

Where next?

What you told us in our Annual Survey 2021

Aims

For the past five years Healthwatch Northumberland has conducted an annual satisfaction survey with the residents of Northumberland to find out what they have thought about the NHS and social care services they have used over the last 12 months. We also look at how this compares with the previous years' results. With 2020-21 being such an exceptional year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this year we decided to shift the focus away from looking back over the preceding year and more towards the forthcoming year. Therefore, the aims of this year's annual survey are to:

- the preceding 12 months
- Gain clear direction from the residents of Northumberland which two health services and which two social care services we should prioritise in our work for the next year and why.

Who we are

Healthwatch Northumberland is the independent health and social care champion for people in the county. If you use GPs and hospitals, dentists, pharmacies, care homes or other support services in your area, we want to hear about your experiences. As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to local feedback and improve standards of care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

Healthwatch Northumberland is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. We're here to listen to the issues that really matter to people in Northumberland and to hear about your experiences of using local health and social care services. We're entirely independent and impartial, and anything you share with us is confidential.

It's really important that you share your experiences – whether good or bad, happy or sad. If you've had a negative experience, it's easy to think there's no point in complaining, and that 'nothing ever changes'. Or, if you've had a great experience, that you 'wish you could say thank you'. Remember, your feedback is helping to improve people's lives. So, if you need advice, or you're ready to tell your story - we're here to listen.

Gain an overview of satisfaction levels with Health and Social Care services in

Total responses by postcode



We designed a simple two-page A4 questionnaire which asked about people's satisfaction with health and social care services and asked which two areas of health services and social care respectively did people want us to focus on for the coming year. We also had the same questionnaire online on the SurveyMonkey platform. (See appendix 1 for a copy of the survey.)

We handed out 609 surveys over the course of 13 face-to-face events across the county in the period 21 June – 23 July 2021. We also did a maildrop of the survey to 11,153 households in postcode sectors NE61 3, NE61 5 and NE23 6 in the period 21 – 30 June 2021 as well as sending bulk copies of the survey to partners and interested parties e.g. Wansbeck and West Northumberland Foodbanks.

The SurveyMonkey questionnaire was open online from 18 June – 1 August 2021 and was publicised via our print adverts in the local press, social media channels, our website and our host organisation's website (Adapt NE).

Reach

We received a total of 617 responses to our survey of which 199 were via the online version and 418 were paper copies returned via Freepost to the office or completed at a face-to-face event.

We had a good coverage with at least one survey response from 29 of the 36 postcodes in the county. The postcodes that didn't respond were mainly round the edges of the county, where the closest medical facilities were in the neighbouring local authority. However, there were no returns from an area of East Tynedale bounded by Wylam, East Wallhouses, Black Heddon, Eachwick and Heddon-on-the-Wall (an area we will refer to as the 'Wylam gap') and are covered by the NE15, NE18 and NE41 postcodes.

Although we didn't receive a very high percentage return rate from the maildrop, we did receive enough to make NE61 & NE23 the top two response rates. 19% of the total returned questionnaires we received were from NE61 and 14% were from NE23.

The next highest postcode return rate was NE24 at 4%. Unfortunately, 23% of the surveys did not answer the postcode question and there were 2% of answers from outside the county (13 surveys). See Fig.1 over.

The overall response rate and responses from some areas were lower than last year. We believe this is a combination of local community groups and face to face services just starting to get going again and some 'survey fatigue'. We will think about how to build on this survey during the year and also for next year's survey.



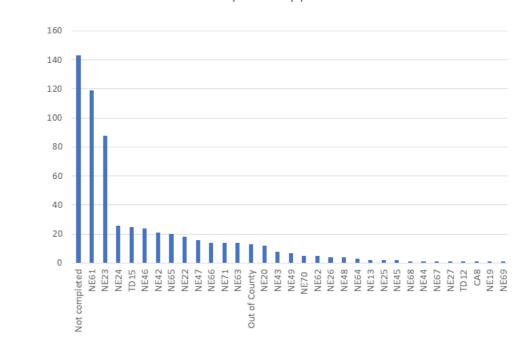


Fig. 1. Count of completed surveys both online and print version by postcode.

