- *Family and friends have been identified as the biggest help and are the biggest connection. Schemes and projects that connect people and build on mutual aid groups.*
- *Low level support needed.*

## Wider Community: 6 Recommendations

1. The lockdown and shielding brings with it isolation on a large scale, perhaps unprecedented. One resident says “I live on my own and nobody has telephoned if I am ok except two neighbours in the beginning. I am scared”. This is not an uncommon account.

**Suggestion:** *The difficulty with social isolation is, there is no single organisation with ultimate responsibility - therefore it is crucial that agencies co-produce and work together, to find solutions. Those completely isolated are extremely hard to reach, nevertheless it should be possible to offer a ‘friendly knock on the door’.*

- *Developing and expanding the Hounslow Community Hub.*
- *As there are social prescribers in GP surgeries perhaps a similar role could be created in the Local Authority.*
- *Local Authority reviewing their databases and information on vulnerable people.*

2. Anxiety about contracting the virus is widespread, with just a quarter of people ‘not concerned’ about passing it on to others. Those who use public transport, work on the frontline, are shielding or have regular interaction with those shielding, have particular and justified concerns.

**Suggestion:** *We need to make the working and wider environment as ‘Covid Secure’ as possible. While this is difficult, and indeed challenging to implement and police, we recommend some level of visible, ongoing enforcement and review - not least to reassure the public.*

3. While food boxes are appreciated by many, we hear that some people have not been successful in cancelling unneeded deliveries, despite several attempts through various channels - resulting in waste.

**Suggestion:** *It should be possible for council and other services to provide a clear line of communication - to those in receipt of services. Additionally, people’s situations and needs change over time, so regular contact, if possible, would help to better target resources where needed.*

4. We hear that older people are feeling marginalised and ‘sidelined’, those from LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) communities are feeling vulnerable and isolated, and people from BAME backgrounds are feeling particularly uncertain and at risk.

**Suggestion:** *We would urge authorities and services to reinforce their links with identified groups, listen to any concerns and give meaningful reassurance and support.*

- *Ongoing communications with vulnerable groups of people should be established.*
- *Funding for local groups who are well established with these vulnerable groups.*
- *Reviewing funding strategies for the community.*

5. While services of all kinds are moving more online, we still receive accounts of people without access to computers, or the knowledge or inclination to use them.

**Suggestion:** *While it is acknowledged that digital services are effective and resourceful, we feel there should always be an alternative. It is simply the fact that ‘one size fits all’ systems result in the marginalisation of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.*

- *Services should be offering telephone consultations where possible.*
- *Services should be offering a variety of options considering accessibility.*

6. A sizeable minority of people (10%) say that information is not accessible to them.

**Suggestion:** *Ideally, information intended for the public should observe accessibility protocols on formatting and presentation. Any information considered to be especially important should also be offered in a range of accessible formats (e.g. plain text, clear images), as appropriate. Depending on the audience, use of plain wording, and translation into known community languages is also encouraged.*

- *2787 respondents said that they used WhatsApp. The Local Authority, HCCG and other providers should consider trialing some of these options.*

## BAME Communities: Wholesale Recommendation

Findings suggest that those from BAME communities are disadvantaged, and more vulnerable in a range of key areas - including health, living conditions, employment and financial security, and communication and information needs.

**Suggestion:** *As the evidence is clear and substantial, we recommend further investigation and review, to better understand and address issues and themes. Healthwatch Hounslow would like to be a core partner and stakeholder, in any such undertaking.*

## 14. Glossary of Terms

BAME	Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic
BSL	British Sign Language
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

## 15. Distribution and Comment

This report is available to the general public and is shared with our statutory and community partners. Accessible formats are available.

If you have any comments on this report or wish to share your views and experiences, please contact us.

