

**May 2021**



**healthwatch**  
North Yorkshire

# **COVID-19 in North Yorkshire: December 2020 - March 2021**

A Summary of Public Feedback



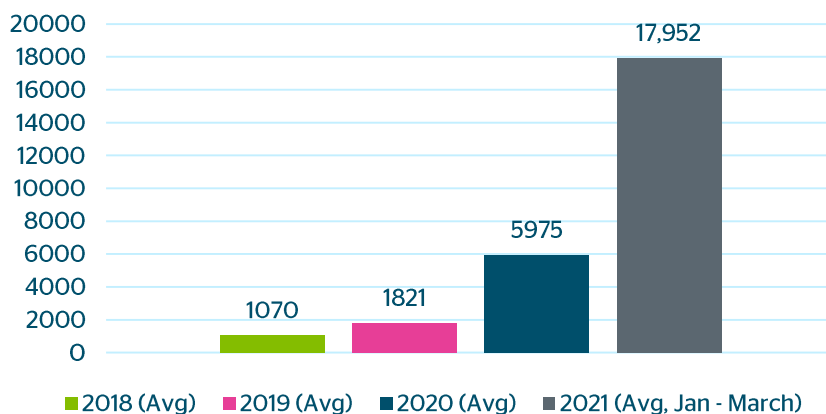
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## Introduction

It has been a very busy time for Healthwatch North Yorkshire since the last COVID-19 Briefing in November.<sup>1</sup> As we published the last COVID-19 Briefing we were just entering the third lockdown, and since then we have had the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccination programme across the country.

Monthly Average of Visits to Healthwatch North Yorkshire's Website by Year

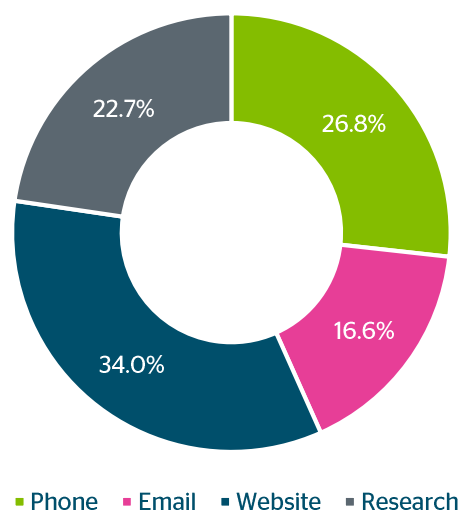


We have been working hard to ensure that we are able to keep members of the public across North Yorkshire informed in this particularly busy time. Due to the rapid roll-out of the vaccination programme, there has been many

questions from members of the public. We have received an unprecedented increase in the number of people visiting our website for the latest COVID-19 information, with a threefold increase since 2020.

We have continued to provide information and gather feedback through our phone-line, email, website, and research (including outreach) activities. A proportion of this feedback was in response to the [#BecauseWeAllCare](#) campaign. This campaign aims to help services identify and, more importantly, address issues people are experiencing

How we gathered our information from the public (December - March)

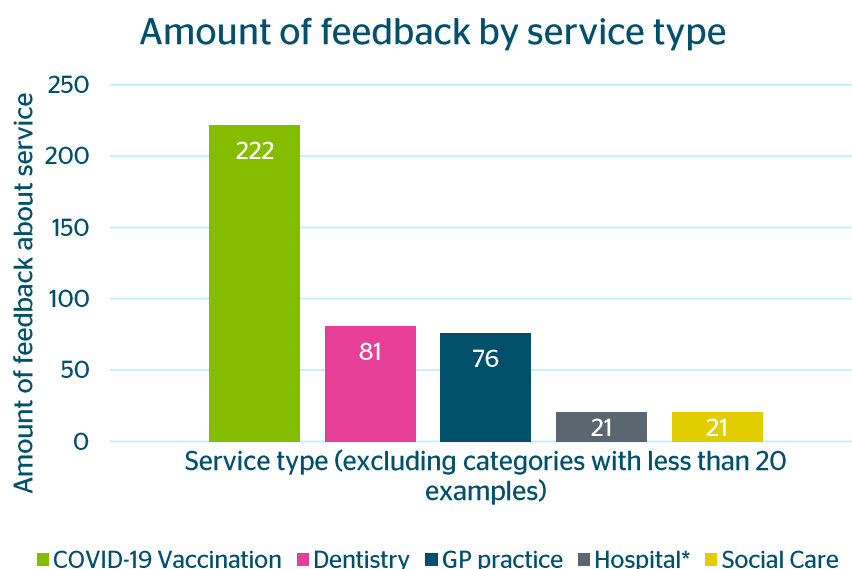


<sup>1</sup> Healthwatch North Yorkshire. 2020. [COVID-19 in North Yorkshire: July - November](#).

with their care. You can get involved with [#BecauseWeAllCare](#) by telling us your views about how health and social care support can be improved.