Findings - Health Services

Overall, the residents of Northumberland seem very happy with health services with over two thirds of responses to the question, "How satisfied are you with the health services you have used in the last 12 months?" being either Satisfied (32%) or Very Satisfied (35%). This was echoed in the answers to the open question "What would you like to tell the people who provide health and social care services about your experiences over the last 12 months?" with almost a third of the comments being fulsome praise for the NHS. The 67% satisfaction rate is the same as in previous years.

"Thank you all for all the hard work you have been through. This pandemic has been the toughest on all but you have shown remarkable strengths to keep things ticking over even though it's been emotional." (This, and all following quotes in this report, are typically illustrative of the issues raised.)

"Very good helpful Drs and nurses working so hard, some in very difficult circumstances with coronavirus to cope with too!"

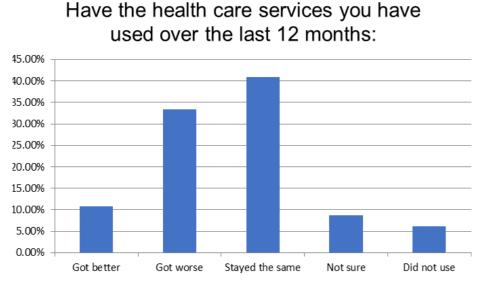
"Hospital experiences for both my daughter and myself have been excellent.

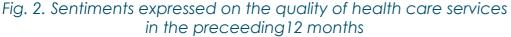
Despite this trying time, we have received first class treatment at Wansbeck, Cramlington and RVI Newcastle."

"Impressed by the adjustments made to maintain service provision caused by covid, congratulations!"

Only 19% of people stated they were either Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied and 10% were Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied. These sentiments are a bit of a surprise given that only 11% of the responses said that services had got better whereas a third of the responses said that services had got worse in the previous 12 months (33%) although, 41% had said that they felt services had remained the same. See Fig.2 overleaf.

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We also asked in the survey which two areas of health services we should focus on in the coming 12 months. There was a clear result to this question with just over half of the responses choosing GP services (51%). The second most popular choice was Mental Health Services (at 30%) but if Children and Young People's Services are included in this choice the percentage rises to 41% in total. The third most popular choice was Cancer Services (22%) followed by Dentists as fourth most popular choice (17%). Emergency care was the fifth most popular choice (14%). All other services were chosen less than 10% of the time. See Fig. 3 below.

Please tick two areas of health you think we should prioritise for our work in the next year

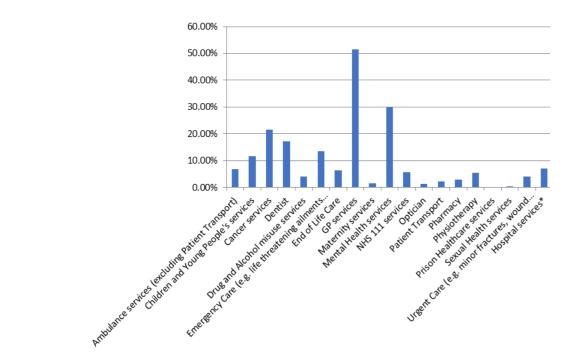


Fig. 3. Distribution of responses indicating which areas of health services should be prioritised

We then asked why the respondents had chosen their two services.

Almost half of the people that had chosen GP Services (47%) were concerned about getting a face-toface appointment. Although there had been an acceptance of the need to go to a telephone appointment system in the early stages of the pandemic, people now appear to feel that GPs are being slow to revert to face-to-face appointments.

"It feels like doctors just don't want to see patients anymore. It is very difficult to get an appointment and telephone appointments are little help. I think they are using Covid as an excuse now."

Some people expressed unhappiness about the reception staff in surgeries who some perceived as obstructive and/or unhelpful (6% of GP Services comments). Also, people are concerned about the lack of confidentiality displayed when receptionists ask for medical details.

