

# GP Access - Beacon Medical Group Ivybridge Surgeries



Engagement Report

February  
2022





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# Introduction

Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay is the independent consumer champion for people using health and care services in Devon. Healthwatch listens to what people like about services and what could be improved, and shares those views with those who have the power to make change happen. In May 2021, Healthwatch became aware of rising feedback around difficulties in accessing GP Services from Beacon Medical Group in Ivybridge. As a result, Healthwatch produced a provider report for Beacon Medical Group highlighting the issues being raised. At a subsequent meeting with Beacon Medical Group and NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group, it was agreed to undertake further face to face and digital engagement around specific topics from patients not only registered with the two Beacon surgeries based in Ivybridge, but also from the Group's surgeries in Plympton.

## Methodology

The engagement took place between 6<sup>th</sup> September and 27<sup>th</sup> September 2021. The survey was co-produced with Beacon Medical Group and NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group and consisted of 16 questions about people's experiences contacting and communicating with Beacon surgeries based in Ivybridge (Ivybridge Medical Practice and Highlands Health Centre) and Plympton. There were also two questions at the end of the survey to collect demographic information (age and gender). The survey was distributed and publicised online via the Facebook pages of Healthwatch Devon and Healthwatch Plymouth (see Appendix 1); six posts promoting the survey reached a total of 14,491 people and were engaged with 2,344 times. Promotion was also done through Healthwatch's weekly e-Bulletin and via Beacon Medical Group. Healthwatch staff and volunteers also conducted in-person surveys in Ivybridge on three occasions between 6<sup>th</sup> September and 25<sup>th</sup> September.

A total of 616 people responded to the survey; 347 respondents (57.84%) were Ivybridge patients and 253 respondents (42.17%) were Plympton patients. This report focuses on the experiences of Ivybridge patients; the experiences of Plympton patients will be detailed in a separate report. A summary of the most notable findings from the Plympton patients' surveys is available in Appendix 2.



# Key findings

The following are the key findings from Ivybridge registered patients.

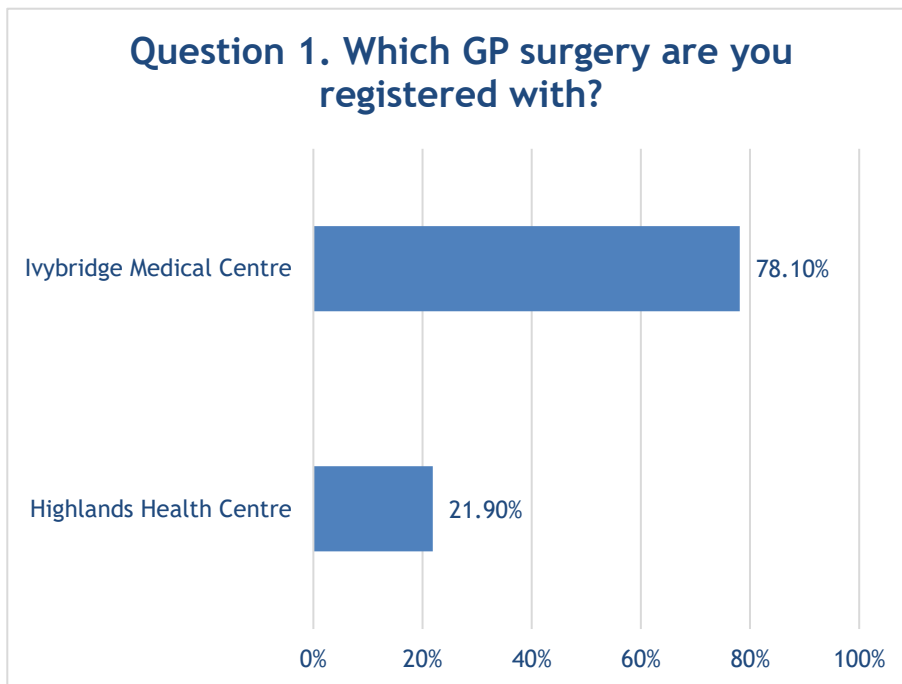
- 94.14% of respondents who had called the surgery in the last four months felt they waited in a queue for a long time to speak to someone; of these respondents, 54.25% said they waited longer than 30 minutes.
- 42.51% of respondents found the online consultation process “not easy” or “not so easy” to use, and 35.54% found using it “easy” or “fairly easy.” 33.58% found other online services (e.g. booking appointments, repeat prescriptions) “not easy” or “not so easy” to use and 45.05% found other services “easy” or “fairly easy” to use.
- After using the surgery’s online consultation process, 65.11% of respondents said they were contacted by the time specified by the surgery and 34.89% said they were not.
- 81.19% of respondents receive information and messages from the surgery; the most common method of receiving messages is via text/SMS (93.95% of respondents). 68.81% of respondents felt that communications from the surgery met their needs and 31.19% felt they did not.

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# Detailed findings

## Question 1. Please select which surgery you are registered with.

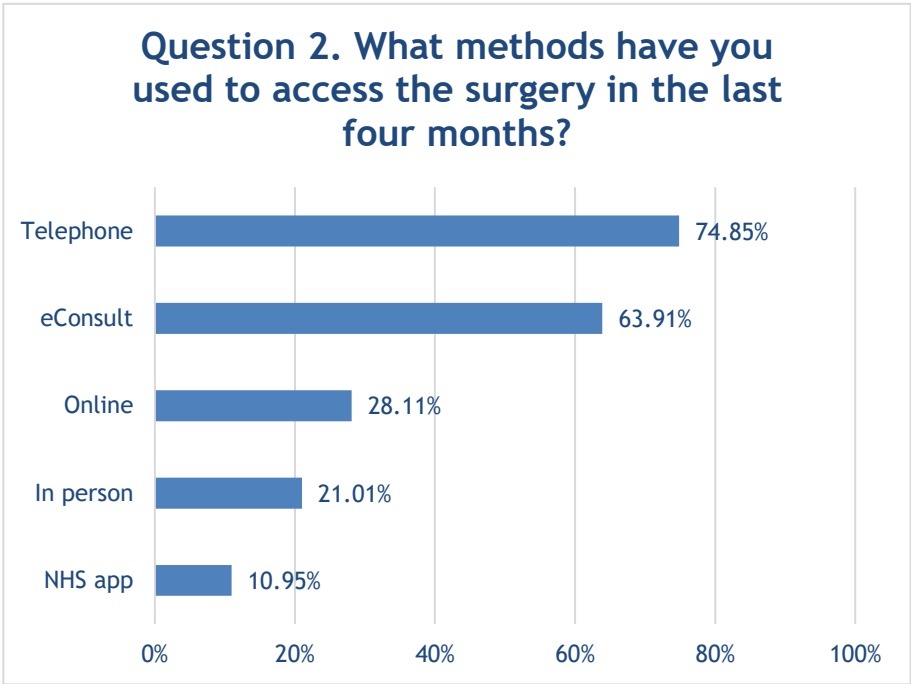
All 347 respondents answered this question. 78.10% of respondents (271 people) were registered with Ivybridge Medical Practice and 21.90% (76 people) were registered with Highlands Health Centre.