We have recorded 437 pieces of feedback and/or signposting in the four months of December 1<sup>st</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup>, hearing from 471 people.<sup>2</sup> Over half of these, 221, have been related to the COVID-19 vaccination programme, which demonstrates the desire from the public for information in this area.

Dentistry, and specifically the lack of NHS provision, continues to be an area of concern for us. With 81 recorded enquiries regarding this area, dentistry accounts for nearly one-fifth of our contact with members of the public. Feedback on GP practice care followed closely behind over this period, with 76 recorded pieces of feedback and/or signposting, however, some of this is connected to the GP-led vaccination programme.



In other areas that we have heard about, we have received feedback and/or signposted about hospital services 21 times (approximately; covers multiple service areas including A&E), 21 instances of social care (combined social services, residential and nursing care home, respite care, etc.). We have also received feedback about other services such as pharmacies but only in small volumes.

Making sure we hear from across all of North Yorkshire remains a challenge for us. In over a quarter (113) of cases we were not told which district the member of the public was in or the enquiries/feedback lacked sufficient detail to identify which specific service was being used to

<sup>2</sup> Due to the nature of feedback gathering and recording, we cannot identify the volume of unique contacts.

determine a location. Over one-third of our recorded feedback and/or signposting over this period has been from and/or about services in the Harrogate district.

A significant driver of this trend over the period was due to the initial confusion by the public over the Harrogate vaccine centre. We received many calls from people who had received their NHS invitation letter, and when they went to book an appointment were offered locations in York, Leeds, or further afield. This confused many as they were aware of the Harrogate Showground delivering the vaccine, and wanted to go there. When people called NHS 119 they were told that there was no vaccination centre in Harrogate. People also tried to contact the Harrogate Showground directly to enquire about the vaccine and they were provided with no information, nor did their website have any details.

We at Healthwatch North Yorkshire are beginning a review of how we collect our feedback and/or signposting and will develop a strategy to ensure we hear more equally across the seven districts of North Yorkshire over the coming year.



## Themes from North Yorkshire

### COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

The COVID-19 vaccination programme, having begun at the end of December, has been the most prominent issue which has arisen in our feedback gathering and signposting activities. The most frequently occurring topics raised through these contacts can be broadly separated into seven categories: lack of understanding of the booking system (60 pieces of recorded feedback and/or signposting); anxiety regarding when a person would be invited for a vaccine (55); people seeking general vaccine information (23); experiences, both positive and negative (22); confusion around the 2<sup>nd</sup> vaccination (20); which vaccine will be delivered (17); and questions over the priority groups (16).

#### *Anxiety regarding when*

The largest grouping of these calls, anxiety regarding when individuals would be invited to receive their vaccine, occurred predominately in January. We received large numbers of inquires asking when they (or an elderly relative) would be contacted for the vaccine. People were perturbed that they had not yet been contacted whilst hearing of other people being offered a first appointment who they felt were less of a priority.

My mother lives in Harrogate and is 96 and still awaiting a call for vaccine, yet where I live in Wetherby lots of people in their 80's have had their jab. Is it a GP lottery?  
- Website feedback, January, anonymous, Wetherby

It is understandable that people were very eager to receive their vaccination, with it being a potential route to us all returning to a normal way of life. However, the vaccination programme was and still is a massive undertaking, and despite consistent messaging that everyone will receive an invite, many members of the public were very worried about when they would be contacted. We have continued to reassure the public, asking them to be patient and to wait to be contacted.

#### *Confusion over the booking system*

One aspect that has increased anxieties around the COVID-19 vaccination programme, especially early on, has been a confusion around the dual strand approach for people being contacted and booking their

vaccination. The vaccination programme is being delivered nationally, by the NHS, and locally by GPs – and the two are largely separate.

The national invitation and booking system operates through large vaccination centres. When someone receives their letter from the NHS, they can book either online or through the NHS 119 number and book an appointment at one of the large vaccination centres – with ones in York, Leeds, Middlesbrough covering North Yorkshire, and many other places – as well as at associated pharmacies.

Whereas the local invitation and booking system operates via local vaccination centres, which are organised by GP practices. GP practices have worked together to organise the delivery, and have been contacting individuals when it is time for their first vaccination. Due to availability of vaccines being confirmed only a small period of time in advance, this has often been done at short notice with people being contacted by phone or text message.