Healthwatch Hounslow, 45 St. Mary's Road, Ealing, W5 5RG

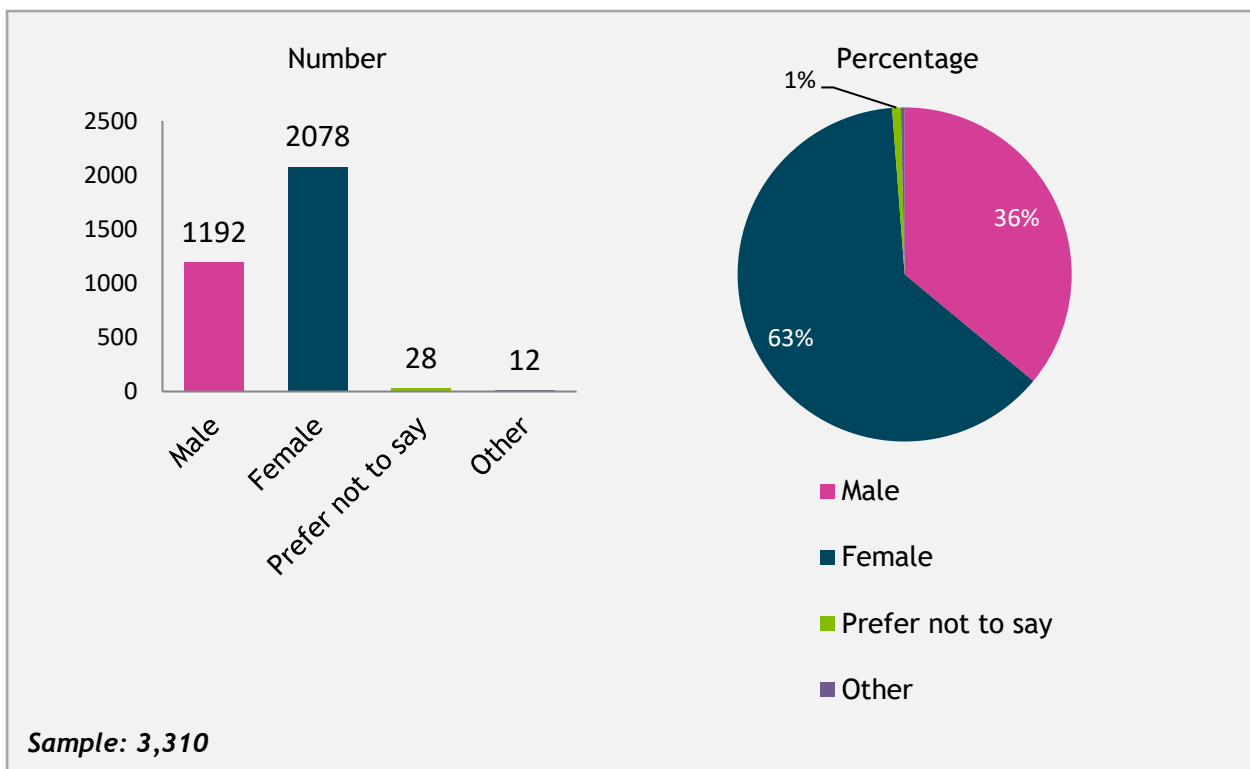
Telephone: 020 3603 2438

Email: [info@healthwatchhounslow.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchhounslow.co.uk)