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**Question 2. Have you had cause to access your surgery in the last four months? If so, what methods did you use? Tick all that apply.**

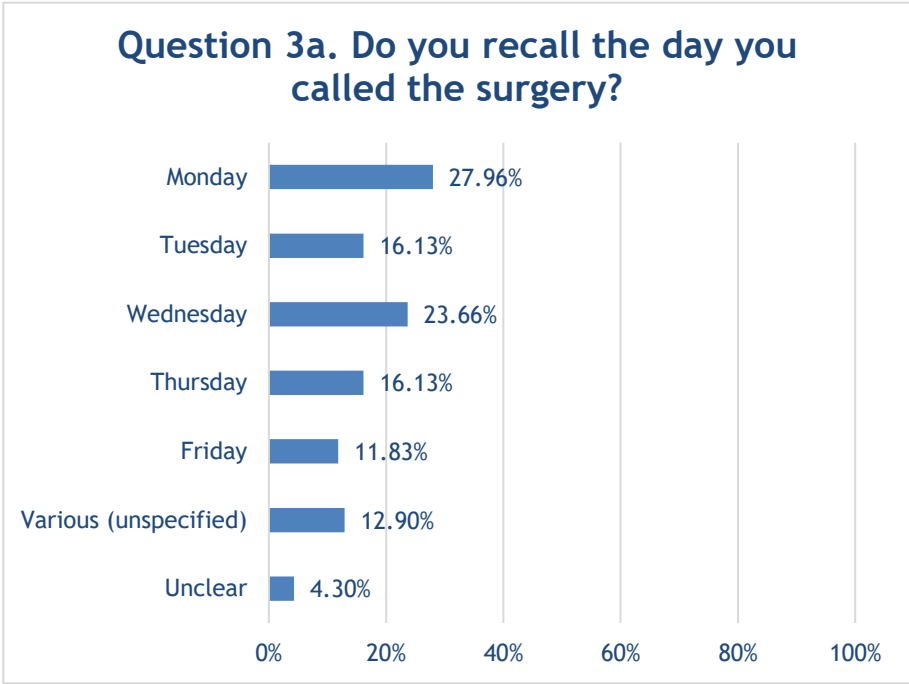
338 respondents answered this question and nine did not. As respondents were able to select more than one answer, percentages may total more than 100. 74.85% of respondents (253 people) contacted their surgery via telephone, 63.91% (216 people) used eConsult, 28.11% (95 people) used online methods (e.g. booking and cancelling appointments, requesting repeat prescriptions), 21.01% (71 people) contacted their surgery in person, and 10.95% (37 people) used the NHS app.



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### Question 3. Can you recall the day and time you rang the surgery?

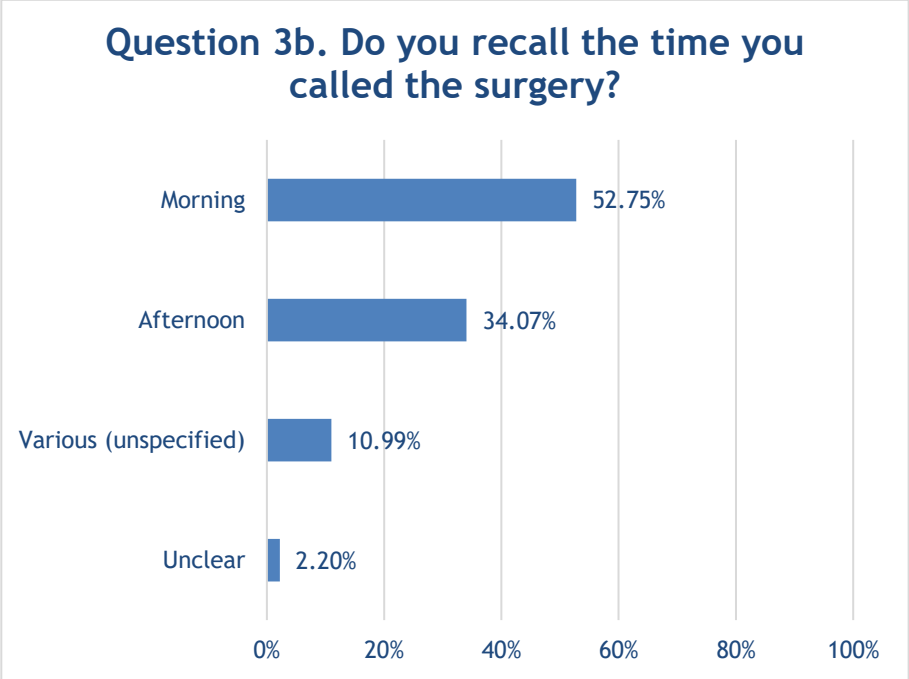
93 respondents answered the “day of the week” portion of this question and 254 did not. Some respondents named multiple days, so totals may be greater than 93. 27.96% of respondents (26 people) called their surgery on a Monday, 16.13% (15 people) called on a Tuesday, 23.66% (22 people) called on a Wednesday, 16.13% (15 people) called on a Thursday, 11.83% (11 people) called on a Friday, 12.90% (12 people) said they called on multiple days but did not specify which, and 4.30% (four people) gave answers that were not clear. No respondents reported attempting to call their surgery at the weekend.





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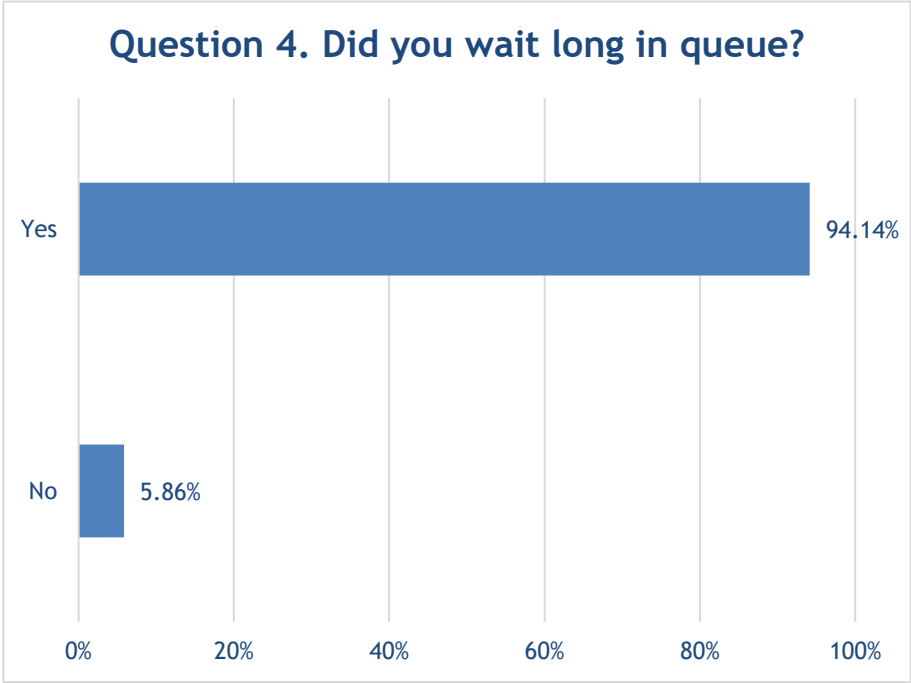
91 respondents answered the “time of day” portion of this question and 256 did not. As some respondents named multiple times of day, totals may be greater than 91. 52.75% of respondents (48 people) called their surgery in the morning (before 12pm), 34.07% (31 people) called in the afternoon (between 12pm and 6pm), 10.99% (10 people) called their surgery various times but did not specify which, and 2.20% (two people) gave answers that were not clear. No respondents reported attempting to call their surgery after 6pm.