Because these two systems are different, and often operating in parallel, many people have been frustrated to get their NHS invite to only be offered an appointment at a site a significant distance away, especially when they are aware of a vaccination centre that is much nearer.

The booking system is wholly inadequate. My 92 year old mother received her letter today (16th January) I went online to book her appointment. Despite the fact that she lives in central Harrogate and there are vaccinations being administered at the Yorkshire Showground the nearest venue offered was central Leeds. I phoned 119 to enquire if she could have her vaccine in Harrogate and was told the Show Ground venue was not NHS and couldn't be booked on the system. My mother now needs to be transported from Harrogate to Leeds and back twice.

- Website feedback, January, anonymous, Harrogate

We have learnt that for anyone who is unable or does not want to travel to a (national) large vaccination centre, that they should wait to be contacted by their GP practice. Although this information is made clear on the NHS invitation letter, we still received many enquires on this matter from people who did not know that they could expect an invitation from their local GP practice. As a consequence of this, they took up the national invitation, which impacted on their time, travel and anxiety levels.

### *Positive Experiences*

We received 22 pieces of feedback about personal experiences, the vast majority (17) of this was positive. Many praise the organisation and smooth running of the vaccination centres.

I had my first Covid-19 Pfizer vaccination yesterday at the Hambleton Forum in Northallerton.

The set-up there was very easy to follow, from parking (there are parking marshals on duty to help find parking slots including disabled parking), through checking in and actually having the vaccine administered.

Then a short 15-minute wait in the socially distanced 'post vaccination' waiting room to ensure there were no immediate adverse side effects. Then done and finished, all within 20 minutes.

The only side effect this morning is a slight ache in my arm which isn't a problem and is as stated in the leaflet given to those being vaccinated.

I look forward to receiving the second jab in circa 11 or 12 weeks.

If anyone is worried about going to the Forum for the jab, do not be worried! the staff are very reassuring and look after you really well.

A very big thank you to all the staff and volunteers at the Forum who were all friendly, reassuring, professional, helpful and above all cheerful.

- Website feedback, February, anonymous

The staff, many of whom are volunteers, are mentioned throughout the positive feedback, noted for their helpful and supportive actions.

In my 80's and just received 2nd dose, I wish to give my sincere thanks to the whole team at the Yorkshire Showground vaccination centre, for their overwhelming hard work, efficiency, care and understanding; all of which lead to such a smooth passage of so many people through the centre. I need a mobility scooter to move around, and I was supported at every turn: from where to park; offer of help to lift my 'chariot', to the swift whisking away of the chair positioned where I was needed. The layout ensures privacy, and aids safety.

- Website feedback, March, Anonymous

Some people contacted us just to share their thanks to those involved;

Just had my vaccination at Knaresborough. Lovely friendly team working there. Was busy at 8am this morning but a quick turnaround and well organised. Thanks to you all.

- Website feedback, March, anonymous

Despite the anxiety caused by unclear messaging at the start of the programme and confusion over the booking system, the vaccination programme has been a success so far.<sup>3</sup>

### *Priority groups*

The COVID-19 vaccination programme has used priority groups to ensure that those at most risk in the community were invited for a vaccination first. The government has been constantly reviewing the priority lists, and

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<sup>3</sup> Baraniuk, C. [Covid-19: How the UK Vaccine Rollout Delivered Success, so far](#). BMJ. 372 (n421) pp. 1-3



how it should best deliver the programme. Part of this has involved reconsidering what qualifies for inclusion within certain groups.

There has been much confusion about this (as noted in the previous section) and we have been asked about priority groups on many (16) occasions.

How do I find out whether my asthma and underlying health issues place me in cohort 6 or whether I will have to wait for my age group (53) to qualify? The information to asthma sufferers is woolly and unhelpful. We are told not to contact GP surgeries, but greater information on personal status would be helpful for me and others in the multitude of parameters in this group.

- Website feedback, February, anonymous

Whilst the government has published its priority group lists online, we have found that this has still created some confusion for people, trying to understand which priority group they were in. As an example, we have had four members of the public contact us believing they should be in Group IV, but after a conversation we were able to determine their conditions placed them in Group VI as they were considered clinically vulnerable (in Group VI) and not clinically extremely vulnerable (Group IV).