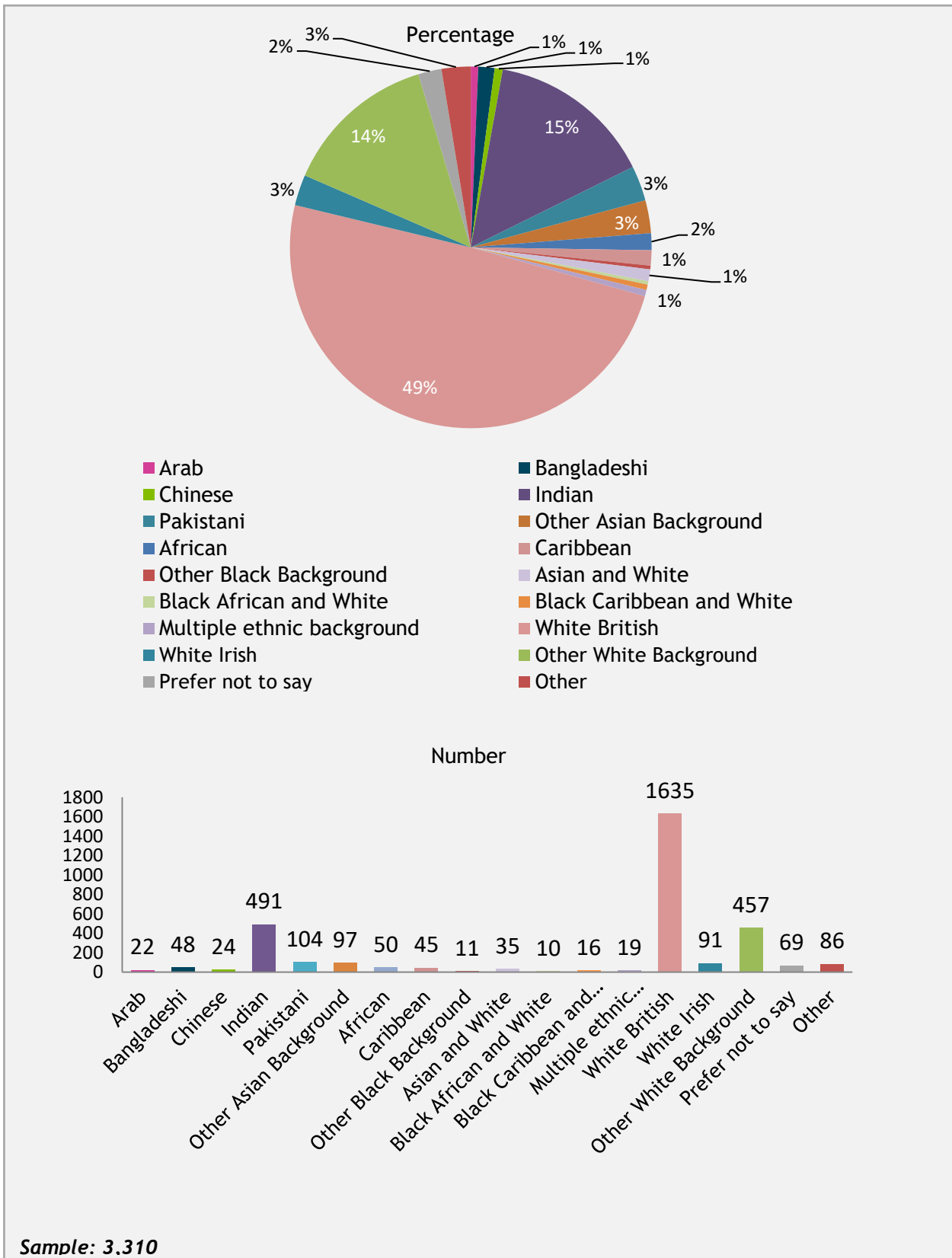
## Annex - Demographics

The stated demographics of participants are as follows.

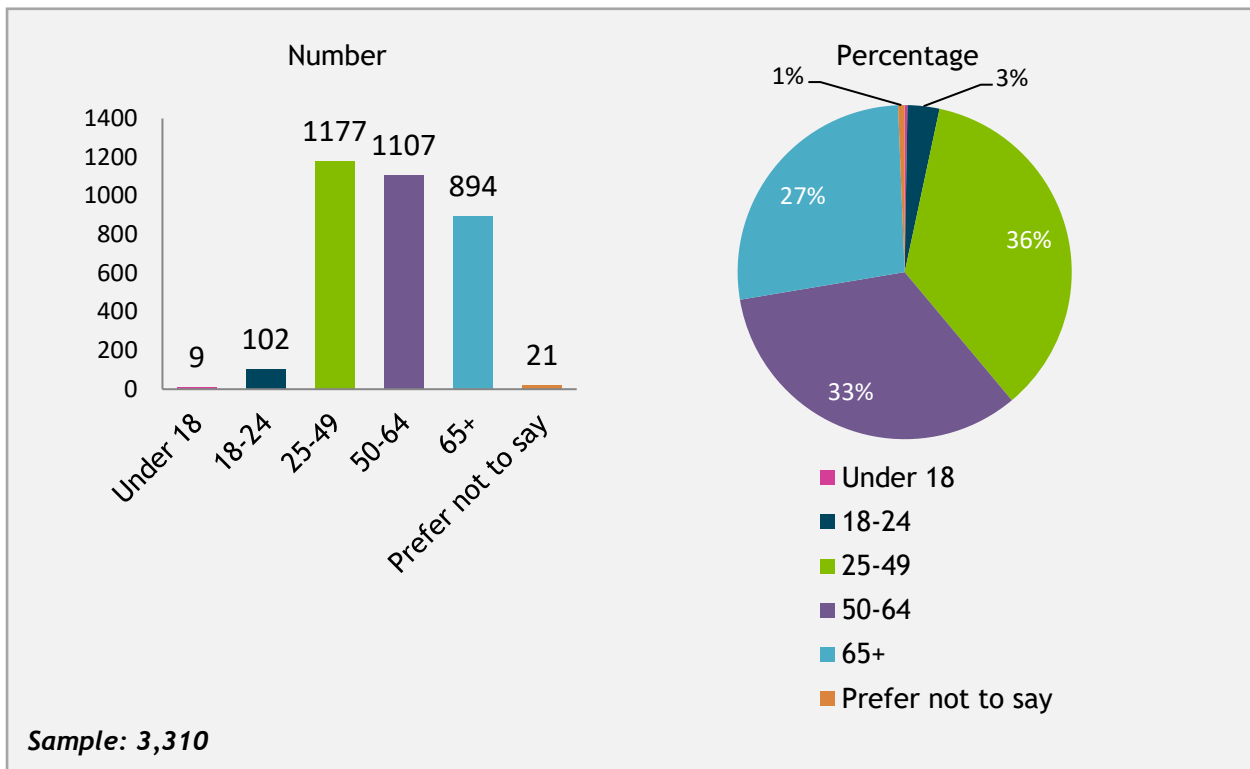
How would you describe your gender?