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**Question 4. Did you wait long in a queue?**

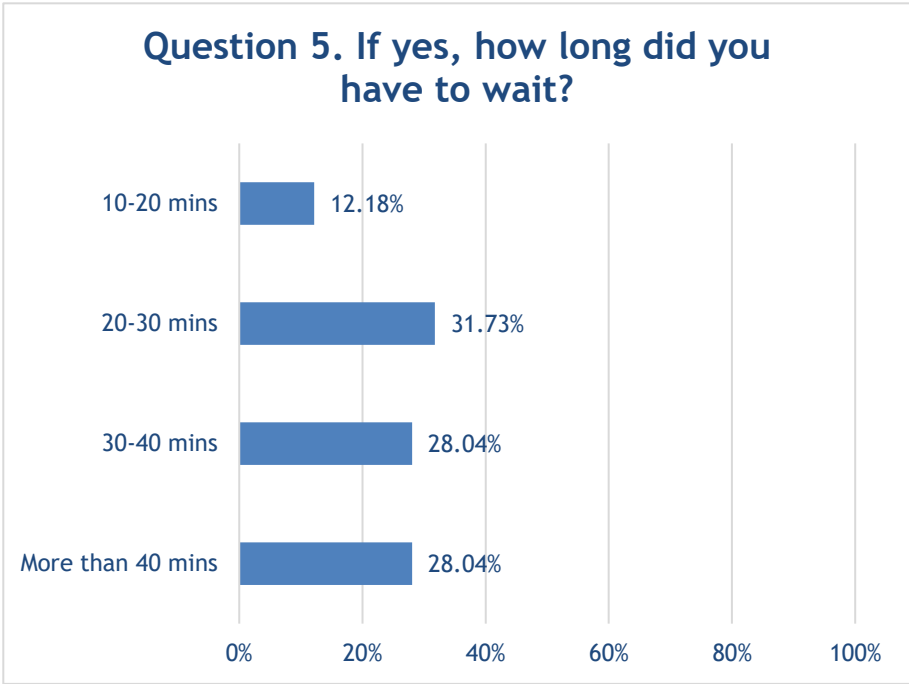
290 respondents answered this question and 57 did not. 94.14% of respondents (273 people) answered yes and 5.86% (17 people) answered no.



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**Question 5. If yes, how long did you have to wait?**

Only respondents who answered “yes” to the previous question were included in this analysis; 271 of those respondents answered this question and two did not. 12.18% of respondents (33 people) said they waited between 10 and 20 minutes, 31.73% (86 people) waited between 20 and 30 minutes, 28.04% (76 people) waited between 30 and 40 minutes, and 28.04% (76 people) waited longer than 40 minutes.



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## Question 6. What are your expectations of the telephone system, i.e. acceptable waiting times?

299 respondents answered this question and 48 did not. Some respondents expressed what they believed an acceptable waiting time should be, whereas other respondents shared their current experiences of telephone waiting times. It was not always clear whether respondents were referring to the former or the latter in their answers. 112 respondents left comments expressing their general dissatisfaction with the telephone waiting system. 97 respondents said they expected to wait no longer than five minutes, 69 respondents said they expected to wait no longer than 10 minutes, and 13 respondents said they expected to wait no longer than 20 minutes.

### *General dissatisfaction about telephone waiting times (112 comments)*

- “They are a joke, having to work for a living you do not have the luxury of over 30 [minutes] to make a personal call.”
- “[It takes] so long to be answered to make an appointment for an injection that cannot be booked via [eConsult].”
- “Being told [you are] number one in the queue and having to wait 20 minutes for someone to pick up the phone is not acceptable.”

### *Expecting to wait no longer than five minutes (97 comments)*

- “I think 5 minutes is more than enough. We never used to wait more than a few minutes when it was an independent surgery.”

### *Expecting to wait no longer than ten minutes (69 comments)*

- “If you can’t answer within 10 minutes you should be employing more people to answer your phones.”

### *Expecting to wait no longer than 20 minutes (13 comments)*

- “I know they are busy so 20 minutes seemed a reasonable wait.”

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## Question 7. Should there be multi-choice options for appointments, prescriptions etc to speed up the process?

285 respondents answered this question and 62 did not. 184 respondents said yes or made positive comments about the suggestion, 47 respondents said they felt such a system already existed, 32 respondents said no or made negative comments about the idea, and 21 respondents supported the idea conditionally or made alternative suggestions that would make the booking process easier. Alternative suggestions included making it easier to speak to a person or navigate the multiple option process.

### *Yes (184 comments)*

- “If it will speed up the process then yes.”

### *Options already exist (47 comments)*

- “There are multi-choice options but they aren’t clear and if you don’t respond you get thrown out of the system and have to start all over again.”

### *No (32 comments)*

- “No, they never work properly and drive me mad having to listen to all the options.”
- “It doesn’t speed it up, only slow it down.”

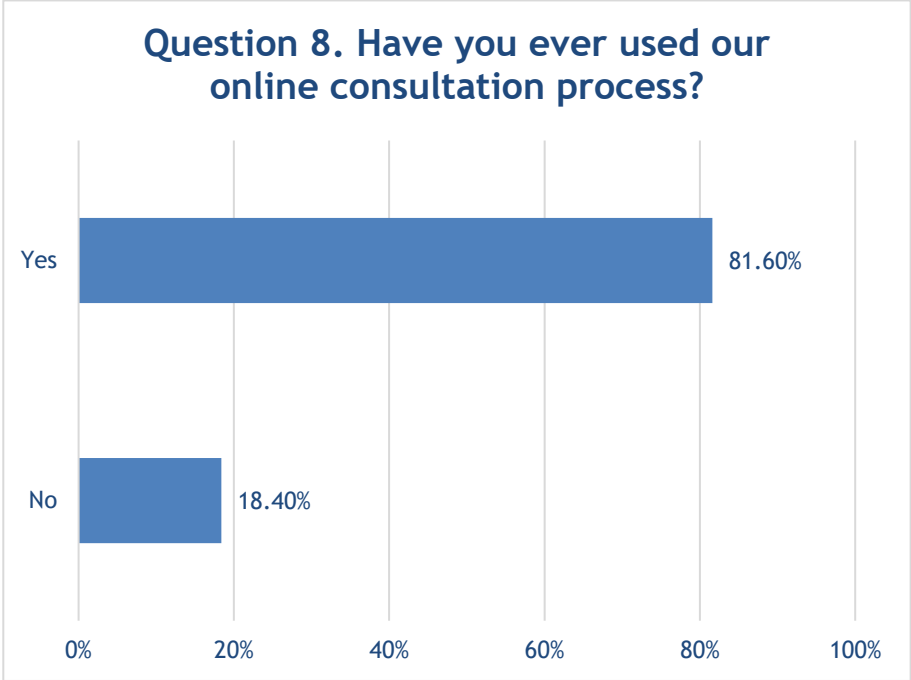
### *It depends/alternative suggestions (21 comments)*

- “Only if it works! I personally still like to talk to a person and am sure elderly or other vulnerable patients that struggle with an automated system would agree.”
- “There should be a quick option to speak with someone.”
- “Yes, but for those options to go somewhere, or provide an option to return to main menu or hold.”