This has not been helped by the fact that the online list is not exhaustive. For example, adults (aged over 16) living in households with other adults who are severely immunosuppressed have been recommended by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) to be vaccinated alongside Group VI.<sup>4</sup> However, this is not included in the government website.<sup>5</sup>



In cases like this, we have found that people have been concerned as to how they will be categorised. We have received contact from three people in this period seeking clarification on this. The advice we have been giving to members of public regarding this is that if they believe they should be considered as a higher priority for reasons that their GP will be unlikely to be aware of (for example, unpaid carer or you live with a someone who is severely

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<sup>4</sup> NHS. 2021. [Letter to all GP practices and all CCGs: Vaccination of adult household contacts of severely immunosuppressed individuals alongside JCVI priority Cohort 6 and completion of Cohorts 1-9](#), 31 March.

<sup>5</sup> PHE. 2021. [COVID-19 Vaccination First Phase Priority Groups](#). 12 April. [Accessed: 21 April 2021].

immunosuppressed) then they should inform their GP so they can update their records. However, greater clarity on this would be beneficial. Including that this will not help individuals move to the front of the queue and they will still be required to wait along with everyone else in the current priority groups.

We were also made aware that priority Group VI was being prioritised by GP practices over priority Group V. This was determined nationally and put forward as it was felt that GP practices would have better relationships with the clinically extremely vulnerable in their local area.

### *Information*

The above demonstrates the difficulties people have faced sometimes in accessing information regarding the vaccination programme. We have been contacted by 23 people asking for information about the vaccination programme: such as if there are toilets at the vaccination centre, where is the parking, which entrance should be used, should they turn up in advance.



We have also heard from two people with autism distressed by the lack of information regarding the process and the inability to contact someone associated with the sites who can provide this information.

I suffer from bad anxiety, and due to autism along with a bunch of other stuff, I cannot cope with uncertainty, and the situation is making me really struggle. I don't like surprises, I get very stressed.

I don't like going somewhere and not knowing what is going to happen, I worry about not being able to communicate as I struggle with a mask.

It's a postcode lottery, and that doesn't help the anxiety. I don't like new technology, and I'm worried because I don't know which vaccine I'll get.

There doesn't seem to be the flexibility required to make sure people get the help they need. It's not person-centred, basically. If people don't know what's happening, then they're not going to get it. I want to take the vaccine, but I need to know [what will happen].

- Telephone, February, 25-49 year-old woman, Harrogate

We have also been asked for information about which vaccine will be provided to people, and in some cases people have asked what dates certain vaccines would be given at a given location. During this reporting period, the preference for Pfizer or AstraZeneca has varied and been split quite evenly among those who indicated a preference.

## *Second appointments*

Lastly, we have been contacted 20 times between January and March about second appointments. The shift from 3 to 12 weeks for the interval between first and second dose caused some confusion. We heard from five people concerned that they had not been given a second appointment, and a further eight people worried that they had not heard about their second appointment several weeks after their first dose.

Person rang concerned about their 2nd vaccination appointment. They said that their first invitation arrived by text message, and were able to book their 1st vaccination the next day. However, it is 10 weeks later and they have heard nothing and are experiencing anxiety at the moment.

- Telephone, March, anonymous, Ripon

Part of the concern that we heard about was from people not being given a second appointment after they had booked and/or received their first vaccination, and this made those who had to wait, worry that something had gone wrong. With those concerned that they had not yet been contacted for a second appointment, generally they were in the usual 4 to 10-week window for being contacted and were relieved to hear that they should be contacted soon. But we did receive one report from someone who had been contacted five days before their second dose was due - however they did receive their invite for their second appointment less than half an hour after calling us.

We also received four requests for information about how to change the location of a second appointment. If booked through the national NHS booking and invitation system, members of the public were able to go online and select an alternative large (national) vaccination centre. However, it is unclear how one would switch between NHS and GP led centres, or how to change your GP-led vaccination centre if you moved location - such as was the case for one person who contacted us who had recently moved into the county for their work as a live-in carer.



## Dentistry



Dentistry was a major issue in our last COVID-19 Briefing.<sup>6</sup> We produced an updated Dentistry Intelligence Briefing in February, where we looked at all dentistry-related feedback we had gathered over the 12-month period up to that point.<sup>7</sup> In that briefing we highlighted how there has been an increase in the concern around children's oral health, and we highlighted the importance to the public of accessing emergency treatment if needed by calling NHS 111.

### *Lack of NHS dentists*

The feedback received over the past four months has been predominately about the lack of dentists taking on NHS patients. Most of our dentistry feedback (54) in this period has been from people trying to access an NHS dentist, with many people having called dental practices across the county and beyond. One individual told us how they had contacted 40 dental practices with no luck:

I've spent hours ringing round 40 dentists in Tadcaster, Garforth, Kippax, Rothwell, Selby, Pontefract, Castleford, Airedale, Knottingley, Featherstone and Normanton and no one has any NHS places. Please can you help with information where there might be places available.

