



# Newcastle Outer West PCN patient survey

## About Healthwatch Newcastle

Healthwatch Newcastle is of 152 local Healthwatch organisations established throughout England on 1 April 2013 under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. We are the independent voice and champion of users of a range of NHS services and social care for adults, children and young people. We have a dual role to champion the rights of users and to hold the system to account for how well it engages with the public.

We collect feedback on services from people of all ages and communities. We do this through our network of voluntary and community sector organisations and during events, drop-in sessions and listening events at a range of venues across Newcastle. We also gather views online through the feedback centre on our websites, via social media and from callers to our information and signposting helpline. As part of the remit to gather views, we also have the power to ‘enter and view’ services and conduct announced and unannounced visits.

Healthwatch Newcastle is part of Tell Us North CIC (company no. 10394966).

Author: Healthwatch Newcastle

Publication date: May 2021

© Tell Us North 2021

# Contents

Introduction .....	1
Methodology.....	1
Survey findings.....	4
Questions .....	4
Summary of key findings .....	15
Acknowledgements.....	16
Contact details.....	17

## Introduction

In spring 2020 Newcastle GP Services contacted Healthwatch Newcastle to ask us to help develop and deliver a survey for all GP patients (54,000) of the Outer West Primary Care Network.

Primary Care Networks (PCNs) are groups of GP practices working closely together. Their focus is often on preventing ill health and tackling health inequalities. PCNs do this by improving access to social prescribing programmes, mental health support, physiotherapy, and other services. The Newcastle Outer West PCN includes:

- Denton Park Medical Group
- Denton Turret Medical Centre
- Newburn Surgery
- Parkway Medical Group
- Throckley Primary Care Centre
- Westerhope Medical Group

The six practices wanted to learn from patient experiences and better understand what will work for patients as the PCN continues to develop its services. All practices have had to significantly change how they support patients due to the COVID-19 pandemic and they wanted to know the impact of this on their patients. This report summarises the survey's findings.

## Methodology

Healthwatch Newcastle and the Newcastle Outer West PCN worked very closely to develop both the survey and communications and engagement plan. The high number of survey respondents who completed the survey reflects the success of this approach.

We agreed that the main survey would be online, using SurveyMonkey, and a hard copy version was also created. During autumn 2020 Healthwatch drew up a draft survey based on questions provided by the PCN, which was shared with PCN representatives. Further amendments and additions were incorporated and the final version was ready by December. However, all agreed that the Christmas period was not a good time to promote a survey and so the launch was deferred. The survey went live on Monday 18 January 2021 and remained open until Friday 12 February.

The survey was intensively promoted by Healthwatch Newcastle and the PCN, using a wide variety of communication methods and platforms including:

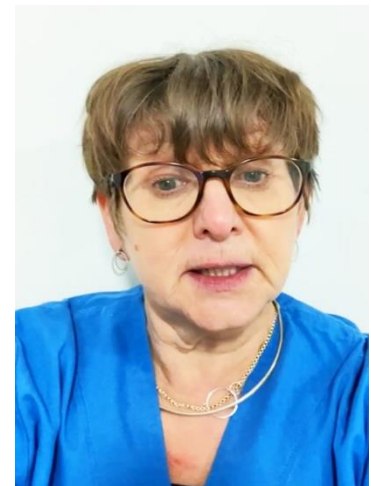
- Active promotion on all Healthwatch Newcastle's social media platforms, its website and in its newsletters. The survey was also promoted on third-party platforms and local Facebook groups.

- A postcard was created to promote the survey. The postcard was particularly important for digitally disadvantaged communities as it offered telephone support to complete the survey.

Copies of the postcard and hard copies of the survey were delivered to all surgeries and key pharmacy locations.



- Healthwatch Newcastle contacted local community groups, charities, resident groups and patient participation groups to promote the survey and share the survey weblink.
- The survey weblink and supporting information were also shared with all care homes located within the Outer West area.
- Dr Joughin (pictured), a GP at Throckley Primary Care Centre, made a promotional video that was shared with Healthwatch Newcastle and GP surgeries for promotion on their social media platforms and websites.
- The PCN funded an incentivising prize draw of ten £25 shopping vouchers for people completing the survey.
- GP surgery staff were briefed by the PCN to support the promotion and received regular emails to maintain momentum.
- The PCN promoted the survey through members of the PCN Team, pharmacy staff and via Social Prescribing Link Workers.
- Text about the PCN was added to each surgery website to help reinforce the message.



There were 1,390 respondents to the survey. We are very happy with this number, which represents just over 2.5% of the total patient population. It is an acceptable response rate for this type of survey, especially given the short turnaround period and the fact that it took place during a COVID-19 lockdown, when there were limited opportunities for promotion.

Just under 71% of survey respondents were female and just over 30% were male, meaning male views were underrepresented in the results. The age spread was better:

Age	% of respondents
18–24	2.86%
25–49	33.49%
50–64	45.23%
65–79	16.60%
80+	1.53%

Just under 19% of respondents described themselves as having a disability. However, the ethnicity spread was a concern; over 97% of respondents described themselves as White British. Likewise, people with a different sexuality were also underrepresented; 95.5% of respondents described themselves as heterosexual.