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**Question 8. Have you used our online consultation process?**

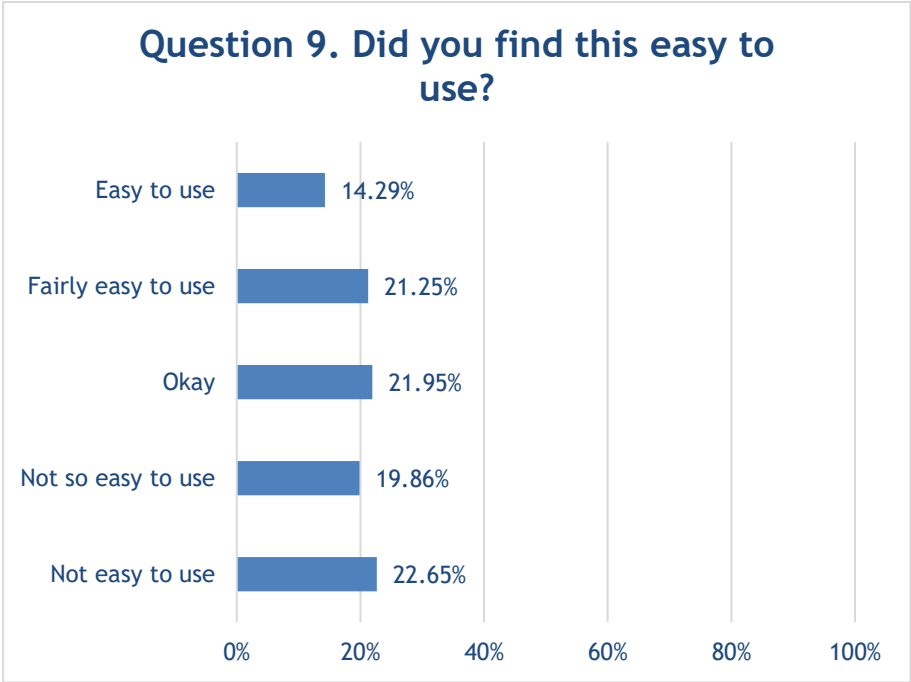
337 respondents answered this question and 10 did not. 81.60% of respondents (275 people) answered yes and 18.40% (62 people) answered no.



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### Question 9. Did you find this easy to use?

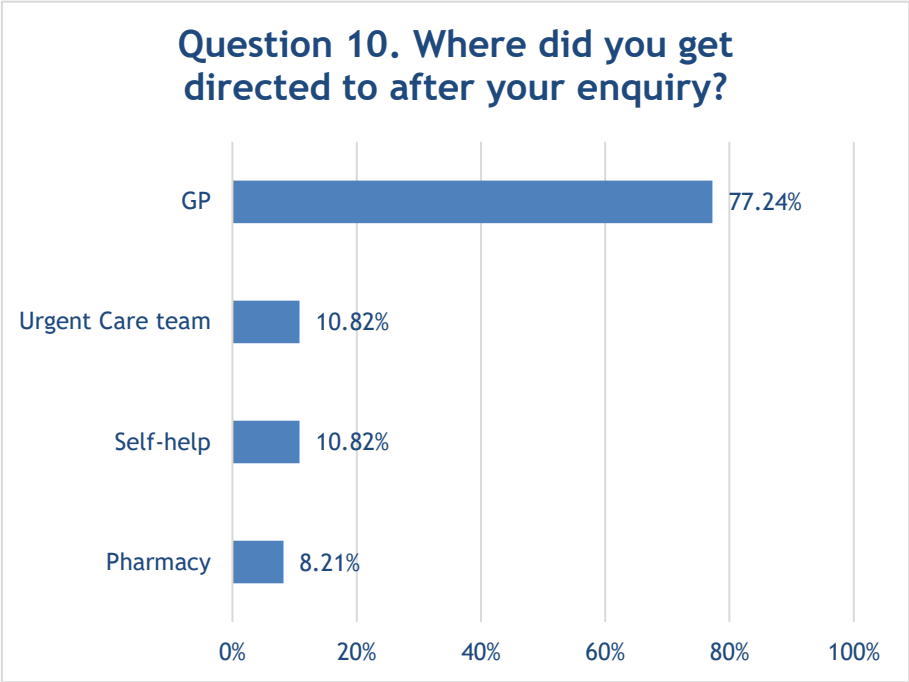
287 respondents answered this question and 60 did not. 14.29% of respondents (41 people) found the online consultation process easy to use, 21.25% (61 people) found it fairly easy to use, 21.95% (63 people) found it okay to use, 19.86% (57 people) found it not so easy to use, and 22.65% (65 people) found it not easy to use.



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**Question 10. Where did you get directed after your enquiry?**

268 respondents answered this question and 79 did not. 77.24% of respondents (207 people) were directed to their GP, 10.82% (29 people) were directed to self-help resources, 10.82% (29 people) were directed to urgent care, and 8.21% (22 people) were directed to a pharmacy.

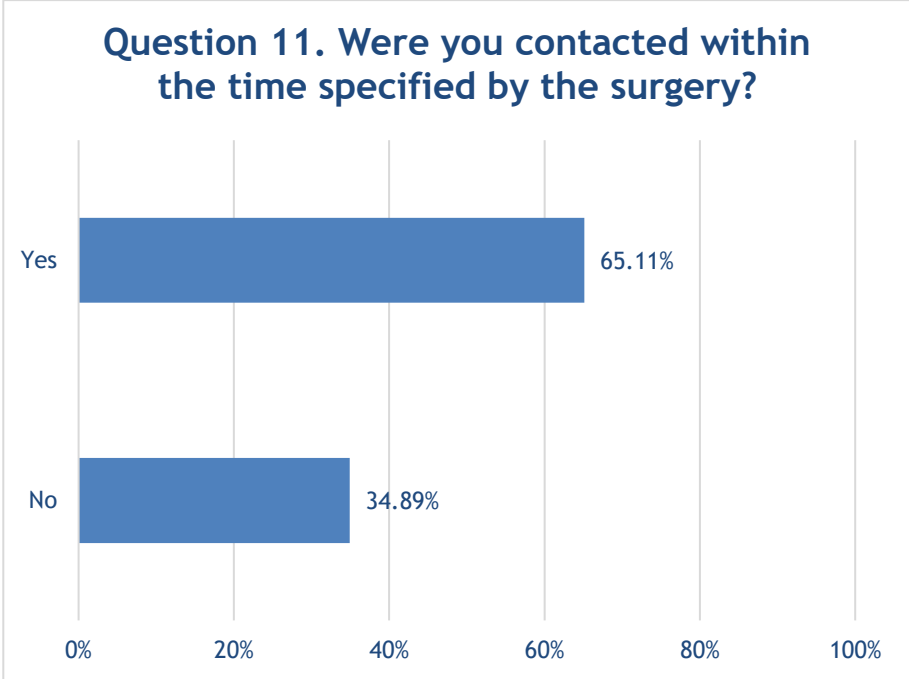




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**Question 11. Were you contacted within the specified time indicated by the surgery?**