- Email, March, anonymous, Sherburn

In our October Dentistry Intelligence Briefing, we highlighted that people had been travelling large distances to access NHS dental treatment, and we continued to get an indication of this. People who move into North Yorkshire are unable to access NHS dentists locally, and many are forced to retain their previous dentist if they are able to travel.

I have to go back to my one dentist in Peterborough because I can't get one for 1.5 year in Selby so I've stayed with my old one, however it keeps moving my appointment.

- Email, December, anonymous, Selby

### *Waiting times for regular appointments*

The situation has been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. Dentists have had to spend longer between appointments to clean equipment, replace PPE, and ensure the safety of themselves, their staff, and

<sup>6</sup> Healthwatch North Yorkshire. 2020. [COVID-19 in North Yorkshire: July - November 2020](#).

<sup>7</sup> Healthwatch North Yorkshire. 2021. [Dentistry Briefing - February 2021](#).

ultimately their patients. NHS contracts have been re-organised to accommodate for this, with dental practices receiving their full contract award for seeing a lower number of patients.

Due to the pandemic dentists have been required to only fulfil 45% of their contract (but have received 100% of their funding); this has since been increased to 60% from April and is currently expected to last until September 2021.

Hopefully this increased provision to see more patients will mean more people will be able to see their dentist as an NHS patient for a regular appointment, but it remains the expectation that dentists will continue to prioritise those with the biggest needs and it will be some time before provision returns to previous levels – which was already insufficient.

I can't get an appointment despite having 3 cracked teeth.  
- #BecauseWeAllCare survey, February, 25-49 year-old woman

### *Private vs. NHS*

With a lack of NHS dentist provision available, people are being pushed towards private treatment, and this has been creating a lot of frustration. Whilst we know that NHS dentistry provision has been reduced due to COVID-19, we have heard from people who have called for an NHS place only to be told that there is a two and a half year waiting list (if offered a place at all), and then told that they could be seen privately sooner. This is causing a perception that dentistry is now a two-tier system: for those that can pay, and for those who cannot.

We have heard from many people who say they cannot afford to pay for private dentist treatment. We have heard from two expectant mothers who should be eligible for free treatment being unable to get access at all. We have heard from three people whose private treatment would cost in excess of £1,000, for one of these the expectant bill would be over £4,000. That access to necessary treatment is determined by one's ability to pay is something which causes annoyance:

What do you do? Just let your teeth rot? I thought the NHS was meant to cover this? Dentist told me to go private. At least £622. I'm living on a pension; I can't afford it! I've rung other dentists, but they're not even offering a waiting list.  
- Telephone, March, 65 to 79 year-old woman, Scarborough

### *Services closing*

Over the four months covering this briefing, we have heard of three dental practices that are going to stop providing NHS dentistry: one in

Scarborough, and two in the Selby district. The reasons vary, but this follows the withdrawal of a NHS dentist contract from a service in Ryedale which we highlighted in our previous COVID briefing. This is a concerning direction of travel for NHS dentistry in the region.

After raising the issue of the service withdrawal in Ryedale last year with NHS dentistry commissioners, alternative provision was made available in the area. We have been given reassurances the same will occur in Scarborough, and we hope for the same in the Selby district. Further to this, we will be working with NHS England and NHS Improvement to undertake public feedback across Scarborough to identify what a new NHS dental service in Scarborough would look like.

Whilst we welcome this opportunity to work together to see a new NHS dental service in the Scarborough district, we will do everything we can to ensure it helps as many people as possible, and we will continue to push to see improvements across the whole county.

### *Perfect storm for dentistry*

The situation regarding NHS dentistry has been a problem from many years, however the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these problems. This is largely an issue of funding and structure, with a national delivery and funding contract facilitated by NHS England, which over the years has restricted the ability to increase the level of dentistry provision.

The below quotes capture multiple aspects of the problems facing people in North Yorkshire: new to the area, family without dentistry coverage, long distances to get what access there is, pushed towards going private, long waiting lists, waiting lists closing, NHS website not fit for purpose, and fear the problem will only get worse as more families move into the area:

My family and I (4 adults) moved to Pickering, North Yorkshire in May 2019. We have been unable to access NHS dental care, despite being on local waiting lists.

In February 2020 I registered with a dentist and now make a 70-mile round trip to Great Ayton for dental care. The remaining 3 members of my family are on a waiting list for this dental practice. However new patients are not being currently accepted. My husband and son are looking to go private.

Our NHS dental practice in Pickering are not taking new patients and closed their waiting list in March 2020.