"It is very difficult to get an appointment to see or speak to a doctor. The receptionist seems to be first and last." However, there were a handful of comments from patients who praised the work of GPs throughout the pandemic, so the sentiments expressed weren't all critical.

"GPs have done a great job during the lockdowns, staying open, administering vaccinations, telephone appointments etc. I feel that my practice has done a great job and the doctors give me input into my own health and wellbeing. They and others like them probably need funding to continue their good work and improve even more their service."

Patients are experiencing frustrations accessing GP services and are expressing perceptions that services are not operating well. We are currently working with NHS Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group to encourage GP services to communicate and listen to patients concerns and will report on this during the year.

The largest proportion of those who had chosen Mental Health Services, including Children and Young People's Services (CYPS), as a health service to focus on had given the reason that there was a real need for these services, particularly in the light of the Covid pandemic (46% of Mental Health Services and 70% of CYPS reasons).

Although this was the most commonly cited reason, from the tone of the comments it seemed to be a general perception rather than based on personal experience. 18% of the reasons given to focus on Mental Health Services - and 15% of CYPS reasons - were due to historic underfunding/under-resourcing and 13% of the reasons given referred to the long waiting times for Mental Health Services. The percentage of reasons citing long waiting times rose to 20% for CYPS responses. talk, suicides have risen."

"Mental Health and Wellbeing, massively affected due to and we can't assume people will improve as restrictions ease, I imagine it will be more difficult and people need support."

"After the last year of lockdowns, people need support more than ever. The wait to see someone is too long. It seems you need to be suicidal before anyone takes you seriously."

"I chose the above health service CYPS because I think a lot of young people need help, because of the present pandemic, also grown-ups find it hard to deal with so it must be even harder for them."

The people that had chosen Cancer Services largely gave one of two reasons, again largely based on their understanding of the situation rather than direct experience of services either:

a) The services had been set back by the Covid pandemic and as identifying and treating cancer are time critical more resources need to be put into catching up with the backlog as quickly as possible, or:

b) As figures now show that 1 in 2 people will get cancer in their lifetime the services should be expanded.

"As statistics now tell that one in two people will suffer from some kind of cancer during their lives and that generally people have been hanging back from seeking treatment during the pandemic, I think it is vitally important to make up lost ground."

"I can't think of a group that must be more let down during Covid than cancer sufferers. There must be a major catch up operation to deal with the backlog."

The fourth most popular area suggested for us to focus on in health services was dentists. Here, the responses fell into two common themes: a lack of NHS dentists in the area – and the option to go private, and the difficulty of getting an appointment – particularly for a routine checkup. 32% of responses that chose dentists said it was difficult to find an NHS dentist nearby and several people said specifically in their responses that there was no NHS dentist provision in their town.

"Dental practice (NHS) is sadly lacking in this area. Many people have not seen a dentist for a long time and are suffering as a result. There has been, in the past, too much emphasis on the private sector- which many cannot afford."

"Lockdown has shown the limitations of current dental health in sharp focus. Too many people can't afford any, availability is poor, profit-seeking has overtaken patient care."

"I don't object to the service of my dentist, he is excellent, but I do not like pressure from admin and hygienist to take out plans (payment). I felt my teeth were about to drop out overnight." Lastly, the fifth most popular area chosen for us to focus on in health services was Emergency Care. The most common themes coming out of the comments was that it is an important service that should remain a priority and that speed is key. There were a small number of comments that you can wait too long to be seen in A&E (5% of reasons why they had chosen Emergency Care) and that A&E is too far away but the majority of comments were neutral with some being very positive.

"Living in a rural area this element of the NHS is very important to us. The emergency care infrastructure is frighteningly inadequate for the aging population in North Northumberland"

"Emergency care: because it is just that, a lifesaving service so should be a top priority as it can affect anyone at any time, not something we can protect ourselves from needing unlike some of the other services."

"I have used A&E in the last 12 months (broken ankle). The service was exemplary. This wonderful service should continue."