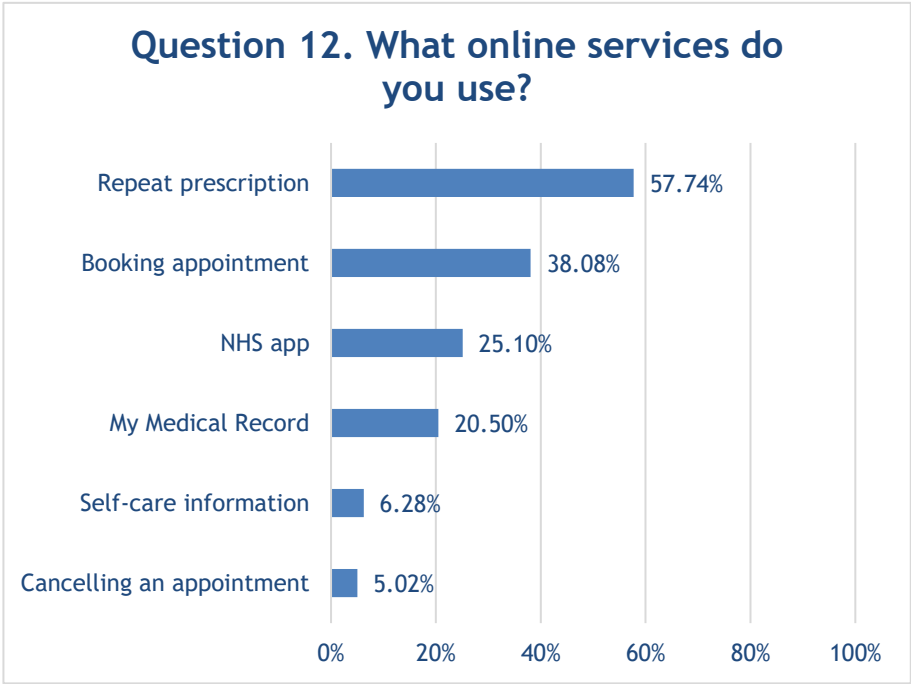
278 respondents answered this question and 69 did not. 65.11% of respondents (181 people) answered yes and 34.89% (97 people) answered no.



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**Question 12. What online services did you use? Tick all that apply.**

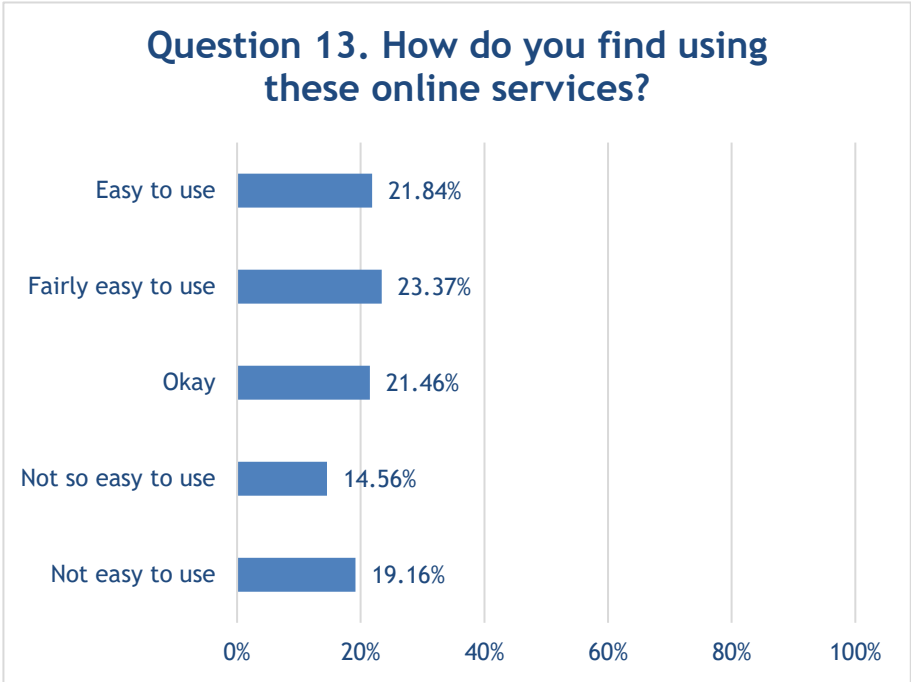
239 respondents answered this question and 108 did not. As respondents could select more than one response, percentages may total more than 100. 57.74% of respondents (138 people) used online repeat prescription services, 38.08% (91 people) booked appointments online, 25.10% (60 people) used the NHS app, 20.50% (49 people) used My Medical Record, 6.28% (15 people) used online self-care information, and 5.02% (12 people) cancelled appointments online.



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### Question 13. How did you find using online services?

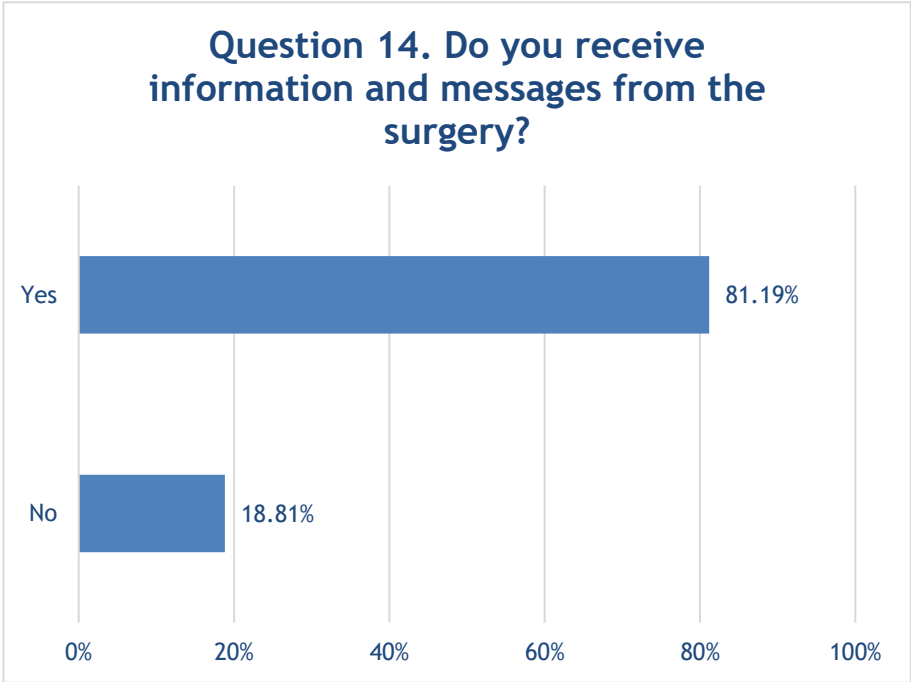
261 respondents answered this question and 86 did not. 21.84% (57 people) found online services easy to use, 23.37% (61 people) found them fairly easy to use, 21.46% (56 people) found them okay to use, 14.56% (38 people) found them not so easy to use, and 19.16% (50 people) found them not easy to use.