The underrepresentation of certain groups may be due to the impact of current restrictions on our usual working practices. In normal circumstances, we would actively seek out the views of minority communities and other ‘hard to reach’ groups. Although we promoted the survey widely and shared the link with many local groups and communities, our more proactive engagement work (getting ‘out there’ and physically talking to people) was not possible during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Another area of concern is the fact that patients from one practice (Denton Park Medical Group) responded in much higher numbers than patients from the other five. This will affect the validity of the report’s findings for the other surgeries:

GP practice	% of respondents
Denton Park Medical Group	63.10%
Denton Turret Medical Group	4.46%
Newburn Surgery	8.56%
Parkway Medical Centre	10.16%
Throckley Primary care centre	4.81%
Westerhope Medical Group	7.13%
None of the above	1.78%

Not all respondents completed this survey question – it was made mandatory once we realised it was an issue. The practices are not all of an equal size, however, neither of these points explain away the disproportionate number of responses from Denton Park Medical Group. We must assume that the survey was more actively promoted to Denton Park patients.

These issues, plus the fact that 1,390 people responded (a good figure but still a small sample size) means that we cannot say the findings are a true reflection of the experiences of all GP patients in Newcastle Outer West PCN. What we can say is that they are the views, experiences and issues of the 1,390 people who completed the survey. The

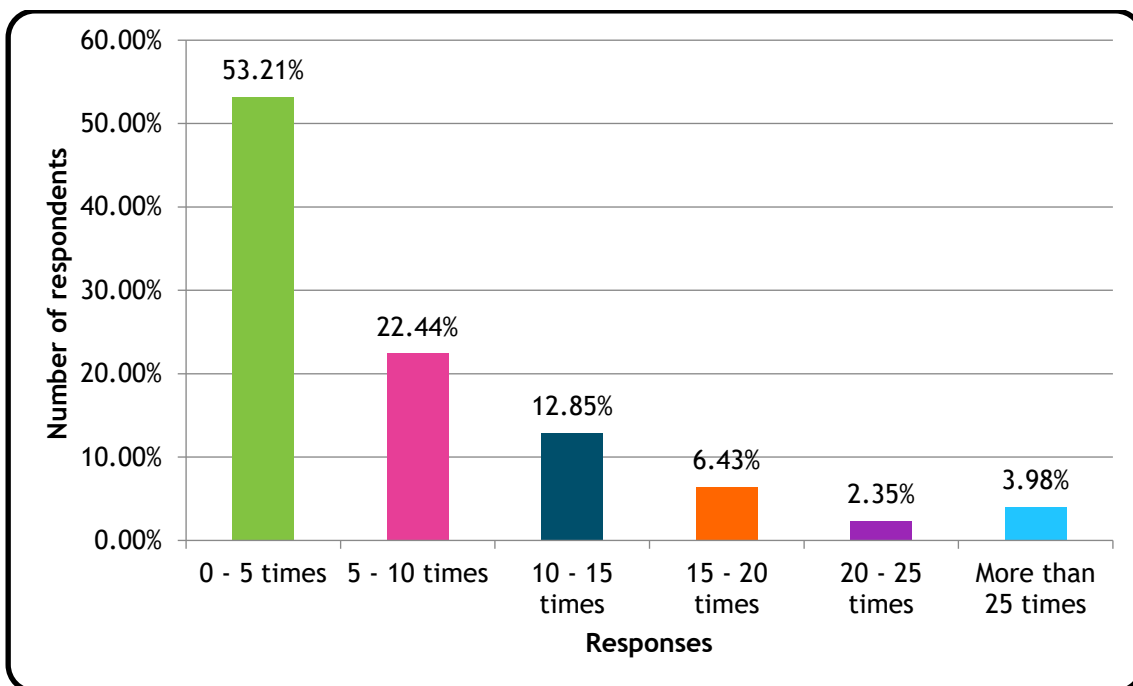
underrepresentation issue of certain communities and some surgeries' patient populations, requires further, more targeted, engagement.

## Survey findings

The survey contained both open and closed questions and the results are summarised below. The closed question responses are presented in graph form alongside explanatory text. The open question results have been themed based upon points that were raised by several respondents. We also identified the number of times they were mentioned – you will notice that these numbers do not add up to 1,390. This is because some people identified several issues in a single response, while others chose not to answer all the questions. Finally, we have included some direct quotes which we hope will add meaning and depth to our findings.