Findings – Social Care Services

The majority of surveys returned to us stated that they did not use social care services in the previous 12 months (74%) but of those who did use the services satisfaction levels were good. 6% were very satisfied with services and 7% were satisfied compared to 3% who were dissatisfied and 4% who were very dissatisfied. 7% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Like the views expressed for the health care services most people who had used the services in the previous 12 months felt that services had remained the same (11%), 6% felt that services had got worse and 2% felt the services had got better.

(However, it is important to note that, as three quarters of the people who replied to our survey ticked the 'Did not use' box, the sample size for the above answers is quite small - being only 137 responses – so the percentages are quite sensitive to individual votes.)

As with the health care services above, we then asked which two areas of social care they thought we should prioritise for our work in the next year. Even though threequarters of people hadn't used social care services in the past 12 months we still had a very high percentage of people suggesting which two areas of social care we should prioritise in the coming 12 months (83% of total survey respondents).

The most popular suggestion was 'Support to live independently/Care at home' with 40% of the votes. 'Dementia Services' was second with 34% and third most popular was 'Care Homes' with 33% of the votes. 'Community based services' came fourth with 27%. See Fig. 4 below.

Please tick two areas of Social Care you think we should prioritise for our work in the next year

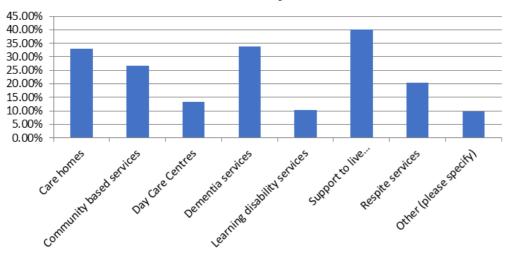


Fig. 4. Distribution of responses indicating which areas of Social Care services should be prioritised

We then asked why the respondents had chosen their two services.

Of those people who had chosen 'Support to live independently/Care in the home' as their preferred service, the most common reason - given in about a third of the responses – was that people generally want to stay in their own homes and communities. About a fifth of the responses gave the reason as it better maintains an elderly person's sense of wellbeing and/or independence.

The third most common reason given was of a poor service received from rushed, poorly trained and underpaid staff.

"Support to live independently at home is vital to give older people or those with disabilities some assurance they will be able to retain some independence and control of their lives with the appropriate help and assistance."

"I like my independence", "I want to remain in my local community", "I want to stay in my home until the end."

"1. Unaffordable for adults on benefits. 2. Untrained inexperienced staff who are disrespectful and uncaring and make you feel embarrassed. 3. Lack of quality staff probably due to very low wages. 4. Arrive late, leave early, and do the minimum. 5. Careless about covid safety/ PPE. 6. Some of the staff are genuine, good and caring, but there are too few of them." There were three main themes given as reasons to choose Dementia Services. The most common reason given for choosing Dementia Services was because more people are developing the condition. This was given in 21% of the reasons given.

Closely behind it, with 19% of the reasons given, was the lack of support for carers and the families of dementia patients. There was a strong feeling for the need for more support to be available.

The third main reason given was that there is currently a poor or very few services available to help dementia patients. This reason was given in 16% of the answers. There was also a minor theme of more research into the disease being needed. This was given in 5% of the reasons for choosing this service. The remaining answers did not make any clear themes.

"Appears there is increasing number with social, political, financial and inter-personal consequences."

"Dementia can be very difficult for the carer who is often the wife or husband and themselves aging. There seems to be little support for the individual caring for a spouse or relative. They seem to fall through the cracks."

"Dementia is something I have personal experience of and the care available is not always satisfactory. There needs to be more specialist care to make things easier for the families as well as the person who has dementia."

"Dementia affects whole families, and any research into causes and treatments seems the best way to help in this dreadful disease."

- The care homes and social care sector needs wholesale reform, preferably led by central government
- Closer monitoring of care homes is required after COVID19
- A wish to see the highest quality of care as the main focus for care service providers
- Staff need better training, support, wages and career structure

The reasons given were pretty much equally distributed between all four themes with the need for reform coming out the strongest - but only by a small margin.