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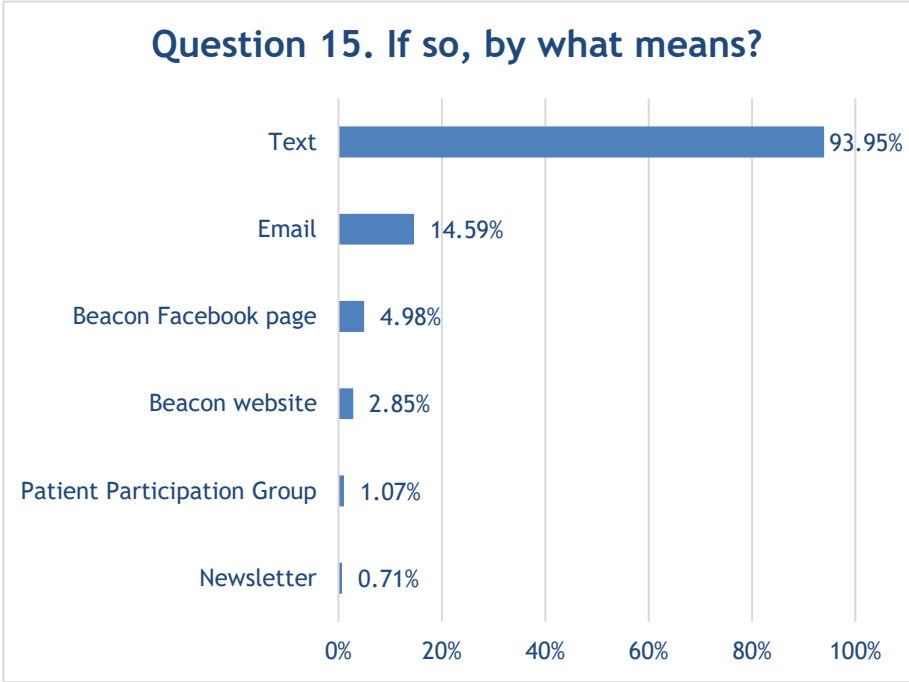
**Question 14. Do you receive information and messages from the surgery either about an appointment or general information about Beacon?**

335 respondents answered this question and 12 did not. 81.19% of respondents (272 people) answered yes and 18.81% (63 people) answered no.



**Question 15. If so, by what means? Tick all that apply.**

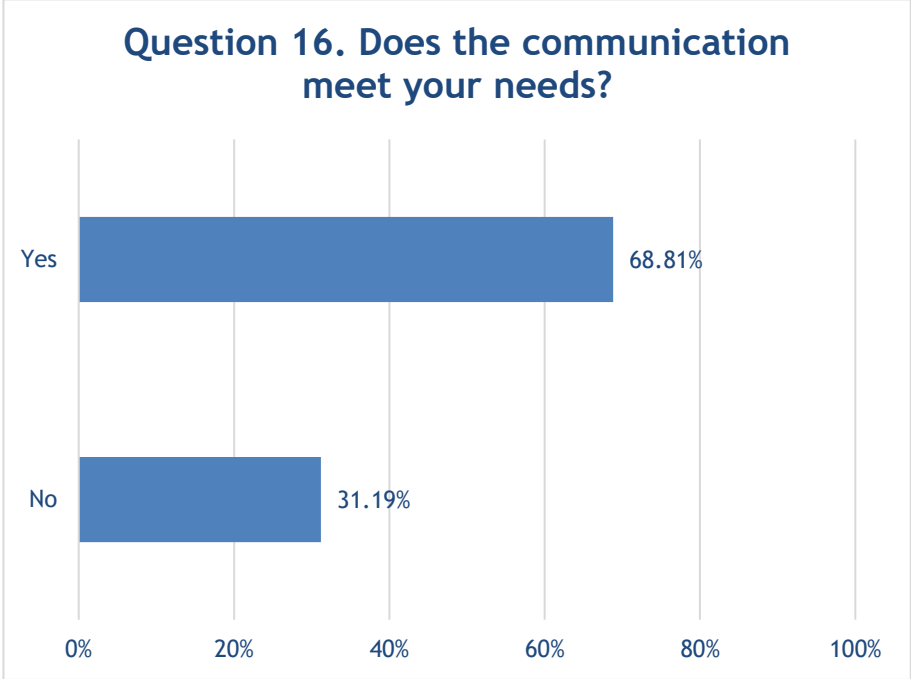
281 respondents answered this question and 66 did not. 93.95% of respondents (264 people) received information via text, 14.59% (41 people) received information via email, 4.98% (14 people) received information via the Beacon Facebook page, 2.85% (eight people) received information via the Beacon website, 1.07% (three people) received information via a Patient Participation Group, and 0.71% (two people) received information from a newsletter.



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**Question 16. Does the communication meet your needs?**

311 respondents answered this question and 36 did not. 68.81% of respondents (214 people) answered yes and 31.19% (97 people) answered no.