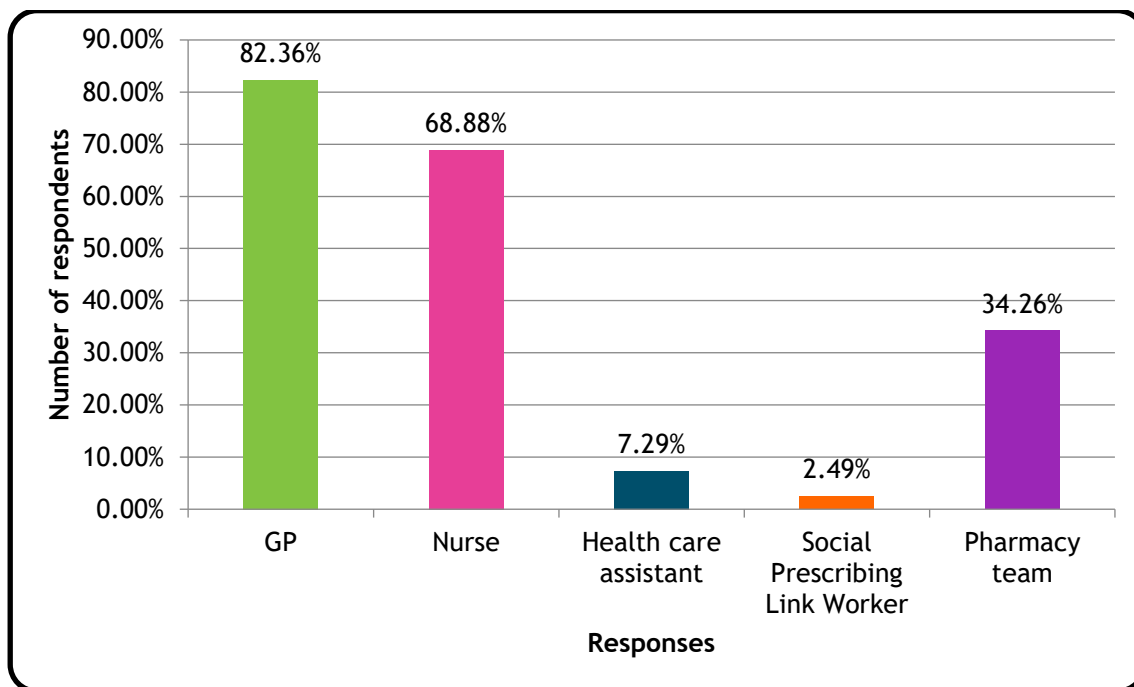
## Questions

### 1. How often have you contacted your surgery in the last year?



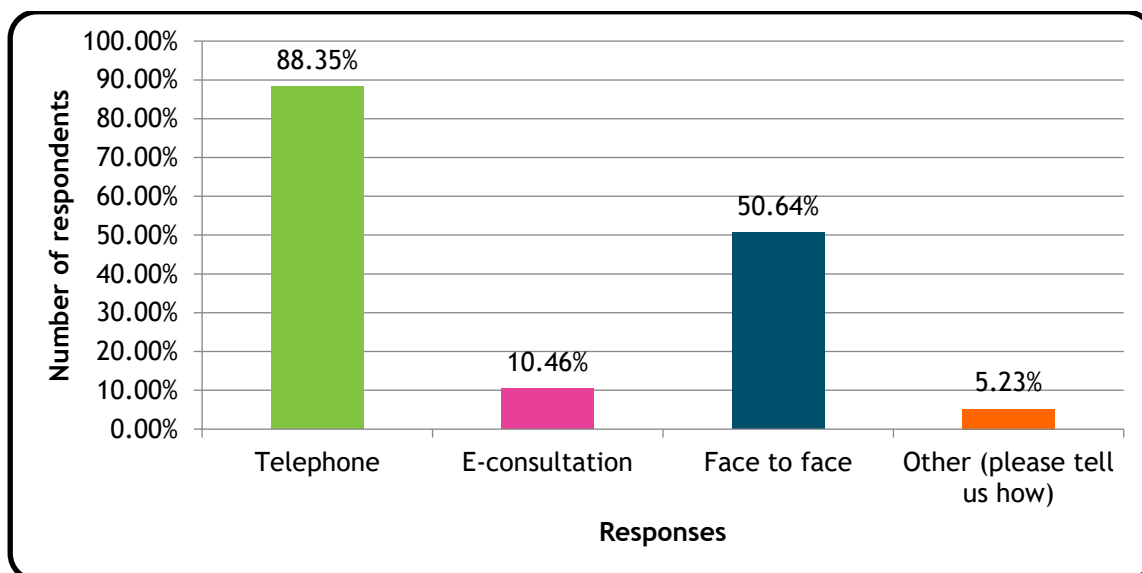
The results show that over 53% of respondents contacted their surgery between 0–5 times during the last year and a further 22.5% between 5 – 10 times. After which the numbers fall rapidly until they rise slightly to almost 4% of respondents contacting their surgery more than 25 times in the last year.

## 2. Please tell us which services you have used.



Over 82% of people who had an appointment during the last year saw their GP and 69% saw a nurse. The results for the other services are much lower, with only 2.5% of people using the Social Prescribing service. It would be interesting to compare these results with pre-pandemic ratios to see if there have been significant changes.

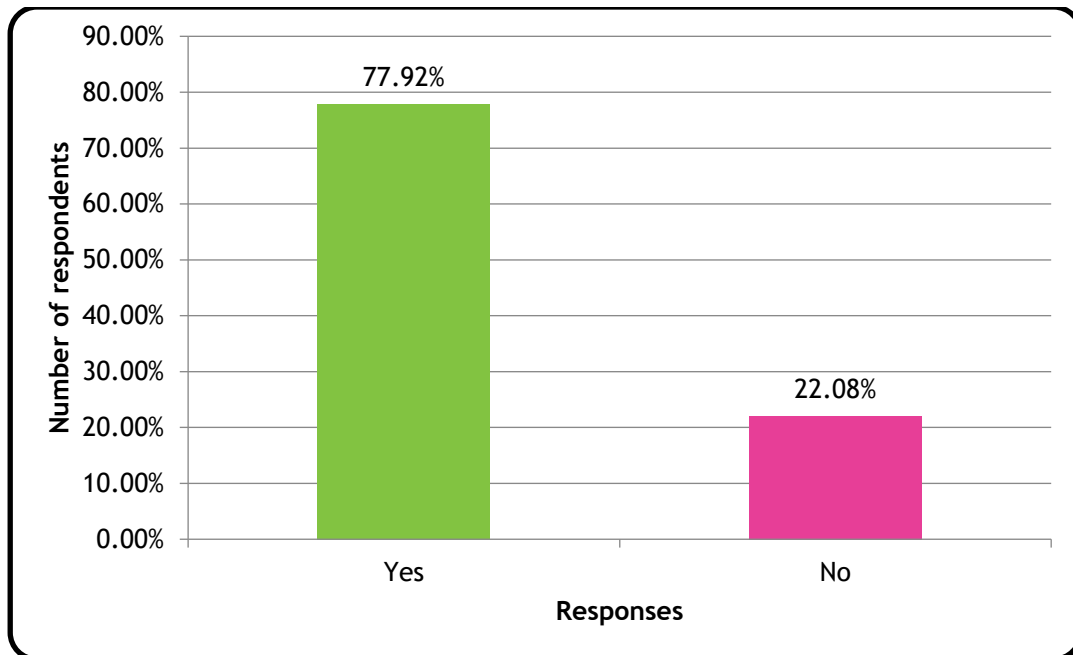
## 3. How did you access those services?