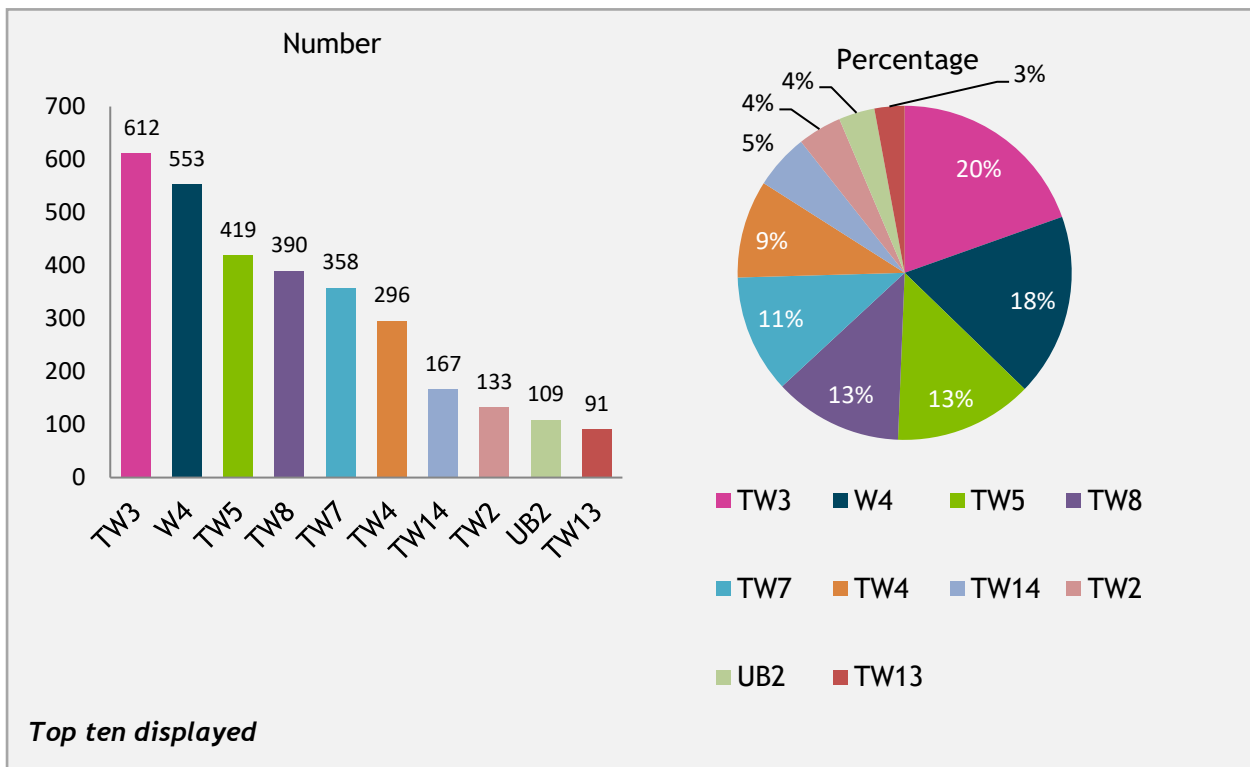
Please select your ethnic background:



## How old are you?



## Post Code Areas



“There's better air quality, since the outbreak. The biodiversity surrounding the borough has increased for better (I noticed I could see butterflies more often).

There is much more community spirit and kindness.

This period of time has given me time to re-evaluate what is important in my life.”

Local resident