"Care homes must be funded properly through an integrated system of H&SC. Staff working in care homes must be valued by more than a sense of 'vocation' and referred to as 'key worker'. There needs to be a pay structure for core staff equivalent to nursing staff."

"Care homes require better funding, better staffing and a national plan to help implement this."

"There has been very little scrutiny or access into care homes in the last year. Vulnerable people have been left isolated, in prison like conditions with their human rights being violated. Please can you investigate what scrutiny and protections are in place to uphold these rights."

"The whole care system needs to be overhauled. People shouldn't be blatantly making money out of old people's infirmity."

"Care assistants should be well trained with a proper career path and paid accordingly"

Community based services was the fourth most popular service chosen for us to focus on. Unfortunately, there was widely differing interpretations of what was included in these services with many people confusing it with the Support for independent living/care at home services, Respite Services etc.

It was difficult to draw out common themes however, distance from services and public transport provision in rural and coastal Northumberland came out as the main reasons why this service was chosen for us to focus on.

"In rural areas there is a feeling of isolation, especially with older people and youngsters. Very little public transport- so local community base would be an asset."

"Community based services: more of these seem to be centralised and people have to travel distances whereas many years ago lots of these services were provided in rural villages on a rota system."



Demographics of survey respondents

As mentioned above in the reach section, we had 617 surveys completed. We had surveys completed from all age brackets with the 65-79 years old bracket returning the most surveys – 293 surveys, 47.5%. We had very few surveys returned by the under 25-year-olds with only one survey (0.2%) returned by the 18-24 years old age group and three surveys (0.5%) returned by the Under 18 year olds. See Fig. 5 below.

What is your age?

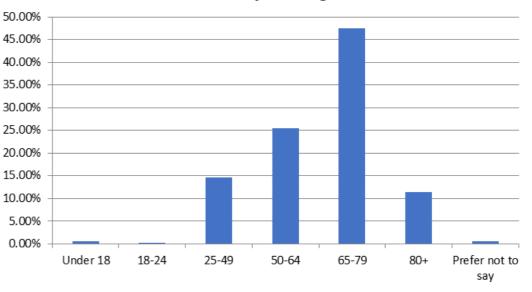


Fig 5. Distribution of responses by age.

The breakdown of responses by gender was 27.9% Man, 66.9% Woman, 4.7% preferred not to say, 0.5% preferred to self-describe and 0% were non-binary.

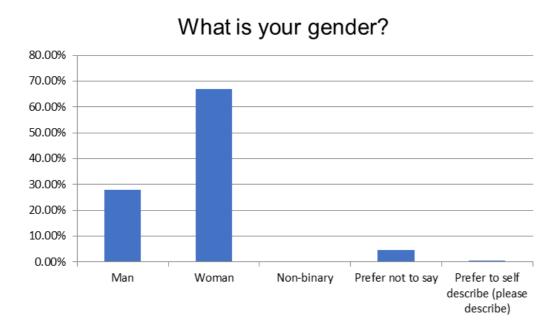


Fig. 6. Distribution of responses by gender.

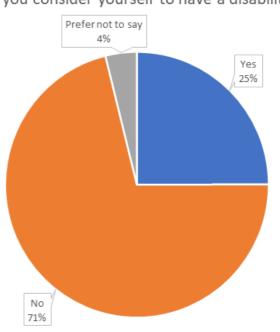
We also had a slightly higher proportion of responses from men than usual: 27.9% were from men this year compared to 25.8% in 2020-21's survey and 23.2% in 2019-20's survey.

Unsurprisingly for Northumberland, the vast majority of people who returned the surveys were of White background: 89% were 'White: British/English/Scottish/Welsh/ Northern Irish', 0.33% were 'White: Irish' and 4.8% were any other 'White' background. There were some responses from other ethnicities but these only came to 2.65% in total with 'Asian or Asian British: Chinese' being the most numerous ethnic minority at 1.65%. 0.17% declared themselves as Gypsy, Roma or Traveller. This compares well to the 2011 Census ethnicity data for Northumberland of 98.4% White; 0% Gypsy, Roma or Traveller; and 1.6% other ethnicities. See Table 1 over.