Telephone appointments were by far the most common method for patients to access care. Over 88% of respondents had taken part in a telephone consultation. More surprisingly, over 50% of respondents indicated they had had a face-to-face consultation, belying the idea that face-to-face consultations are not currently available. The number of e-consultations (just over 10%) was surprisingly low. However, what is not apparent from this data is whether this is due to a lack of availability or lack of demand.

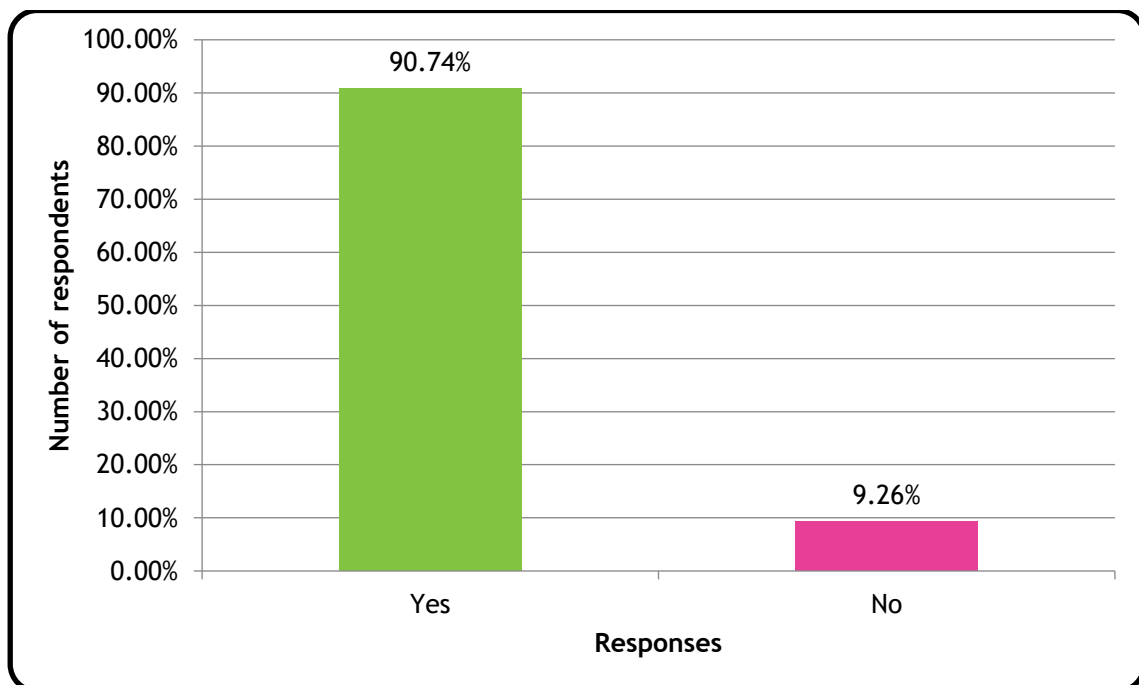


4. When you contacted the surgery, did you know which member of the practice team you needed to get help from?



This positive response indicates that most (almost 78%) respondents knew who they needed to see when they contacted the surgery for help.

5. Were you then transferred to the most appropriate person to meet your needs?



Again, this is a very positive response with over 90% of respondents stating that when they contacted the surgery they were transferred to the most appropriate person to meet their health needs.

## 6. Please tell us what you have found helpful when using a service available through your GP surgery.

There were 846 responses to this question, the highest responses rate for any of the open-ended questions. As the table below shows, the point raised most often relates to the helpfulness and efficiency of staff and clinician. In other words, people felt that they were getting the help they need. Respondents also commented on how accessible services were and they particularly appreciated the systems in place for ordering prescriptions. The approachability of staff and the quality of care received also scored very highly.

You will notice that the table includes only points that were raised more than ten times. This is because of the large numbers and the wide range of responses. Responses have been themed but to have included points raised less often would have resulted in a list of over thirty points.

Points raised more than ten times	Times mentioned
Helpfulness and efficiency of staff and clinicians	157
Ease of access	100
Telephone and online systems for ordering prescriptions	97
Friendliness and understanding of staff and clinicians	89
Professionalism, knowledge and standard of care	80
Telephone consultations and call-backs	72
Speed and responsiveness of service	68
Online appointments	32
Online booking of appointments	32
Telephone triage and seeing the right person	23
Nursing service	21
Accommodating my needs	14
A COVID-safe environment	14

What people told us:

**“All staff are very helpful, respectful and go above and beyond their duty to meet the care needs of their patients.”**

**“Always an amazing experience the team are professional, very friendly and helpful.”**

**“Explained on phone how I was feeling and was put through to the right person. Much prefer the new system of telephone consultations.”**

**“I find the e-consultation service much easier; you can provide them with everything they need to know so when they phone you the Dr has an idea of your problem.”**

**“Quick appointments, on the day service.”**

**“The e-consult option is brilliant it saves waiting on the phone to get through and is very efficient service.”**

## 7. Please tell us which services you feel could be improved and how

There were 766 responses to this question. Of those, 225 people stated that there were no services they felt could be improved meaning only 541 of the responses relate to services that need improving. The table below shows that respondents expressed the greatest concern about systems for contacting the surgery and making an appointment. This is not surprising and replicates the findings of many previous surveys. More surprising, especially given the results from the question above, were the number of concerns about prescription ordering.