The NHS dental practice in our next village Kirkbymoorside has 800 patients on their waiting list and myself and my family members are also on this list.

My concern is that NHS dentistry is not available in the area having checked on the NHS website and made some telephone calls, no dentists are actually accepting new patients in the area and have even closed their waiting lists. In both Pickering and

Kirkbymoorside new housing is being developed and I question how families moving into these homes will receive NHS dental care.

- #BecauseWeAllCare survey, February, 50 to 64 year-old woman, Pickering

We would encourage members of the public in North Yorkshire to keep contacting us about dentistry. Your voices give us the ability to demonstrate the need for change to those with the power to make change happen. It may be difficult, but as we hear from more of you, the more the case becomes stronger.



**healthwatch**  
North Yorkshire



**GET IN TOUCH!**

## GP Practices

Nearly a fifth (76) of the feedback we have gathered between December and March involves GP practices. Some of this is due to the prominent role GP practices have had in delivering the COVID-19 vaccination rollout. We have received a mix of positive (21) and negative (33) experiences, with appointments (13) and access (13) being regular themes, waiting times on phone lines was mentioned by only 3 contacts but is something we are aware has been an issue across the county due to large call volumes and staff shortages, both due to COVID-19.

### *Positive experiences*

Over a quarter of the feedback regarding GP practices (27.6%) has been positive. This feedback has been filled with comments such as 'excellent', 'superb', and 'pulled out all the stops'. Characteristic among these positive feedbacks are quick and responsive GP practices, doing their best to care for their patients.

I am 85 and have found my GPs; my physio nurses; and the hospital staff, are all very caring and helpful. They all work together in that each communicates their findings, and suggestions for any changes that may be helpful towards my health and well-being, to the other service providers. Who in turn make the changes after discussing them with me. NHS at it's normal, which is the best!

- #BecauseWeAllCare survey, December, 80+ year-old man

I received an invitation for a Well Woman check at my GP surgery. During this assessment, the nurse was excellent. She took my blood pressure, pulse, discussed my general health including smoking and alcohol use and took blood. The blood showed raised cholesterol levels which they immediately followed up with me giving me the options available. This has alerted me to aspects of my lifestyle and diet which are detrimental to my health and enabled me to address these before more serious problems arise. I am very grateful for this wake up call.

- #BecauseWeAllCare survey, March, 65 to 79 year-old woman, Scarborough

### *Negative experiences*

Unfortunately, over two-fifths (43.4%) of our GP practice feedback was negative. These are characterised by user stories of patients not receiving the correct diagnosis, feeling like staff do not care, and struggling to communicate with the GP practices.

Had several run-ins with rude receptionists and nurses. In fact it's got so I hesitate to ring them even when quite ill.

- #BecauseWeAllCare survey, January, 65 to 79 year-old man



Access and appointments have been common themes; we have been told about difficulties in reaching GP practices.

Woman: I agree with [other focus group participant], the way they treat people is just shocking. I'm with [GP practice] as well and you just cannot get into the building. The lights are off, the blinds are down and even if you do get in, the reception has its shutter down and they only open it slightly to speak to you. I'm going to move practice when COVID is over because of all this.

I suffer with chronic pain and it is really bad recently but I don't ring because I would get no further than a phone call. There is no point, the doctors don't seem to give a toss.

HWNY facilitator: Have you always found [GP practice] to be this way or is it because of covid and lockdown?

Woman: It has got worse since lockdown and I know somebody else who is thinking of changing doctors from them as well. If you ring to speak to a GP, a nurse rings you and then they wonder why people are so frustrated. Yes COVID is awful and stressful and has killed a lot of people but our other illnesses do not stop just because of covid.

- Focus Group with disability group, March, Selby

We are also aware of significant issues for members of the public trying to get through to their GP practice through their phone line. A number of GP practices placed information on their websites in the early months of this year saying they were experiencing big delays on their phone line due to staff illness, and increased call volume as a result of the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Cannot get through and when they rang they rang my mobile asking me to book an appointment for breathing problems. This was November 2020, no appointments till February, rang them to be 98<sup>th</sup> in the queue. I've left it, as cannot go through all the waiting, knowing I won't get anywhere.

- #BecauseWeAllCare survey, February, 50 to 64 year-old woman, Scarborough

From this feedback gathered between December and March, 14 people have asked for our support in making a complaint about their GP practice.