What is your ethnicity?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Arab	0.00%	0
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	0.33%	2
Asian/Asian British: Chinese	1.65%	10
Asian/Asian British: Indian	0.17%	1
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	0.00%	0
Asian/Asian British: any other Asian/Asian British background	0.00%	0
Black/Black British: African	0.00%	0
Black/Black British: Caribbean	0.17%	1
Black/Black British: Any other Black/Black British background	0.00%	0
Gypsy, Roma or Traveller	0.17%	1
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	0.33%	2
White: British/English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish	89.09%	539
White: Irish	0.33%	2
White: Any other White background	4.79%	29
Any other ethnic group	0.00%	0
Prefer not to say	2.98%	18
	Answered	605
	Skipped	12

Table 1. Distribution of completed survey responses by ethnic minority.

We asked about disability and 71% of people said they had no disability, 25% said they did have a disability and 4% preferred not to say, as shown in Fig. 7 below.



Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Lastly, we asked whether people considered they were a carer. 17% said Yes, 77% said No and the remaining 6% Preferred Not to Say. See Fig. 8 below.

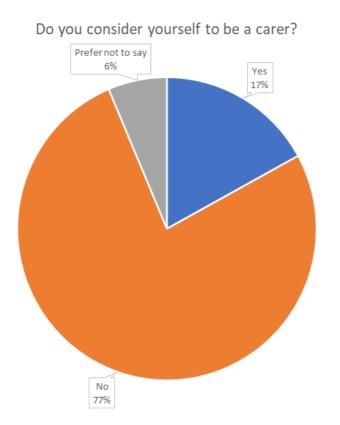


Fig. 8. Distribution of responses to whether the respondents thought they were a carer.

Recommendations

This year's survey results have demonstrated that there is an overwhelming desire to have face-to-face appointments with GPs. This sentiment came out strongly in both the reasons why we are to focus on the respondents' chosen health service (Q4) and also in the final question asking for any other comments (Q7). We will, therefore, focus our work on GP services in the coming year, to ensure patients are heard as services emerge and respond to the changes that Covid has brought.

Mental Health Services also came out strongly however in this case the sentiment was more of an opinion rather than first-hand experience. We focussed on mental health services last year and produced a report into young people's mental health services in May 2021.

We will continue to seek experiences of mental health services. The focus of our Annual Meeting in November will be the transformation of mental health services agenda and in particular the Northumberland Recovery College which residents highlighted as service they wanted to see in Northumberland. The performance of Cancer Services is surveyed every year by the National Cancer Patients Experience Survey and the results published annually.

According to the most recent survey results, which are for 2019, the patients' average rating for cancer services was 9.0 out of 10 (where 10 is very good) compared to a national average of 8.8.

Likewise, with the percentage receiving treatment within the national NHS target of 18 weeks was 89% for Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (Northumbria) and 74% for The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals Foundation Trust (NUTH) compared to the England average of 69%; the figure for half the people waiting for treatment started their treatment within 8.0 weeks for Northumbria and 9.1 weeks for NUTH compared to the England average of 10.4 weeks; and the percentage of patients waiting more than a year for treatment is 0% for Northumbria and 6% for NUTH compared to an England average of 6%.

In short, Cancer Services in

Northumberland are well regarded by the patients and performing well against national targets and have done for the preceding five years. In addition, the sentiments expressed in our survey regarding Cancer Services appeared to be people's opinions rather than direct experience. Taking all these factors into account, we do not feel we should focus our resources on Cancer Services. We will of course monitor the statistics and gather patient experience in order to see if this situation changes. However, looking at the sentiments expressed on dentists in our survey these appear to be borne of personal experience and the lack of NHS dentists is concerning many people. We will consider dentistry as an area of focus in health care.

In terms of where we should focus our work in the coming year for social care services, we will follow the top two areas chosen in our survey and focus on Support to live independently/Care at home and Dementia services.