The issues people raised about online services are also a concern, particularly at the moment. However, in part, they appear to reflect the different levels of online access available in the different surgeries taking part in the survey. Some people complained that online services were just not available to them, while for others the issue was more about their ability to get online and/or their confidence in using online services.

Points raised ten or more times	Times mentioned
Contacting the surgery via telephone	106
Appointment systems	100
Systems for ordering prescriptions	67
Online facilities (lack of, complexity, problems with)	48
Staff attitudes and communication skills	41
Access to clinicians (including waiting times)	30
Telephone appointments and call-backs	24
More face-to-face appointments	23
More, better, simpler information about services	19
Better mental health services	15
Better referral and follow up systems	10

What people told us:

“Telephone lines – often constantly engaged for long periods or ring for a long time before answered.”

“Appointment times, I have to ring at 8.00 in a morning and it is difficult when I work full time and can’t always get to a phone and if I ring when I get time there’s no appointments left for that day. Don’t really look after people who work full-time.”

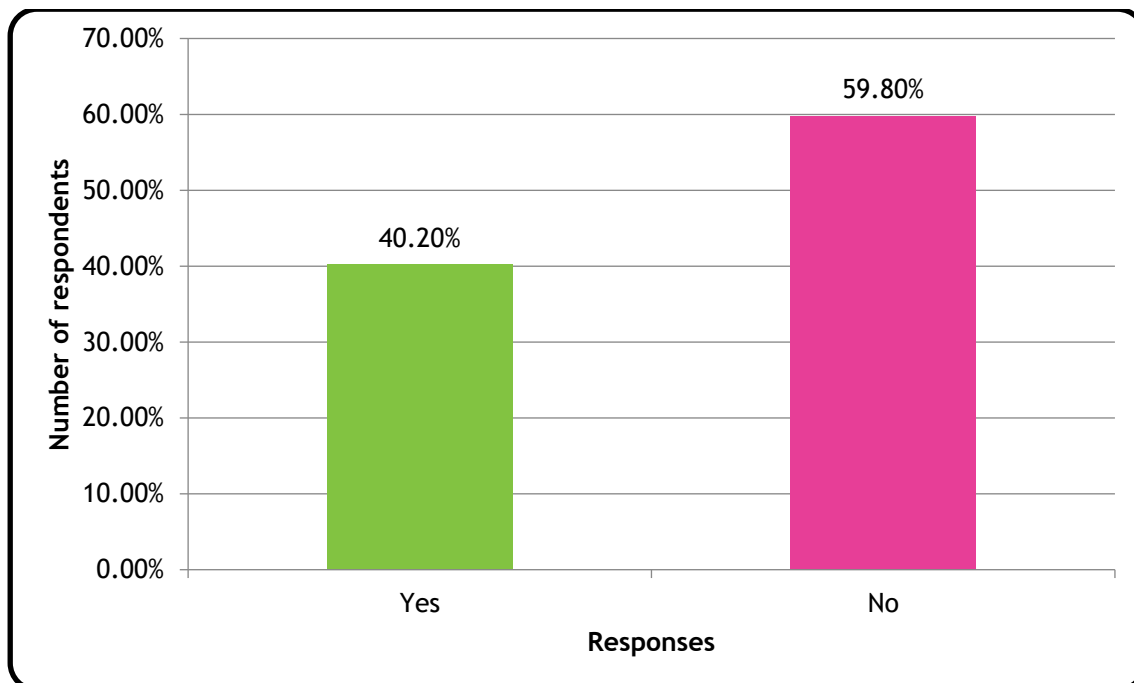
“Telephone appointments feel very difficult.”

“Repeat prescriptions are terrible now, I have to have medication that I take daily, I used to be able to get a three months’ supply now I get 28 days.”

“Receptionist (not all) could be kinder and less patronising and not so much in a hurry to get you off the phone and take time to actually listen. “

“Online registration access. I would like to register for online access to get access to my medical records/blood test results etc, however, I was informed this wasn't possible during the pandemic.”

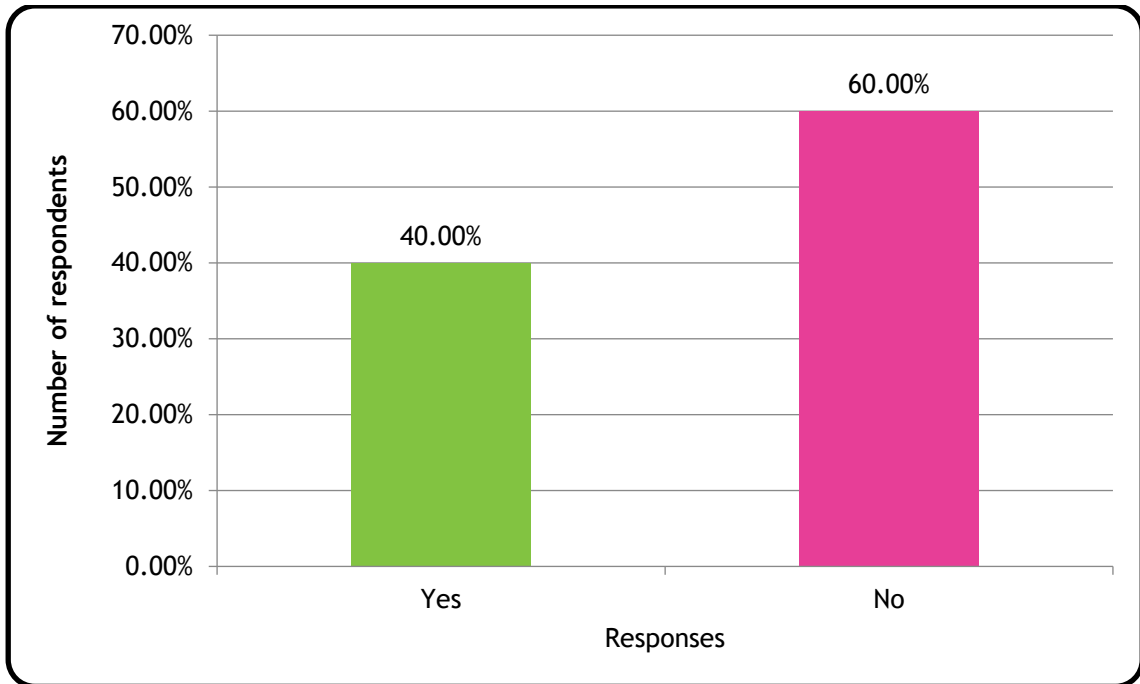
**8. Your mental health is very important both to you and to us. During the past year, have you had any concerns about your mental health?**