82

GP practice websites reviewed  
by our volunteers

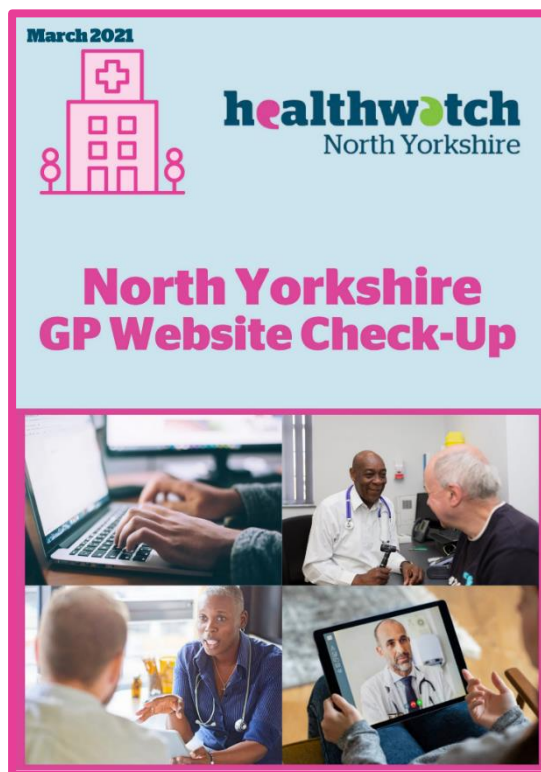
In March we publish our *North Yorkshire GP Website Check-Up*<sup>8</sup> report, where we reviewed 82 GP websites to assess if their information was up-to-date and how accessible their websites were in general. We found only half of GP websites made it easy to find out how to make a complaint.

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<sup>8</sup> Healthwatch North Yorkshire. 2021. [North Yorkshire GP Website Check-Up](#).

Whilst there were other areas in need of improvement among some GP practices, we also found some examples of good practice for supporting patients. For example, our volunteers liked GP practice websites with clear information around how to make an appointment and what to expect, and useful tips such as the best times to call to book an appointment.

We are currently working with commissioners and Primary Care Networks to bring improvements for members of the public in North Yorkshire, and we are seeking to work closer with Patient Participation Groups to help get patient voices heard.



## Other feedback

In this final section we cover other feedback that we have received on areas that do not occur frequently enough to justify their own section, but are relevant and important.

### *Hospitals*

We received 21 pieces of feedback relating to hospitals between December and March. Within these, 7 were about positive experiences or comments, 5 were negative experiences or comments, 5 raised the issue of long waiting times, 2 about long travel distances, and 2 included feedback about being unhappy with being unable to see family or loved ones in hospital due to COVID.



I am waiting for an appointment with a neuropsychologist to do a functional test to try and identify what interventions might help with my dysdiakansia at Airedale so that I can physically and mentally function better. I was referred by neurologist in Feb and told there was about a 9 month waiting list.

I spoke to the department last week after my GP contacted them on my behalf to see how much the waiting list had been extended because of Covid. I was told it was likely to be another 9 months as the service had been closed for 6 months.

- #BecauseWeAllCare survey, December, 65 to 79 year-old man

### *Social Care*

We have received 22 pieces of feedback relating to social care services (nursing, residential, respite care, domiciliary, etc.). Six of these have been positive comment and feedback, and only two negative.

Excellent support to enable dad to stay at home. Whilst supporting me to continue to work and look after him.

- #BecauseWeAllCare survey, January, 50 to 64 year-old woman

Five pieces of feedback have been in regards to COVID-19, with one being unhappy about not being able to visit family and loved ones, one enquiry about COVID-19 outbreaks in homes, and another about the vaccination of staff, two have raised concerns about staff pressures to undermine infection prevention and control measures:

I have needed the help of carers to enable me to continue to live in my own home for many years. I have no problem with my current carers, but I am becoming increasingly concerned about the management decisions regarding the rules about Covid-19.

Last week one of my carers said that she had been a contact of someone outside her work setting who had tested positive for Covid-19. She had called 119. They told her to get tested and not to work until the test result came back negative. Her employer told her to ignore 119, as they were far too cautious, and to continue working as normal.

I refused to allow her into my home until her test result came back negative. I am even more anxious this week. One of my regular carers told me that another carer, who is employed by the same company tested positive.

When she told her employer of her Covid-19 positive result she was told to continue working. She was told the only change she needed to make was to wear two masks instead of one and then she should continue with her usual calls, which include personal care for Clinically Extremely Vulnerable clients.

With Domiciliary Carers knowingly going into the homes of some of the most vulnerable when they know they are COVID-19 positive how can we ever be expected to get this virus under control?

The carers are too scared of losing their employment to complain about this.