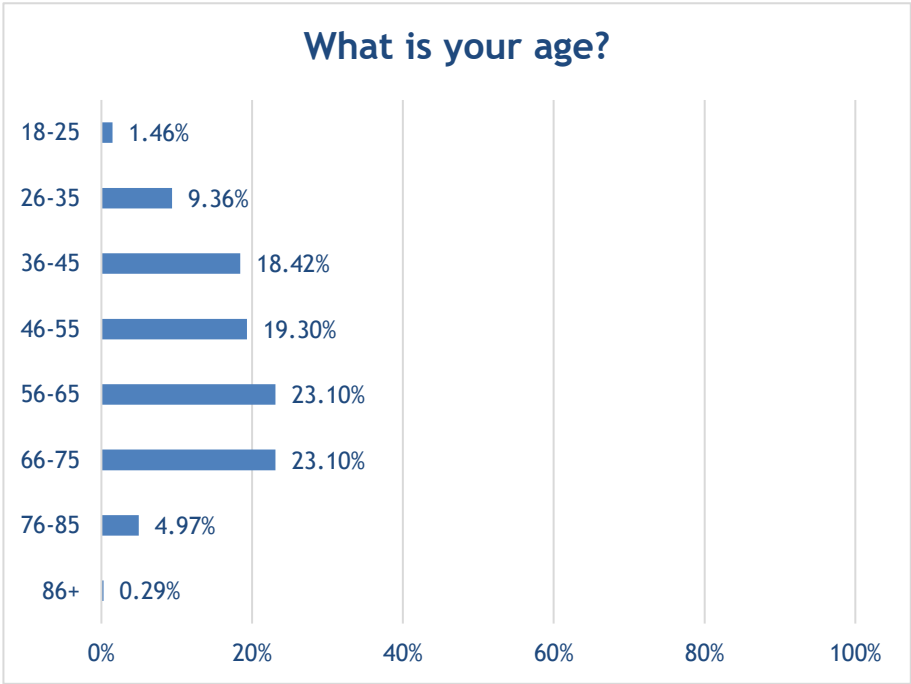


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## Demographics information

### What is your age?

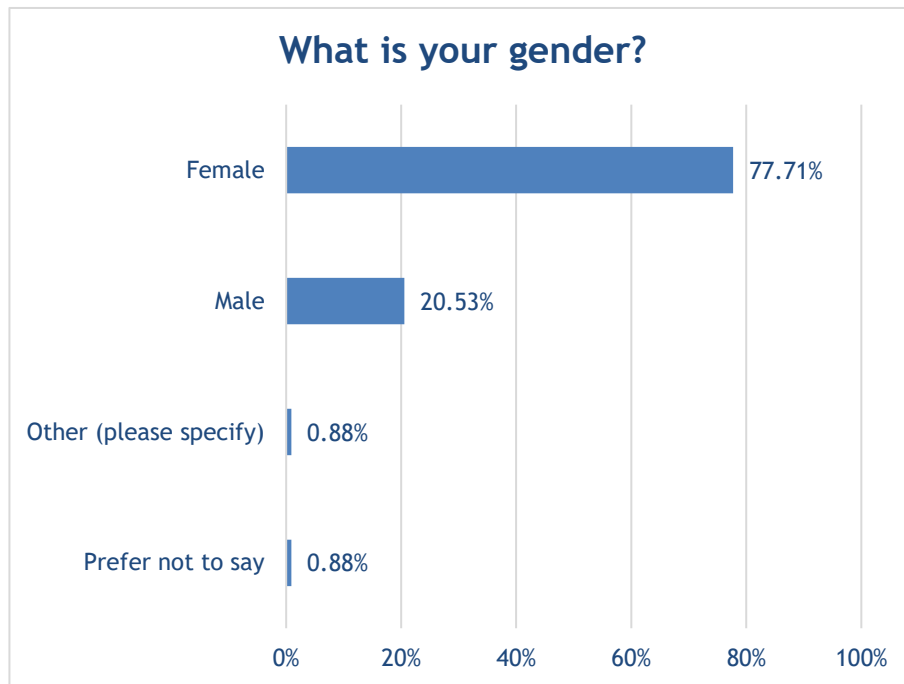
342 respondents answered this question and five did not. 1.46% of respondents (five people) were aged 18 to 25, 9.36% (32 people) were aged 26 to 35, 18.42% (63 people) were aged 36 to 45, 19.30% (66 people) were aged 46 to 55, 23.10% (79 people) were aged 56 to 65, 23.10% (79 people) were aged 66 to 75, 4.97% (17 people) were aged 76 to 85, and 0.29% (one person) was aged 86 or over. None of the respondents were under 18.



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### What is your gender?

341 respondents answered this question and six did not. 77.71% of respondents (265 people) were female, 20.53% (70 people) were male, and 0.88% (three people) answered “prefer not to say.” 0.88% of respondents (three people) answered “other” but did not specify their gender.





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## Other feedback

Other comments regarding Beacon Medical Group surgeries were collected via social media and Healthwatch staff conducting in-person surveys. The most common themes among these comments are summarised below:

### *Accessing GP services*

- “Waited over an hour in a queue.”
- “Couldn’t get through to the surgery.”
- “Luckily [I] haven’t needed the doctor, but [I have used] repeat prescriptions. Rather than wait on the phone [for an] answer, [I] walk to the surgery.”
- “Totally fed up with how hard it is to get an appointment, [I] had a smear test cancelled by them in mid August, tried to make another, [but I was] told nothing available until mid-October. You get the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree by the receptionist when you call and sometimes you only want to talk to the doctor.
- “I’ve given up contacting GP... [I] do not always want to discuss with people on the phone, [I] want to see [someone] face to face. I think many people with serious illnesses will be in trouble trying to get help. If there was another local surgery I would change.”
- “[If you call] very first thing in the morning you’re in with a good chance.”
- “eConsult [is] tedious beyond description, [you] have to work out how to get around the system, if [your] pain [is] more than [a certain level] they just tell you to go straight to hospital.”
- “When it’s so difficult to get through, you put off things you should have rung in.”
- “Waiting far too long for the phone to be answered (45 minutes) is certainly not unusual”
- “Bloody awful trying to fix up a basic [blood pressure] appointment”
- “My prescription, which I had for 24 years, suddenly stopped. [I] had to contact [the] GP. [It was a] very stressful time to get [it] resolved.”
- “My 47 year old son had very bad back pain, [he] rang on Tuesday [and they] said [he] had to wait a week for a phone call from GP.”
- “It is difficult to have continuity of care from one’s “named” GP because we don’t know which day he works. Instead, you speak to a different GP each time you phone up, none of whom have actually seen the patient in person. It is not always possible to explain how one feels over the phone. Having to explain in minute detail all symptoms and problems to a “patient advisor” can feel very intrusive at times and only results in a phone call. When will the health centre doors be open to be seen face to face with continuity of care?”
- “The system is a joke! I’ve recently recovered from Covid which has left me with a flare up of asthma, I did [eConsult] on the Monday and had a text from the surgery saying a doctor will ring me on the Friday! Later in the evening, I rang 111 as it became worse. Three hours later, [I had] a new prescription for an inhaler, no doctor wanting to see me, [I was] advised to go to A&E if it persisted. The lovely doctor I spoke to from 111 sent an investigation enquiry to my surgery as he felt I should have been seen!”

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- “I put in request for my medication and nothing has come back, I need to speak to a doctor before they will give me one of my medications. Can I get an appointment? Nope, I have now run out of said medication.”
  - “I was number two in the phone queue, [it] had been like this for 30 minutes, so [I] jumped in the car and drove down to the surgery... I booked my appointment through the intercom.”
  - “I was on the phone for 45 minutes and went from [being] caller six to caller four.”
  - “It was difficult before they all combined, now they’re all combined it’s pointless trying to get an appointment, they just call you back and do the assessment over the phone.”

### *General feedback about Beacon*

- “Beacon medical group is rubbish, please can we go back to the old system, can we also start having face to face appointments with GPs?”
- “Not too impressed with doctors, never [get a] response... Derriford is impossible to get a reply from”
- “[Bad] system.”
- “Everywhere I go I meet people talking about problems with Station Road surgery.”
- “Everyone is very nice and usually effective when you get through.”

### *Feedback about the survey*

- “It would be good if the survey offered space for some feedback... not sure the current design will elicit anything useful from a patient point of view unfortunately.”
- “Very limited questions and no opportunity to respond.”

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# Healthwatch Observations

Healthwatch have the following observations:

- Given that the survey was run for a short period of three weeks, the relatively large response from Ivybridge patients should be noted as a degree of concern around the service delivery. Whilst the questions were formulated to gather further feedback around issues identified in the June 2021 report, many of the issues identified then are still being commented upon in this survey particularly around telephone access.
- The original report and this survey concentrated on gaining feedback from Ivybridge patients, Healthwatch welcome the Beacon Medical Group initiative to also open the survey up to Plympton patients as well. The headline findings at Appendix 2 are similar to the key findings in this report and would suggest that any service development designed to improve access needs to be across the whole medical group.

## Statement from Beacon Medical Group

We always aim to provide the best possible care for our patients and welcome this survey feedback. Beacon Medical Group is encouraged by the results from this as it reflects that our patients are being contacted within time, they receive regular communication from us and over 80% have used our online services at some point.

It is insightful for us to reflect from the survey when our patients contact us by telephone and what our busiest days and peak periods are so we can investigate looking at resources for this. We note that since this survey was conducted in September 2021 and our improvement plan is in place and is in constant review. We are pleased that this has already delivered a reduction in our call wait times and will continue to work on further improvements. We welcome community feedback and support to help continue with this journey.

Further detailed response can be found at Appendix 3.

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# Statement from NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group

NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) thanks Healthwatch Devon and Plymouth and Beacon Medical Group for working together to undertake this engagement as a direct response to concerns raised by some patients in terms of patient experience, access and communications at the practice.

This engagement report sets out a detailed approach for engagement, which has provided a good opportunity for patients to contribute and is reflected in a high level of response. There was a good mix of online engagement, face to face and working with the practice to collate patient feedback. The level of detail in the engagement will help to target specific areas for action and clearly understand how the patient experience for Beacon Medical Group could be improved.

Beacon Medical Group has already taken a number of actions to address the main concerns raised in the engagement as part of their improvement plan to address the main issues and improvements are already starting to be made. We look forward to continuing our work with the practice and Healthwatch to ensure the improvement plan continues and that patient experience improves for the most challenged areas highlighted in the report.