The results shown in the graph above confirm the need to include this question in the survey, as they show that just over 40% of respondents were concerned about their mental health over the past year.

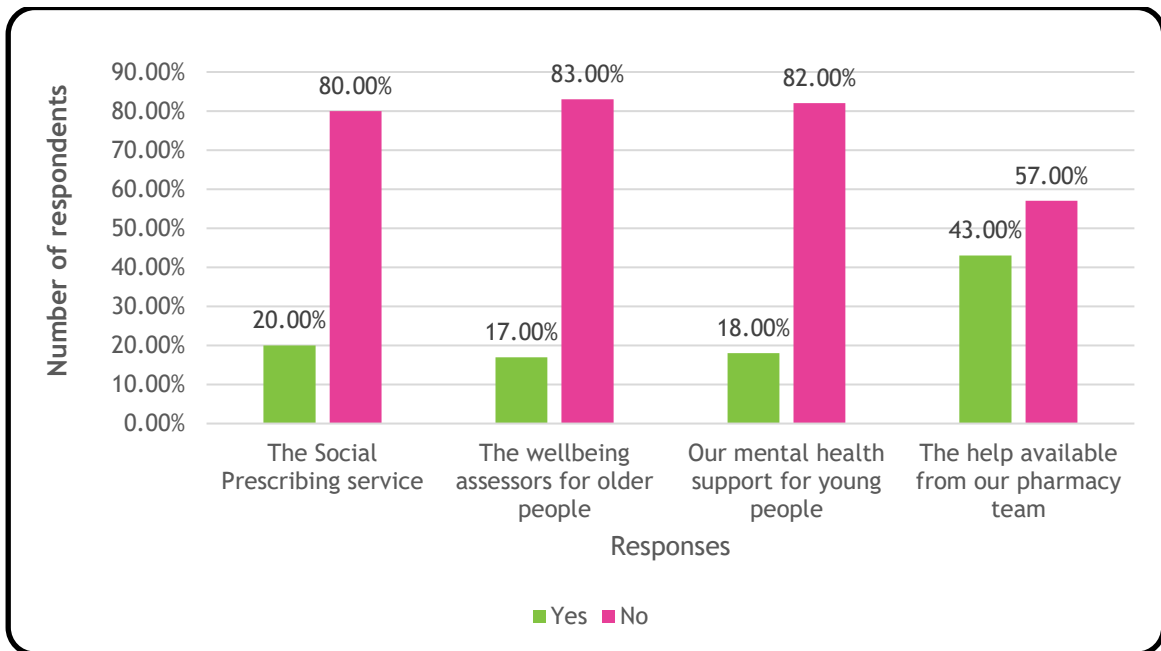
This figure is significantly higher than one would expect in pre-pandemic times and, while the results probably reflect the national picture, they are in themselves a concern.

**9. If you needed to speak to someone at your surgery about a mental health concern would you know who would be the best person to talk to?**



This graph is also significant, showing that two-thirds of respondents did not know who at the surgery would be the best person to speak to about their mental health. This is concerning and, with the results for question 10, show that people need more information about what help is available at their surgery and how to access it.

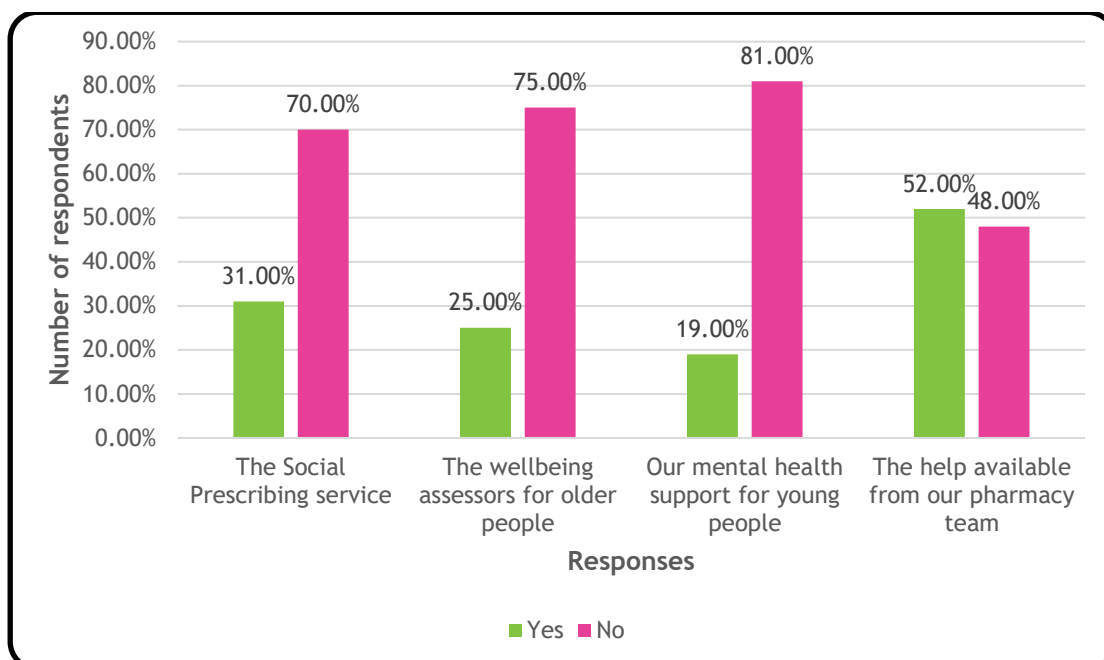
**10. Have you heard about the following services available at your GP surgery?**