- #BecauseWeAllCare survey, February, 65 to 79 year-old woman

We also received four contacts from members of the public asking for help in negotiating the social care landscape. In each of these cases the person or their loved one's circumstances had changed and they were now needing changes in help as a result of this, with potentially significant financial obligations.

I recently lost a spouse (COVID-19), and I am struggling to manage my routines. I am looking for information so I can get social care support.

- Telephone, December, 65 to 79 year-old woman, Ripon

The need for support from social care services is likely to be increased during the 'COVID recovery': people will have lost loved ones; inactivity will have caused deconditioning; and there is fear of a mental health crisis on the horizon.<sup>9</sup> Making sure the information on how to navigate services is easily accessible is going to be important and something that we will endeavour to help with.

### *Mental Health Services*

Following on from the strains that members of the public will be facing requests for signposting in regards to mental health services. None of these pieces of feedback reported positive experiences. These were mainly about poor quality of support provided (6), seeking help with complaints (3), and asking for help to find support (2).

Member of public was in touch to complain about the quality of their appointment at the local Mental Health Service. They have long-term health conditions and they are working hard to get their education. After their college changed their educational plan

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<sup>9</sup> Abbott, A. 2021. [COVID'S Mental-Health Toll: Scientists Track Surge in Depression](#). Nature. 590 pp. 194-195.

it has negatively affected their mental health and they are now suffering from anxiety and depression.

They are finding it very difficult to get access to mental health services, because it is a long waiting time, and, once they offered an appointment it was administrative only. They have been trying since October to get professional help and it is having a massive impact on all aspects of their life. They would like to escalate a complaint.

- Telephone, December, 18 to 24 year-old woman, Harrogate

### Pharmacies

We received only seven pieces of feedback regarding pharmacies between December and March. All positive, with pharmacy staff being praised for being knowledgeable, helpful, and well organised.

My husband and I have regular prescriptions delivered to our local pharmacy. The process of ordering from our GP online is easy, quick and efficient. We had our flu jabs there - quick and comfortable. The staff are friendly and well organised; the pharmacists are helpful, knowledgeable and always ready to reassure.

- #BecauseWeAllCare survey, January, anonymous



## Conclusion

A year on from the start of the pandemic, we see that the impact of COVID-19 on people's lives and services continues to change. As the pressure from COVID-19 has changed, so has our responses. With the continued roll-out of the vaccine programme, there is light at the end of the tunnel that we may be moving towards a new equilibrium.

The vaccination programme, the largest of its kind in the nation's history, triggered a flurry of activity. The NHS and GP practices organised themselves to deliver the vaccine under immense pressure, in short timeframes and variable supply. They responded heroically well to the challenge. Whilst many members of the public were concerned at the start of the vaccine programme, and there still remains some levels of impatience, the messages we hear at Healthwatch North Yorkshire have become mainly positive. Also, a note of thanks and appreciation should go out to the many hundreds of volunteers who have helped to make the vaccination rollout a real success.

Dentistry remains a serious problem in the region. The pandemic has only exacerbated an already fragile situation of dentistry provision across the county. Hopefully we will begin to see improvement over the next few months as contractual expectations require an increase in the delivery of NHS dentistry. It is likely, however, that it will be a long time before dentistry is meeting the needs all residents in North Yorkshire. We will continue to focus on this in the coming months.

As we continue to see improvements in infection rates and hospitalisations, the roadmap out of lockdown will continue to see the easing of restrictions. The people of North Yorkshire will be able to return to many of the activities of their daily lives. Health and social care services will move closer to operating as they did before the pandemic. There are a lot of unknowns as we move into a 'COVID recovery' which will undoubtedly create new and renewed health and care concerns for the public. As the independent champion for people using health and social care services across North Yorkshire, we will continue to make sure people's voices are heard by those with the power to make change happen.

As lockdown restrictions continue to ease, the people of North Yorkshire and the health and social care services they use will hopefully return to familiar ways of operating as before the pandemic.



Healthwatch North Yorkshire would like to thank everyone who has contacted us, left feedback, or participated in our research and engagement activities. Our work is supported by the amazing efforts of our volunteers. We will continue to gather feedback and help support patients and the public across North Yorkshire.



# healthwatch

## North Yorkshire

Healthwatch North Yorkshire is an independent charity commissioned by North Yorkshire County Council to carry out statutory duties.

The Healthwatch Network was established under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf.



### Share your views with us

If you have a query about a health and social care service, or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch is here for you.

**Website:** [www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk)

**Telephone:** 01904 552687

**Email:** [admin@hwny.co.uk](mailto:admin@hwny.co.uk)



### Find out more about us and the work we do

**Website:** [www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk)

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