It's important to note that as part of the national response to the Covid pandemic, infection control restrictions have required GP practices to change the way they work to limit exposure to both patients and staff, requiring them to move to a more telephone and online access focused 'first contact' arrangement. This has had a direct impact on access to GP practices across the country, and this will have impacted on patient experience. This change to demand and the way patients access their GP will have impacted on call volumes in to the practice and the demand for online consultations, which in turn impacts response times, however Beacon Medical Group is taking steps to manage this demand and improve patient experience.

## Recognition

Healthwatch Devon and Healthwatch Plymouth would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their experiences.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1. Healthwatch Devon Facebook post

 **Healthwatch Devon**  
23 September at 13:01 · 🌐

Have you recently used Beacon Medical Group's services, or tried to access their services?

Running for a couple more days, please share your views and experiences in a short survey so the practice can gain information needed to make improvements!

You can find the survey at: <http://ow.ly/2xu850Gf8A5>

Thank you to those who have already completed it!

**Share your experience of using and accessing Beacon Medical Group services**

**#yourvoicecounts**

 **BEACON MEDICAL GROUP**  
**healthwatch Devon**

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## Appendix 2. Plympton headline findings (as of 12 October 2021)

Note: the survey for Plympton patients was planned to run until 18 October

- 253 Plympton respondents completed the survey.
- eConsult was the most common method of contacting surgeries (74.21% or 187 people), followed by telephone (67.46% or 170 people), online methods (33.73% or 85 people), in-person contact (21.83% or 55 people), and the NHS app (16.67% or 42 people).
- 90.78% of respondents (187 people) answered “yes” to the question “did you wait long in a queue”? 46.9% of respondents (91 people) said they waited longer than 30 minutes in the queue.
- 40.36% of respondents (90 people) said the online consultation process was easy/fairly easy to use, 34.98% (78 people) said it was not so easy/not easy to use, and 24.66% (55 people) described the process as okay. 75.21% of respondents (176 people) said they were contacted within the specified time indicated by the practice.
- 66.84% of respondents (129 people) used online repeat prescription services, 30.05% (58 people) booked appointments online, 29.02% (56 people) used the NHS app, 20.73% (40 people) used My Medical Record, 12.44% (24 people) used online self-care information, and 3.11% (six people) cancelled appointments online.
- 48.77% of respondents (99 people) found online services easy/fairly easy to use, 23.64% (48 people) found them not so easy/not easy to use, and 27.59% (56 people) found online services okay to use.
- 93.27% of respondents (194 people) received information and messages from the surgery via text/SMS, 18.75% (39 people) received info via email, 3.85% (eight people) received info via the Beacon Facebook page, 1.44% (three people) received info via the Beacon website, 0.96% (two people) received info via a newsletter, and none of the participants received info via a Patient Participation Group. 69.33% of respondents (165 people) said the communication met their needs.

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## Appendix 3. Beacon Medical Group ‘You Said, We Did’ response and actions to survey findings

We always aim to provide the best possible care for our patients and welcome this survey feedback. Beacon Medical Group is encouraged by the results from this as it reflects that our patients are being contacted within time, they receive regular communication from us and over 80% have used our online services at some point. However, the concerns raised around other aspects of the survey have been noted and we have undertaken the following actions:

### Telephone Access

It is insightful for us to reflect from the survey when our patients contact us by telephone and what our busiest days and peak periods are so we can investigate looking at resources for this. For the week 31 January 2022 to 4 February 2022 Beacon Medical Group received an average 454 calls a day with a total of 2270 telephone calls. We feel that these figures show the demand and high volumes that our team members work hard to deal with.

Specifically, the survey shows that our patients state that they mainly contact Beacon Medical Group on a Monday, Tuesday and a Wednesday. We have compared this to our own in-house statistical data which we collate daily and is reviewed on a weekly basis. Our data shows us that our busiest day is a Monday, and our call times are generally higher on this day than any other day of the week. Our busiest time of the day is between 11 to 11.30 except on a Monday when it is at 8.00.

Beacon Medical Group is aware that telephone standards could be improved and waiting times can be at levels that do not provide a good level of customer service. We have an improvement plan in place that we are working with and hope that our patients will see an enhancement to our telephone service.

We have also provided training for the team and individuals where standards are not being met, monitoring the statistics more closely and new Team Lead roles have been created to provide support to the telephone team by floorwalking and problem solving. We have also recruited someone with significant experience in managing a busy call handing service, and they will have oversight of this work and to provide support to the team to make further improvement.

Beacon Medical Group updated the care navigation tool which is a set of questions that our Patient Advisors ask patients to ensure that they are directed to the most appropriate person for their medical concern. This tool has been streamlined and is now more efficient and has helped to reduce call waiting times.

We are pleased that our improvement plan has already delivered a reduction in our call wait times and will continue to work on further improvements. The average wait time for answered calls was 14 minutes for October 2021 and this has since reduced to 11 minutes in February 2022.

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## Booking Appointments

Following patient feedback Beacon Medical Group has received via Facebook, the Friends and Family Test, NHS.UK, and the Healthwatch engagement survey, we have updated our online booking system to allow our patients to book blood pressure, blood tests and smear test appointments online.

It is noted that the 40% of our patients who use the online services use it to order prescriptions. We receive regular feedback about the process of ordering prescriptions, and it has highlighted areas for potential improvement between Beacon Medical Group and the Pharmacies. We are working with our Pharmacy team to enhance this and have a more collaborative approach which in turn will help our community.

## Online Services

Looking at the survey results it shows that overall, over 80% of those who completed the survey have used our online services and 40% found this easy to use. On average we Beacon Medical Group receives 206.6 e-Consults on a daily basis with an average of 1033 e-Consults a week.

Beacon Medical Group understands that not all patients are able to use online facilities and anyone who struggles can still utilise the practice phone system. If our patients who are registered to use online services are able to make use of them, this frees up the phone lines to other patients who are unable to.

We regularly promote the use of our online services via social media, banners in our reception areas and via our quarterly patient newsletters.

We have driven numerous campaigns to help with the understanding of the e-Consult and online systems including (pre COVID) offering in house tutorial sessions. We have encouraged our patients to use the iPads that were available in our reception areas where our Patient Advisors and our Patient Participation Group were able to offer support to use these, however we have had to withdraw these due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We hope to introduce these as soon as we can as the infection control guidelines will allow.

As we do not own or build the e-Consult platform, this is a national tool, we pass on patient feedback to the provider regarding suggested changes and improvements. We also encourage our patients to complete the feedback forms provided by e-Consult after it has been used to provide their feedback on ease of use and possible changes to support the process.

Beacon Medical Group welcome community feedback and support to help continue with this journey.



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## Our actions

Finding	Action	Improvement
Peak periods for incoming calls to the practice are Mon - Weds mornings	Increased levels of staffing resource introduced at peak periods to manage incoming calls	Call waiting times down by 5 minutes during these peak periods
Patients found that it took too long to complete the questions asked by the Patient Advisors when they called Beacon Medical Group	Streamlined the number of questions asked by Patient Advisors using our navigation tool	Call waiting times have been reduced
Ability to book some types of appointments without having to call Beacon Medical Group	Blood test appointments, blood pressure bookings and cervical smear test appointments available to book using our patient partner telephone system and also available to book on line	Patients are now able to book their own appointments, and this has reduced the amount of telephone calls.

# Contact us



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