This graph shows that, apart from pharmacy services, over 80% of respondents were unaware of the additional help available at their surgeries. This was a closed question that

did not allow comment, but many respondents took the opportunity at question 12 to raise their concern about being unaware of the full range of services available.

### 11. Would you wish to use this service?



The graph shows that, except for pharmacy services, most people would not wish to use the additional services. However, many respondents again used question 12 to explain that they could not answer this question because they did not understand what the additional services were, the eligibility criteria or how to access them.

### 12. Are there any other services you would like us to provide? Please tell us what they are and why you would like us to provide them.

There were 396 responses to this question – 170 respondents simply responded ‘no’ or ‘none’ to the question about additional services. A further 26 stated they didn’t know or weren’t sure and 22 felt unable to answer because they were unaware of what services were available. Many went on to say that more information about the full range of services on offer would be helpful.

There was a wide range of other services that respondents mentioned once or twice including palliative care, phlebotomy, diabetic support, baby groups, acupuncture, grief counselling and dementia support.

Services mentioned more than twice	Times mentioned
Mental health support	15
Weight management/healthy lifestyle	11
Online booking, consultations, prescription ordering	11
Women's health services	10
Podiatry services	7
Physiotherapy services	7
Sexual health services	5
Extended hours	4
Mental health support for young people	3
X rays/scans/minor surgery	3
Dietician	3
Home visits/medicine deliveries	3

What people told us:

“Health MOT appointments for people who are coming off the pill and trying to conceive.”

“Mental health support for young people, it's hard to find and waiting lists are very long. My daughter who is 17 has been told by CYPS and IAPT that she will have at least a year wait before she gets any mental health intervention.”

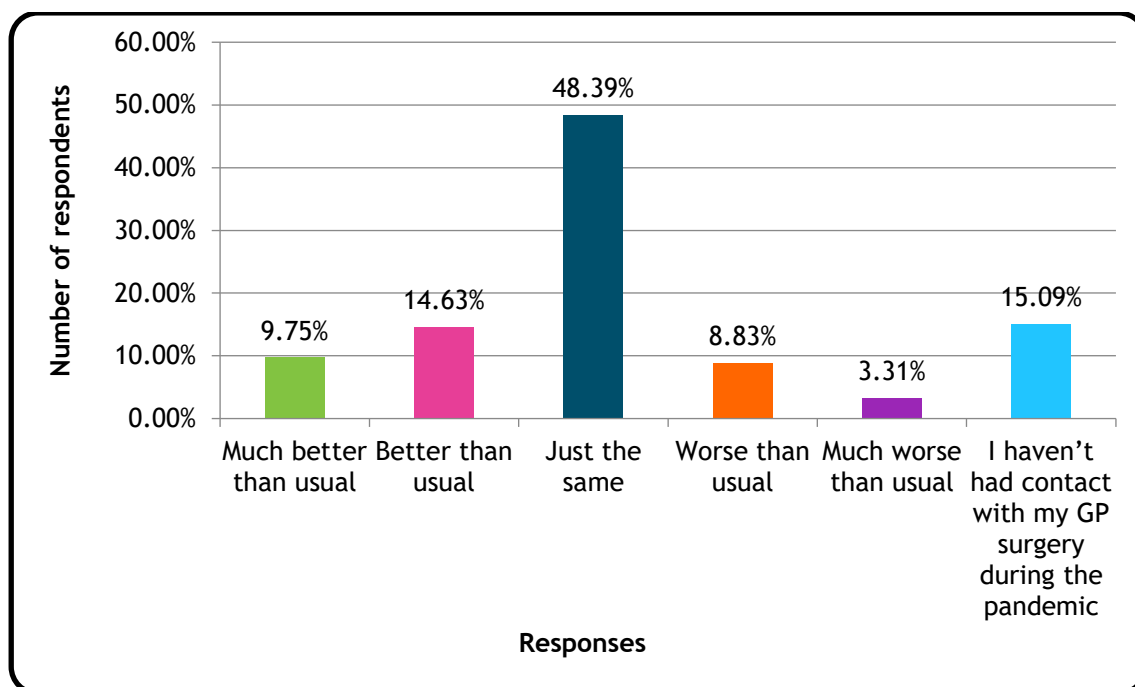
“Any help with mental health for all ages. I suffer from severe anxiety and depression and social anxiety... But I feel very strongly that mental health is not treated as seriously as it should be.”

“I find having to attend the New Croft Centre not very convenient for contraception services.”

“Maybe a chiropractor, a lot of people cannot afford private treatment for this service.”

“I think myself and possibly others would benefit from health classes. I feel like I could do with education on healthy eating, what foods to avoid and how much exercise the average person should be doing.”

**13. If you have had contact with anyone from your GP surgery during the COVID-19 pandemic, please tell us how you found the experience.**



The most striking thing emerging from this question was that almost 73% of respondents said their experience of contacting their GP during the pandemic was either the same as usual or better. Only 12% of respondents stating that their experience was worse than usual. This is a positive result especially at this stage of the pandemic when it would be understandable if people were becoming less tolerant of the changes they have had to deal with. These results indicate that most people feel that the changes imposed by the pandemic have either, not affected the care they receive or have improved it.