Although, care homes came a very close third choice and the issues in care homes during the Covid-19 pandemic have been highlighted by the media nationally in the last year, we had a focus on care homes this year, have set up an online relatives' forum and will use this to gather experiences and insight into the care experienced by care home residents.

In summary, our recommended areas to focus our work on in the coming year are:

Health care services:

- GP services
- Dentists

Social care services:

- Support to live independently/ Care at home
- Dementia services

In addition, to get a fuller picture in terms of reach, next year's survey needs to target under 25-year-olds and the 'Wylam gap'.

Appendix 1: Annual Survey 2020-21

Independent champion for people in Northumberland who use health and social care services



Tell us your Story

Healthwatch Northumberland is the independent champion for users of health and social care in Northumberland. We listen to what people like about services or what could be improved, and we share their views with those with the power to make change happen.

We would like you to help us set our work priorities for the coming year. Together we can help make health and social care services better for everyone in our community.

Please take a few minutes to complete our short survey - this can be as a patient or carer. Your views will be shared anonymously and stored in line with general data protection regulations.

Healthwatch Northumberland Annual Survey 2020/21 1. How satisfied are you with the HEALTH services you have used in the past 12 months? very satisfied satisfied neither satisfied nor dissatisfied dissatisfied very dissatisfied did not use 2. Have the health services you have used over the last 12 months: stayed the same got worse not sure did not use got better 3. Please tick TWO areas of health you think we should prioritise for our work in the next year. Maternity Services Ambulance Services (not Patient Transport) Mental Health Services Children and Young People's Services Cancer Services □ NHS 111 Optician Dentist Drug and Alcohol Misuse Services Pharmacy Patient Transport Services Emergency Care (e.g. life threatening ailments like stroke, Physiotherapy severe blood loss, heart attack) Prison Healthcare Services End of Life Care Sexual Health Services □ GP Services Urgent Care (e.g. minor fractures, sprains, cuts) Hospital Services* *Please state which hospital department/ Other (please specify) service Briefly tell us why you would like us to focus on these health services. Name of health service 1 and why I chose this: Name of health service 2 and why I chose this: 4. How satisfied are you with the SOCIAL CARE services you have used in the past 12 months? satisfied neither satisfied nor dissatisfied verv satisfied dissatisfied very dissatisfied did not use

5. Have the social care services you have used over the last 12 months: got better stayed the same got worse not sure □ did not use

6. Please tick TWO areas of social care you think we sh

Care Homes	
Community Based Services	
Day Care Centres	
Dementia Services	

Briefly tell us why you would like us to focus on these health services.

Name of social care service 1 and why I chose this:

Name of social care service 2 and why I chose this:

7. What would you like to tell the people who provide health and social care services about your experiences over the last 12 months? What do you think is working well and what could be improved?

Please tell us a bit more about yourself. This information will be used for monitoring purposes only so we can see who our survey has reached.

First part of postcode (e.g. NE70):

A	ge:	Dunder 18	□18-24	25-49	□50-6
G	ender:	□Man	□Woman	□Non-binary	□ Pre

□Prefer not to say

Ethnicity: 🗆 Arab 🛛 Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi Asian/Asian 🗍 British: Chinese 🗖 Asian/Asian British: Indian Asian/Asian British: Pakistani Asian/Asian British: any other Asian/Asian British background Gypsy, Roma or Traveller Black/Black British: African Black/Black British: Caribbean Black/Black British: Any other Black/ Black British background Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups White: British/English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish White: Irish White: Any other White background Any other ethnic group Prefer not to say

Do you consider yourself to have a disability? DNo DYes (please specify) **Do you consider yourself to be a carer?** DNO DYes DPrefer not to say

or by scanning the QR code.



	ould	prioritise	for our	work in	the next	year.
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- Learning Disability Services
- Support to live independently/care at home Respite Services
- Other (please specify)_

65-79 □80+

efer to self-describe, please describe

Prefer not to say

Contact Us

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