**14. If your experience was better than usual, please tell us what made it better.**

There were 296 responses to this question. The findings below show that environmental safety measures introduced by surgeries were a significant contributor to why people felt the experience was better than usual. Appointments running to time, thereby reducing the time people had to wait in the surgery or on the telephone or online, also led people to feel their experience was better than usual.

Many people also commented on a more caring, helpful approach from both clinicians and reception staff. The fact that the service was generally speedier and more efficient was also significant, as were telephone consultations, which many found easier, safer and more convenient.



Points raised five times or more	Times mentioned
Improved environmental safety	63
Appointments running to time/reduced waiting	47
Speed at which you get to speak to a clinician	43
Clinician more helpful and understanding	36
Generally, a speedier, more efficient response	32
Telephone consultations easier, more convenient	32
Reception staff more friendly, helpful, professional	22
Easier to get an appointment	13
Clinicians have more time for you	9

What people told us:

“The staff and doctors were so understanding of my needs and helpful and supportive.”

“I was pregnant... during the pandemic and had to attend all appointments alone, the doctors, nurses and midwives offered exceptional care and support and went above and beyond!!

“You seemed to get a GP appointment either by phone or in person, much quicker than usual.”

“Very speedy and efficient telephone consultation with GP and I didn’t need to arrange a visit to the surgery... I’m disabled and it can sometimes be difficult to get to the surgery.”

“Surgery was very quiet and it felt very safe with COVID-19 precautions in place.”

“Had a follow-up phone call asking if I was ok and was there anything they could do,”

### 15. If your experience was worse than usual, please tell us what made it worse

There were 187 responses to this question, of which 38 stated that this question did not apply to them. The findings below show that not being able to see a GP face-to-face was the most common issue that people struggled with.

People also found it more difficult to get in touch with the surgery. Others found telephone consultations difficult. In contrast to the question above, some people found that the care they received and the way they were treated was worse than usual.

Points raised five times or more	Times mentioned
Not being able to see your GP face-to-face	31
More difficult to get through on the phone	21
Problems with telephone consultations	17
Poorer quality of care	17
Poorer attitude of staff and/or clinicians	15
More problems with prescription	13
Greater difficulty getting an appointment	12
More appointments/call-backs running late	12
More difficult to get access to surgery	10
Problems with telephone triage	8
Unsafe physical environment	5

What people told us:

“It isn’t easy to get an appointment with GP, just phone appointments and it’s hard to describe symptoms on the phone.”

“Generally, just harder to get in touch.”

“Prescription delayed, not delivered on time and when it arrived it was wrong. They had dispensed and issued an incorrect dose of controlled drug.”

“Long delays, waiting in the rain for someone to come from behind the reception desk to be carry be out COVID-19 checks prior to entry.”

“At one point reception staff were unable to attend surgery and were instructed to handle calls via their personal mobiles, which led to me reaching what was obviously a private person’s voicemail on which I did not feel comfortable leaving sensitive personal information.”

“Reception staff being unpleasant and talking down to you.”

## Summary of key findings

The overall results of this survey were very positive. Positive options were selected significantly more times than negative ones in the multiple-choice questions, Questions asking about people’s good experiences always received more answers than those asking about areas for improvement. Asking about additional services elicited some interesting responses. The following emerged as the main findings from our survey:

- The questions about mental health and additional services both show that mental health is a significant concern for survey respondents. In addition, the results indicate that many respondents do not know how to access mental health support should they need it or feel that the help on offer is insufficient.

- Many respondents are unaware of the new services on offer at their surgeries. They asked for more information about what services are available, what they involve and how to access them.
- How people are dealt with when they visit or contact the surgery is always important. In its various elements, it represents the single most significant factor in what respondents found most helpful about their contact. Also, the perceived improvements in how both staff and clinicians have responded during the pandemic are significant.
- Contacting the surgery by telephone was the issue which respondents felt needed the most improvement. It was also a significant contributor in the question asking why respondents felt their experience of contacting their surgery during the pandemic was worse than usual
- Appointment systems are the second most common area requiring improvement, scoring almost as highly as telephone systems. Interestingly, respondents also rated appointment systems second in the reasons why their experience of contacting their surgery during the pandemic was better than usual, indicating that changes introduced during the pandemic have led to improvements in this area.
- Although most respondents feel that changes introduced during the pandemic have improved their experience of contacting their surgery, for others not being able to have face-to-face contact with their GP is a major concern
- The question about additional services indicates that many respondents are keen to live a healthy lifestyle and would like support from their surgery with this.

## Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Newcastle would like to thank all those who took the time to complete our survey. We are grateful to the GP practices that promoted the survey and assisted people in completing it.

We would like to thank Sarah Levison, the Outer West Primary Care Network Project Manager, for her sterling efforts in promoting the survey and Dr Joughin for the short video she provided to help us promote the survey online.

## Contact details



Healthwatch Newcastle  
MEA House, Ellison Place  
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8XS



0191 338 5720



07551 052 751



info@healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk



www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk



@HWNewcastle



@HWNewcastle



@healthwatchnewcastle



healthwatch-newcastle

**If you require this report in a different format please call Healthwatch Newcastle on Freephone 0808 178 9282.**

**Participating GP practices can also provide a paper copy of this report.**



Healthwatch Newcastle is part of Tell Us North CIC, company no. 10394966. We use the Healthwatch trademark (which includes the logo and the Healthwatch brand) when carrying out our activities. The Healthwatch logo is a registered trademark and is protected under trademark law.